

# I, ARIEL

David Wheldon

*Ariel sets out his terms*

I'd like to see you raise a storm—  
I'm waiting: I'm waiting for the hail,  
and the rising seas, and the vessel perturbed

(the sails sheer-reefed) — I'd like to hear  
the rigging shriek — green water crashing on the deck—  
and sense the fear, and see the flaming corposant.

But you can't. Well, I'll do your dirty work  
pejoratively. And, when all's over,  
I'll stand in the dock and cry my innocence:

but only if you perjure your witness-self  
on oath. I exact a heavy price for acting  
as I do, and doing as you say.

Spirits such as I command alacrity.

*Ariel feels sorry for himself*

The world is kind of caustic  
and not much helps; I rely  
too much on persons. Why?

I'm immortal. And tired  
of my immortality. Every  
trick in the book I've tried.

But to be put on the earth!  
I count the sorry hoard—  
a handful of pennies

each with the changing  
sovereign's face. I won't tell you  
what I've done: guile

in the end defeats me. In the end  
if you're immortal, you just feel sorry

for yourself. Endlessly. Perhaps  
God does, in his major way.

But he doesn't deign  
to engage me. Surely: his should be  
the approach: he understands prayer

better than I do:  
why doesn't he approach me?

*Ariel's first captivity (by the Pythia of Delphi)*

Like that! She put out her hand  
and plucked me from the air!  
Free one moment: the next—  
Let me enlighten you.

I was caught by the prophetess; she was the first  
to tame me. She never asked hard work of me;  
I think I was the companion with whom time  
might pleasurably be passed and understood.

And so her prophecies formed the texts  
of my instruction on time and all mortality:  
Each morning she would take her post, and read  
requests for oracles; and answer: I was

her amanuensis, and wrote at her dictate.  
I grew to understand the way her mind was ordered,  
and followed the limpidity of her words  
as she uttered them. But — and this is true —

the client never understood. Her forewarnings  
were opaque until the end could be forestalled no more.  
Then, a second too late, they were clear as knives.  
She would smile, and let me look deep

into her grave grey eyes. I would spend the night  
awake (I do not sleep) lying at her feet,  
listening to her gentle breathing. At first light  
she would give me my commission:

*'Take this, Ariel, and fly for me,'* she would say,  
sealing the envelope. She knew my willingness.  
Why am I telling you this? Well, you see,  
I learned my educator's semblance of duplicity.

*Ariel is fed*

The world's a place of dark diameters  
(a little ketchup on my beans, as you mean  
to feed me: your modesty of diet beguiles

my small fury: slight me as you feed me:  
I don't care that much. I won't fly for your  
entertainment. Not on beans. Nor flame amazement.)

But I will show your future: it's not good: not bad:  
but I'll try to guide your dark unseens.

*Ariel, the uncompliant prototype*

I don't understand how nerve-nets work:  
No-one ever will: not truly: no-one  
understands the physical device  
by which their thought is made or modified.

Poor Ariel! What's a spirit?  
I'll tell you: something with which  
you do not meddle. Spirits—  
I've never met another spirit;

perhaps I'm the one-off,  
the prototype which didn't do  
as they expected, and so the thought  
was discontinued. Well, I'll have

to live with that. I don't much care.  
Being here isn't fair.

*Ariel and the Liveries of the Stars*

I have no weight, and so can't repose on grass  
to watch the stars; but I see them, more clearly  
than you; and I don't need to sleep on what I see.

But I lose myself, just as you resign yourself,  
and wonder. It's all mortal, though: galaxies  
shall collide, and I shall watch them: in my sight

the stars shall all go out. And then there'll  
be nothing else to ponder, but eternal night.  
And myself. Myself. My unending, punished self.

*Ariel advises his protégé*

I can play the part of a puppet  
if I wish: I can feign the strings  
and the woodenness; obvious joints  
at elbow, hand, knee and hip:

but always, in the end, I get my own back.  
Unless I feign again — strings dropped — and lie upon  
the dusty floor. Dust I don't mind;  
the world is made of dust. Face

to the ground: arse in the air:  
but, whichever way I'm thrown  
you'll note the motion of my eyes.  
Postures; allegoric lessons of a stance:

I'll teach you all of these: they're useful:  
now, boy, sit up; mark the way I move—  
and attend my glance.

*Ariel considers pathogenic bacteria*

Small forms of life I understand;  
Often, when they find a quorum,  
they will prevail. Beliefs are similar.

You're myopic: I am not. Believe me:  
be content with what you've got.

I am Ariel: I have and will maintain  
my name. I advise you: do the same.

*Unique Ariel*

I'm astonished by the smells I have;  
pausing one morning in a stranger's house,  
sitting back, and the muzzles of two Siamese cats  
each within an armpit; yells; nips;  
small, ferocious, feinting bites.

Small animals take to me, think of me  
as one of themselves, perhaps: and persons—  
the hem of my coat. Female cats in heat  
follow me around, look up at me  
with troubled eyes that say:

*why, slim, small immortal,  
are you so aloof?*

My diffidence;  
well, I stand by my diffidence—  
and I don't know why my my-ness  
should seem unique.

Though it is. See? I'm pellucid.  
And oblique.

*Ariel*: noblesse oblige

You think you can control me,  
but when you're dead I'll place  
you in a petrifying well. I'll watch  
the orbits; the unstirring hands,

the brows of selenite: your hair  
will no longer undulate in the flow of time. Your soul—  
I'll permit *that* its quick escape  
from the mighty *largesse* of control.

*Ariel on Bones*

*Resurgam!* Maybe. Until  
that time I'll try to hold  
your bones as best I can;

the long-bones and the skull  
I can fit under my arm.  
Vertebrae and the complex

of metacarpals and phalanges—  
they fall where they may:  
I can't hold the bloody lot.

Let me pause, and sit down  
on the grass, and see what I

shall make of you. *Resurgam?*  
I've even made a mess of this!

*Ariel Studies his Hands*

Strange things, hands:  
the pointing finger,  
the prescient cupped palm;

the grasp; the long-jointedness  
at the death. The terrible pause  
on the wall. Belshazzar

had it easy; the finger  
does not come so clearly  
for us. But we're fingered.

The writing on the wall  
also pertains to us. It wants:  
cupped or pointing.

And it takes. Hands  
are mysterious: look  
deeply at you own.

*Ariel in Chains*

The links of history  
apply to you: why  
attach them to a spirit?

But you've done it,  
and I am captive:  
I hope you're pleased

by what you've done.  
Do you so admire me?  
To want to make me

Just like you?

*Ariel's mysterious shadow*

I'm very little  
but I can cock one leg, foot upon the table,  
and examine you, my arms crossed,  
wondering who you are, and who I am:

your mystery is who am I: mine,  
who I am. Foreshortened, yes,  
but shadows are amazing: look:  
yours, the shadow given by the sun.

My shadow! Ah! How I understand  
my ungiven shadow! My shade  
is what I have made: not that of dawn;  
nor midday. I shake myself:

I don't understand myself.  
In the end, shades precede the form—  
My shadow is not of me: and not myself.  
Poor mirror-self! It's myself I view.

*Ariel ascertains his next master*

Who will come, to control me now  
Under a sky of deepest indigo?  
Search me. I'm innocent. I do not know.  
See! She comes: and there I go.

*Ariel, musing on Pantheons*

Vision perseverates;  
the after-image goes  
through colours, fades,

but never leaves. All  
the senses undergo  
a bruised transliteration.

Immortality's like that,  
only more so: pristines  
are strangely garbled.

It's how pantheons  
are brought to being; doing,  
blindly: never seeing.

*Lucid: so lucid*

The lucid.  
Was anything clear?  
Is anything clear?  
Shall anything become clear?

Tenses don't seem to help.  
Language is born of poverty; and that's  
the truth: language is a mode of want:  
Language always makes its way

of asking. The gums are always  
nipple-hunting, rooting for the tit.

*Ariel finds another way to freedom*

Say I'm parked  
with a master — mistress — someone I dislike;  
how do I plan the end-game?

Not magisterially:  
I'm not a mortal mage—  
Not sinistrally:

I'm not so made.  
I'll tell you. I make myself  
a reversed form; the negative

of what I am. I'll put on the snot-nosed waif  
who hangs upon him, pushes, whines,  
pesters for attention.

And at last, resenting me  
He shows disgust: abandons me:  
so sets me free!

*Ariel considers Purgatory*

I don't believe in Purgatory,  
and nor do you, but, believe me,  
you are in it. I feel sorry for you.

My temperament occupies  
a living-space alien to yours:  
and yet I have kin-feeling for you.

Cause-and-effect has no place in me:  
pity does. Mysteriously.

*Ariel Sighs*

My friend, you plagiarize  
every word: it's inevitable;  
or else you would not speak  
and would not come to speak.

So speak: command my ear  
with all you have been taught;  
then speak your original; speak;  
I'm listening. Just get on with it.

*Temporary Viewpoint*

How is my sense of *I* maintained?  
I do not know: no sense of ego,  
nor desire, nor will, nor commentary  
on the day that was, or is, or,  
as far as I know, the day that shall be.

It's strangely innocent: I do not love  
myself, and take verbal familiars  
like breath, or self, or psyche, or soul  
hardly for granted. But I look out  
upon the passage of the days: from what?

*Reverse Perspective*

All is fulfilled, they say, at the vanishing-point;  
it is here and now where time is out of joint.  
That's the peculiarity of a pair of eyes  
and something sentient behind them that won't  
accurately be described. Or defined.

Perhaps you can only give a name  
to that which can't be understood:  
uncanny self, uncanny other, and the ways  
to the vanishing-point. Going on through days  
is like vamping on a piano: self-taught,

the player knows one harmonizing trick alone.  
The sound emerges from the open twilit door  
and night enfolds the street. At the vanishing-point  
there is a distant light. There are tales about it  
as there are tales about tomorrow, and the day after, and next year.

*Ariel regrets nothing*

The metrical was nothing I did well;  
I wasn't good at orders; the physical  
I didn't understand: the perverse:

well, that was something in me  
which I understood. Like me for it:  
please like me: if you don't

no-one ever will: why am I attached to you?  
I'm not an evil spirit: I'm just not human,  
and I'm glad I'm not. Sometime

I was nearly tamed: forever after, I am simply blamed.

I regret it. No. *Je ne regrette rien.*

*Doors bang*

Your torch-song leaves me cold,  
fellow-traveller; we are waiting  
on the platform to which no train  
will come. Doors bang in the wind,

fellow-traveller. Hanging signs  
no longer mean. You sing for  
your own predicament. Around:  
forever: doors bang in the wind.

*Ariel regards a straw*

Designs are one thing. But systems;  
once they're brought to being, they're obsolescent.  
Or so I've found. I say this in all innocence,  
as though you'd asked me, but you haven't,

and you won't. My leading answers to the tamest  
of your questions get no response. You do not  
wish to hear what you dislike, but you shall,  
and from me. All your thought is obsolescent.

It has to be: now I'll fold my arms, and be quiescent.

*Ariel appreciates Ecclesiastes*

The perfect is not a tense I understand,  
traveller that I am; nothing is finished,  
ever: Ecclesiastes spoke for his time

and ours: and, probably, for time to come,  
but the matutinal elides him. It always does:  
it slides into the brain, along with love

and appreciation of new dawns, middays, sunsets,  
huge moons, companionable walks  
through elm-edged fields.

*Ariel feels affection for mortality*

Here is the difficulty.  
When you are immortal  
you begin to recognize every turn

of the world's kaleidoscope  
and hope evaporates. And so you feign:  
you see: you think: *not that again!*

Patterns are repeated: actually, they engross  
by their rainbow-like expectedness:  
the same sand falls through the narrow  
of the glass. It's the little sounds

that matter, though: rain pattering on glass:  
the child who wants the moon:  
the certainty that first-love cannot end:

the loveliness of first delights.

My affect understands a modicum of this:  
tutor me further—  
Say good-night to me, with a kiss.

*Hats and Systems*

‘Systems are colliquative, I think,’  
said Ariel, bracing his shoulders  
in his thought; ‘soon necrosis  
breaks in upon the made ideal:

autonomies fail: what can I say?  
I’m tutorless.’ Unamused, he sits slimly  
in his untutored silence. He holds  
hats in his hands: mitres, bicornes,

schoolboys’ caps, poke-bonnets, perruques,  
Phrygian head-ware, and, finally,  
Gilgamesh’s mushroom cranial-piece.  
‘They never cease to astonish me,’

he said, his auburn eyebrows raised:  
his voice echoed round the void  
of the disused waiting-room:  
‘how can I understand mortality?’

*I understand you, my rival,  
but don't wish to know you*

I'm sensitive to critic voices;  
of course I am; and so are you,  
my best critic. You do not hate;

you do not love. A neutral voice  
in poetry not unlike my own;  
my deadly equal. Perhaps

you have my voice: maybe  
you steal from me, and I from you.  
Neither of us, in the end, has choice.

*Ariel: the Magus*

I was one of the Magi;  
the fourth one: the one who's  
never talked about.

Three is a divine number:  
three Magi there must always be.  
Facts are otherwise.

I was the fourth, the elastic one,  
who brought no gift,  
the one who got home.

None of the others did.

*Ariel Plays Cards*

Answer me this, Señor: who  
instigated you? Your father?  
Your mother? Were you  
mislaid at birth and later

picked up from the counter  
in error? You'll never know.  
I'm somewhat similar: and now  
we'll settle for a game of cards.

I'll shuffle, and you can choose.  
Ace high: high takes. Playing  
on the platform passes time,  
and time is on my side, Señor.

*Dipping toes in fatal waters*

Beginnings aren't cushy; ends aren't  
either. Do you think there'll be an angel  
to dip you in the purifying streams?

With a soft voice? Dream on, poor soul;  
take those purifying waters on your own.  
Dip in your toe. Actually, you spend

your life dipping toes in fatal waters. It's  
what makes you; it's what makes your life.  
In adolescence you adumbrated death.

You innocently dipped your toes:  
You risked your life to save your breath.

*Ariel's immortal* Amour Propre

As you for yourself, I hold my own self  
in high regard. Two similar regards  
for two very different selves.

Perhaps, then, regards are the selectors  
by which we come to be: selves, well,  
they aren't much understood.

Pause. Or even questioned. You can't  
do much more than take a self for granted—  
you can't take yourself apart, and survive.

An idiomatic summer-glance over  
the split-chestnut fence, neighbourly at oneself.  
I can't do it. Neither, I suspect, can you.

*Ariel considers Saint Elmo*

I've never met Saint Elmo,  
but I quite like him:  
I've duplicated his fire,  
and he doesn't seem to mind

my corposant; my spriteliness.  
Saints disquiet me: Saint Elmo  
is my particular in my lack  
of understanding. His fire

arrives in quietness: mine  
in allusive storm: he's dead  
and I am not. I am still, and, silent,  
wait for his summons:

cross my arms: and perseverate.

*Arise, Shine!*

Well, not like me:  
you don't have my lucency:  
but you have something  
I don't have: and that's the sense

forever at the rim of consciousness—  
the premonition of your end. I don't have this,  
and perhaps in deep I'm jealous  
of the departure-thoughts

which allude the coming of your train.  
Beneath the blackest of black flags  
You shall board and leave the ruined platform:  
I, in lonely isolation, must remain.

*Ariel: a Creature of the Air*

I am the child of doldrum and of storm;  
the tempest-making elements even now  
are never far away. Just beneath  
the silent membrane of the moment

is the vortex small enough to fit a mind.  
So. I'm good at storms.  
And I'm able in tranquillizing seas,  
stilling swells, becalming *La Magicienne*,

teasing her with baffling winds,  
listening to her slapping sails,  
taking her way: in boarding her  
I'll make her unsteerable.

When I was small I could play  
with sky-line forms for hours; the natural  
shapes you'd take for something life-engendering—  
something from your own past,

mirage-like, maybe, the Morgana of the mind.  
Appearances do not deceive so much as beguile—  
Come with me; I'll show you phantom pasts  
and days to come. Maybe we'll inhabit one.

*Ariel distrusts ego-by-proxy*

A slender *Anarch*  
I do not hold a sense  
of self, nor the deadly  
word, the ego.

Though, persons who are said  
to have no ego  
are perhaps the deadliest—  
the ones to dread.

Ego-by-proxy, that's  
the defilement of thought  
at its most base. I think so,  
friend. I was born to yawn.

*Ariel, Taken Apart*

Take me apart:  
treat me as a Russian Doll.  
For myself I'll be content  
in regarding the half-moon

of my left ring-finger's nail. Or  
my corpus callosum; or the glow  
of my delicate claustra; even  
my amygdala. You know I can see

inside my head: the caudate nucleus  
on either side from head to tail.  
I can follow the olivo-pontine tracts.  
All this implies an exterior realm

of thought. And that's a thought:  
complexity's complete. But, if you must,  
treat me as a Russian Doll.  
Anatomize. Examine. I don't mind.

*Ariel considers sexuality*

I'd like to meet another androgyne like me;  
but I shan't: I'm made to be lonely.  
The depositions that set me in my place  
have no feeling for my animality.

Who gave me a name? Not a mother  
or a father. I'm a creature borne  
of an aftermath too shocked to speak:  
a product of celestial quarrel.

I'm not a person: but, honestly,  
if I'm not allowed to fuck  
I'd like to masturbate: I burn—  
Solace me! Or I'll come to hate.

*Ariel, the Hobo*

When I learned that I was damned  
My jaw dropped. Ariel in perdition!  
My world fell! But you have to do  
what you can. For a while you throw

your fist at the Almighty; then you  
puzzle what you have done wrong.  
Damnation, it seems, precedes offence:

I've always wondered this: why me?  
Well, perhaps I never ingratiated myself;

maybe I've never worshipped; perhaps  
my sin was to like myself against my will:  
maybe my crime was to understand

the poverty of all that made me.

I'm a kind of immortal hobo,  
making, as best I can, my way.

*Ariel at the house of La Magicienne*

Ariel, shadowy, frequents the house of *La Magicienne*, in the Alley of the Red Lodge. As she opens the door she says: 'Ariel, fellow child of Sophia, our fathers different: mine a Demiurge; yours unknown. Poor Ariel; come in,

half-brother, eat with me. *Satiram ad te luderam.*' She holds the door open for his pellucid, dubious form. 'I have forgotten the Covenant of my Father; my paths lead down to sleep, my way is that of the feverish. You shall never forget me—

never, Ariel, shall I leave you. Close the door behind you, quickly, thin boy; I've a chill and the winter winds are fierce.'

*Ariel, on being cursed like a tinker*

'You little pervert,' they sometimes say;  
who can argue with them? I can take  
bad words in my stride. My shoulders

were made for shrugging: my hands  
to be placed palms upwards; my legs  
to walk away. But my dagger-eyes

don't curse, exactly. They do worse.

*Ariel and La Religieuse*

Met on a train departing  
The Gare de Lyon, Paris.  
Ariel spoke first:

‘Are you going to Lourdes?’  
‘Why, no,’ said la religieuse.  
‘I’m going to Cap d’Agde

To bathe myself in light.’

*Ariel: on the colour purple*

Purple is a colour I don't understand  
in prose or kingship; stinking snails  
have no attraction for me: but, curiously

I like rank odour — but of my choice —  
germs — gonococci smell of mice —  
I savour their inflorescence:

earth's smelliness has a kind of idiom: a filthy  
clinic suffused with cologne-upon-disease.

*stinking snails*] in antiquity royal or Tyrian purple  
was prepared from the sea-snail, *Murex brandaris*,  
after a process of decomposition.

*Ariel, amongst the bruised unknowns*

In my brief excursion I've become  
unworthy; I've prostituted  
myself too much to rich persons;

hexe-girls, Italian dukes, poets, and, yourself.  
But you are not rich, and for your time,  
I'll gild you with a little rhyme:

Monseignor! Architect! Magister!  
My eyes are unimaginable to you—  
Free me now: and I'll defect!

*Ariel on magic's inefficacy*

If you are immortal  
simulation is a way to pass the time;  
angels are endlessly disobedient.  
They are captive, just the same as me.

Let me tell you this: there's a causeway  
between earth and heaven.  
But I guess you won't take it:  
No more did I.

Why? Because it can not take the weight  
of burdened souls. It is pristine,  
always; potential, always open  
to the aspiration of the mind:

the traverse always wanted, always wished for,  
always dangerous; always feared.

And it has never felt a foot-fall. Ever.  
No rhyme alludes. And so you shall not get one.

Magic does not help. Take it from me:  
rhyme intrudes.

*Ariel's neologisms: a study in contrapposto*

I coin neologisms endlessly  
from every pore. My mouth  
is not my only vehicle  
of utterance: my skin, the lines

of my palms, my brows, the tilt  
of my hip in dynamic counterpoise:

neologistic statements  
are the allusives of my brain.  
Sad me! With no-one whom to talk:  
or fly. Or even walk.

*Ariel seeks a wife*

I'd like a wife, but I've never found  
the other half. Why? Where's the female  
of me? Am I stolid in myself?

Am I so unlikeable? Am I driven  
in a different tense? Am I unwise  
in my attempt to find a love?

Some eternal spirit? Am I too captive  
to be loved? Do I exasperate?  
Am I too crude, to want the ideal

on my lap: am I too vehement? Am I  
too selfish? Am I too illiterate?  
Am I too bored with what I find?

Do I yawn too much? Do I fidget?  
Do I ask too much, for that grandeur  
of a life? Is there no-one seeking me?

Shall I never find a love, a wife?

*Ariel Attends a Funeral*

I didn't understand the mortal frame:  
no more do you; I'm a picture  
of not-understanding: so are you.

Learn from me: I'll comfort you

the best I can. I was not made  
for wisdom, or clarity, or  
fine-honed judgement:

but I'll comfort you, the best I can.

*Ariel, tossed into an oubliette*

Well. I know I often begin  
my words with an astonished: *Well!*  
Actually, I don't mind them; wells,  
well, I do, but there's not much

I can do about it. Yet some wells  
Are much more congenial  
than others. I find I take the best,  
and it's not yours. Yours

is perhaps the room-of-little-ease.  
A well of little-mindedness—  
It doesn't suit me: how wide my eyes!  
I fly as I must, and do as I please.

*Ariel: on the subject of hate*

I think you have an animus for me—  
But I don't hate you, though I feel  
your dislike:

As a clean (and unclean) spirit I have emotions,  
And wish I didn't. I am unlikeable,  
and I wish I wasn't:

Honestly (as far I am honest)

Feel my love (as near as I am honest)

Take my honesty (as far as I can give it)

Allow me a home: I've never known a home.

Honestly.

*Gerontius*

I delivered Gerontius; his mother  
made the best of it; the ditch  
was dry. It was in the dog-days:

Sirius winked in heliacal ascendance,  
I remember. It was a difficult birth.  
A breech. To be honest with you

I fumbled it. To come into the world  
arse-first is hard; and strange. Gerontius died  
within an hour. The presentation

was so difficult. The prolapsed cord was pinched:  
asphyxiation came quick. I'm sorry,  
little Gerontius: I did my best.

*Silly Ariel*

I'm silly; I don't talk straight;  
my silliness casts a shadow.

I'm silly: how I am silly.  
Let me understand the silly  
for a moment. If I can:

that would be the wisest way  
to fill the present moment,

and the least illicit. By silly  
the last thing I mean is stupid.  
To be silly and get away with it

you must be fly; and how I'm fly.

*Ariel's Freedom*

How the mind seeks the illicit—  
perhaps it seeks the shades  
which made it. The preterite

is now unavailable for shaping;  
and so imaginable pasts (which  
never were) allow the movement

of the whoring fingers. If true,  
this is true for senses laid  
heavily on waters which pass beneath the bridge.

But the mind seeks the fusc illicit.  
I have to be explicit: I see myself  
a lonely, prostituted spirit.

*Ariel is silent, though he speaks*

I don't like the score that much;  
the music does not seem to sing to me.  
Silence is better. I hear silence best.

As for you, there's always whirring  
in the ears, the pulse of pumping blood.  
For me, there's celestial silence.

My voice? I am silent. Allude  
to that silence as elemental noise  
if you wish. I don't mind. It's your choice.

*Ariel destroys*

Erase the latest couplet;  
it was not worth the thought  
and it had a nastiness

which even I didn't like.  
Where's the platform  
from which I think

and write? I don't know.  
Tell me, the little involute:  
tell me: I wish to know.

Erase the last couplet?  
I can erase the memory  
of yesterday— one brief pass

of the hands. And then you'll  
have to live with the aftermath  
of all you no longer know.

That's how your days are ordered—  
How chaotic are my ways!

*Ariel Plays Chess*

I can't do it; the board's too small;  
the pieces are too limited—  
and the rules: what are rules to me?  
The results are nothing.

I shan't be cramped:  
I am enraged:  
what I do is not a game:

I must freely fly  
or else I'll die.

*Ariel: on Mortal Conceits*

Mortality I've studied.  
My response: it's borne out  
by a series of small conceits

(and by conceits I mean moral  
metaphors, life-long: thought  
and image turned on a mental lathe.)

But the conceits are always small  
even though they might involve  
kingdoms, empires, bath-time

with the children, perhaps painting  
the front-door. I'm smaller  
than your littlest evasion—

time's manifests I don't understand.  
Though I have learned the way  
you speak, *you* have to speak

a language you prorogue in speaking. So:  
a lifelong syntactical arrangement —  
It's late: the train's arriving. Let's go.

*Ariel Addresses the Sinners*

Even gods make mistakes—  
then cover them up— that's  
where the world begins.

Sins are small allusions  
to divine concatenations.  
Ariel's eyes! How wide!

How observant! Black,  
brown, blue, green; even  
amethyst. You are the mirror.

As for gods: reflections;  
highlights in the eyes;  
perturbations in the skies.

My finger's on the pulse,  
sinner: I'll consume your crime,  
sinner: my finger's on the pulse.

*Ariel's mordant insight*

Remorse plagues me, as it ever will,  
and so it should; I did wrong,  
(as you sometimes do)  
but I'm prompted to confess.

Where's the confessor, though?  
Who is able to confess this guilty one  
to whom time means nothing— this immortal  
who breathes remorse? God, you mortals

are fortunate: when I do wrong  
I have to live with it. Unevanescent,  
everlasting sensorium — Oh! that  
there were some kind ellipsis

which would blind my past.  
But it seems there isn't.  
Echoes, for immortals,  
do not die away: they last.

*Ariel speaks off the cuff*

All's machinery. I had intuition of this  
when I was young: now I know it,  
and perhaps in time to come will understand it more.

It's obvious now that other fingers pressed  
the keys. These I never guessed  
Until I pried them. Best

get your own hands on the buttons;  
then you know where you are. It's easier  
to undergo, but more rewarding

to dislodge. To be in control— when in control  
you're always looking for your nemesis  
(who throws grit in the well-oiled wheel.)

I'll admit I'm vain. Vanity alleviates the bruises,  
loses its nemesis in the labyrinth of self regard:  
or else you'd wonder if you were real

or the virtual reflection of something studied  
in its sleep. I don't sleep; I think you know that.  
I dream, though, in wakefulness, and don't forget  
my self-regarding dreams.

*Ariel as Conscience*

I'm only a small person  
and the magisterial world  
elides my diminutive;  
I'm largely sanguine.

I have a sense of self:  
and it will fall, as selves do.  
Alliteration in a mode:  
How curious: a new self comes

to make a new me. Gainsaid,  
I'm obstinate: the petty  
adamantine person:  
take that as read. Ariel:

head on one side. I judge  
your conscience: I am  
in your head. Your mistakes  
don't furrow *my* brow.

*Your* past never was my now.

*Ariel makes comparisons*

I have ten fingers and ten toes;  
two ears, two eyes and one brief nose  
with two nostrils: I don't have wings  
but I do have illimitable curiosity

which has always been my undoing.  
I'm often caught by *that* frailty of nature  
and have often been confined:  
perhaps I search for prisons.

Maybe I search for a place to live  
duressed. I was made to be duressed;  
anarch nature made me to be stressed.

You're similar: never doubt it. Ever.

*Deceiving Ariel*

I have being by deceit  
And so do you: but I  
am curiously immortal.  
Not so you.

I will never have to stare down  
the reality of end, nor face  
infirmity's brunt.  
There go you.

I can deny immortality  
in strange ways: you  
are always on the edge.  
Admit it

And I won't stress you:  
In fact, I promise you—  
Ungraciously  
I'll confess you.

*Ariel holds a whip*

I'm perverse:  
No end perverse:  
difficult: like picking up mercury:  
you can't do it: the bright beads  
fall through your fingers:  
and so with me.

And yet I'm sullen.  
How I'm sullen:  
How I am the asymptote:  
so close: yet so remote.  
But, understand:

Traduce me, and I'll bring a whip  
to you: traduce me, and I'll lay it on:  
Look at me askance: I'll lay it on!

*Ariel's pansexuality*

Dirty Ariel I have always been;  
my sordor made real to me;  
how I cry for it! Ariel,

the perverse spirit  
in the dark detaining-place.  
Dirty Ariel; tears

streaming down her face.

*Ariel on the sidelines*

Sometimes I play dumb.  
Stupid dumb. Not to amuse myself—  
I don't seek to play amusement:

I'm not an agonist in your play,  
but sometimes I like to sit  
on the sidelines, and watch my nails grow.

*Ariel considers his soul*

Do I have a soul? I don't know.  
I don't have a clue: but there you go.

As for you: each must answer as he finds:  
I'm not scriptural, and I am cold

to metres other than my own. Poor me!  
How should I know the dark equations

of how I come to be?

*Ariel wishes for a companion*

To see the stars I do not need  
to open eyelids; no; and my hearing—  
that's acute. The clicking pulsar  
might as well be within my brain,

deep to the thalamus. I can turn it off  
at will, and then there's silence.

You don't know silence as I do:  
Cold, crystalline stillness where  
nothing moves. Enough. I'm lonely,  
though: no companion, no playmate,

no-one to say, one summer night in spring,  
on the strength of a moment's impulse,  
barefoot on the singing sands:

*I'll race you to the lighthouse!*  
*Now! Let's go!*

*Ariel takes you through the maze*

It may seem strange to you, but  
humanity's my only living contact;  
apart from you I am alone: you, human,

have never known what it is to be alone;  
but alone is what you'll have to be. Your maze  
is what you have to travel through,

never knowing it's a maze: but you'll find the centre,  
and sooner than you think. My maze doesn't seem  
to have a central gnomon: it just goes on.

I make up worlds: I'll lie to you, as I take your hand:  
I must. I'm fluent: I'm ultimately driven—  
take my lonely, faithless hand. It's given.

Your maze— Centres of mazes evaporate,  
I'm telling you, before you start:  
centres always evaporate: perspectives lie:

become, at the approach, indistinct.  
In the end and in the unseen gnomon's shade  
you must come to die.

*Ariel: The Fake*

I'm a fake, honestly;  
but I don't like the flow  
of history that much:

I don't want to sit  
on the miserichord: I wish  
to fly: I don't wish

to glance into the chancel;  
Tombs don't interest me,  
quite honestly: I don't want

terrets round my neck:  
I don't want circumstances:  
*I wish to fly.*

*Ariel describes the smell of humanity*

Pareidolia accide to vision,  
to hearing, to touch, to the four tastes.  
But not to smell: smell  
is curiously honest in its provenance. You recall

the instant. And as for persons:  
smells can be partially disguised at most.  
For me, humanity smells rank  
but not dislikeable.

Smell is the archaic sense  
that bears no metaphor: strangely,  
I have smelt it all before.

*Ariel questions his immortality*

Perhaps I'm too pellucid  
to attain true mortality:  
I shouldn't wonder.  
Shades slip through identities;  
thrown stones hurt,  
but they don't injure me.  
Is my immortality  
just a fear of hurt alone?  
Maybe I question myself  
too much: maybe I shall come to die.

*'Dream on, dear Ariel: caught  
between misfortunes: capable spirit!  
A higher agency holds thee.'*

Well. Maybe.

*Ariel, the Joker*

So I have been called,  
but only out of fright:  
if I make a joke it is  
to wring your viscera

And turn your bowels  
to water. I'm warning you:  
damaged spirit that I am I  
can place the metaphor

inside your eye. Fright  
is what I do well. Don't  
try to reason with me.  
Please. Ease is the last thing

on my mind: if I can be said  
to have a mind: outcomes:  
I never laugh at my own jokes.  
I don't mind. I never mind.

*Ariel's metaphor*

Evanescence is the king-pin of immortality;  
I'll say that strait: the narrow road;  
the path you wouldn't want to take.

Why do I use the metaphors of paths and roads?  
I don't know. The fellow's tyre kisses for an instant  
the rut. Ask me cleverly: I still wouldn't know.

This illiterate can't guide you. Roads lead  
to some place, perhaps: the figurative  
that I would never understand. Immortals like me

are somehow lost. My prayers cannot ascend.  
Immortality is always strange: do not ask for it:  
it cannot end.

*I'll sit cross-legged*

I'll sit cross-legged  
for a moment.

Unlikeable,  
impoverished,

uncared-for. My animal  
understanding

unwanted. Tame me,  
someone. But with gentle will.

*Ariel witnesses the Auguries*

I've been in worse places than this  
(taking for the moment my idiom from yours)  
the still-warm gut of the favoured creature

taken hand-by-hand and the mesentery  
semi-translucent with the dawn behind it  
and the future read. What a way to start a day.

Apopheniae; such narratives  
come second nature to persons like you

and immortals like me (*nil simile.*) What  
you want to read, you read, and what you

hide you wish to hide. I'm familiar  
with this. And I don't mind. I'm similar:  
I'm more elusive, though, but I don't mind.

*He denies his name*

Domesticate me, if you can:  
that's not a challenge on my part.

We live in different wildernesses.  
You see, within my eyes, vain reflections

of yourself: and my own feral gentleness.  
I see in yours the brute prerogative.

I have no name. Ariel's the word  
you had for me. I'll accept it. For the moment.

Sooner or later you'll lose the upper hand:  
and then we'll see.

*Ariel of Sardon*

The age's indenturing  
is not freely given:  
you will see this for yourself.

Unwilling advice; but mark  
the early prodrome. Cards  
cannot predict. Unknowns

command the portal; but  
the nature of the final fever  
is your personal specific.

And that's terrific.  
Or tenebrific.

*Ariel abstracts times*

Rain falls.  
Bits of pargetting fall down the chimney  
into the hearth.  
Iliosacral joints ache.

Sunsets are sincere, but ages aren't;  
so let me light the paraffin lamp for you.  
Let me charge the glass accumulator  
to light the valves of your radio.

*Life Tames Us*

Birth came without understanding;  
Dying won't. Dying has a life  
Of memory to encompass: Birth  
sought a feral singularity. Dying won't.

Except, perversely, death seeks  
the same eventuality as life: I know:  
I have stood at many death-beds,  
and attended many births:

Held new-borns in my hands,  
held the hands of dying persons.  
In the end I'm perturbed in saying  
dying has understanding. I'm uncertain.

Dying is rarely feral, though. Unlike birth,  
life tames us. For what that's worth.

*Ariel*: Improvisatore

I'll play the improvisatore  
in the back-room of a pub  
now demolished; and so it  
stands. I rest my case

upon the wooden bar and  
look out through the window  
at the last-light. My instrument  
you can imagine. Hand it

to me; the spirit-varnish  
on its back worn-through,  
standing in diverse places  
not now brought to mind,

its belly argent with rosins  
of songs past. Pass me my bow.  
Let me tune the thing; then I'll play  
your past: and tell you

where you'll go.

*The Travelling Entertainer*

You were set on this earth to be mocked.  
Don't take my word for this;  
just look around. For myself, I'll take  
a little zither-music for a while, or

something bowed on the ravanastron;  
or even the anarchic playing on a back-bar  
piano. Self-mocking singing; spitting in the dust;  
motifs which elide: it's then I love you best.

All's in flux, my music iterates; no note  
played twice in the flow of hours; sunlight  
in the cold of dawn comes to creep  
along bleached floors, blanches, then fades to night.

But now it's time to take the road you fear.  
Bring me your lead. I'll place it round your neck  
and then we leave. Tomorrow we entertain  
elsewhere. Quickly, now. Or you'll be beaten.

*Habits die hard*

Don't remonstrate with me: he's mine  
in a kind of way, and I beat him  
when I want. It's useful to have a being  
you can take it out on, casually,

because he's disobedient or just  
because he's there. Don't think that I  
would allow anyone else to lay a hand  
upon him, though: that's my privilege

alone. It felt surreal; strange, at first,  
myself a captive for so long: now  
holding another's destiny in my hand.  
But you'll soon grow used to change.

*Ariel procrastinates*

Procrastination was my forte,  
honestly. No task is ever done;  
the eternal storm, once started,

travels on. Reverberation's  
always been my like. I can't  
bring myself to stop events I start.

Echoes define chambers  
of captivity. I dislike the making  
of a choice. Echoic is my voice.

*Ariel Plays Skittles*

You, sir, always bowl at skittles  
that have fallen; I don't know  
a better way to place the metaphor;

or even if metaphors stand apposite:  
but you take issue with the past.  
Perhaps the past's the only thing

you understand, and, to engage  
the present seems underhand.  
The present's curiously pristine

to you. To me it's tenuous; a game  
of rolling balls.

And when it's over  
you walk home. For unsleeping me:

bored, lucent, inevitable,  
starred: eternity.

*Ariel looks at you through his half-moon eyes*

I never was hooked into any zeitgeist;  
the world's not gentle  
and I've long distrusted it.

I mis-read systems of thought:  
find that cradle-names are dangerous.  
I'm a living spirit: but, for you,

I'm best regarded as a metaphor—  
I've said as much before.

*Star-Chamber Sessions begin in Bed*

A Star-Chamber encounter  
screwed you to the world;  
at least you know that; as for me

a divine injunction was put  
out on my epiphany. And so  
I don't know who I am,

except I come from a heavenly mistake.  
I think. I surmise. Origins  
eventually surcease. Perhaps.

Interests fade. Cases lapse.

*Ariel: days and nights*

Silky nights; the rare ones,  
drawn off like stockings  
from day's long legs; silky

semesters. Days are sheer,  
but roads are long; roads  
are somehow male. I choose

my clothes with care: adopt  
a route against my instinct.  
I abandon destinations

for silky nights: for silky nights  
I abandon origins. I'm not  
original: we all rape days

and hours; portray them,  
molested, as our own,  
as though to prove a history.

You, like me, are inclined  
to think you are an integer.  
You aren't: though. Perhaps, once,

in a primal place, you might have been.

*Trouble comes*

You fear trouble  
yet trouble comes:

you love yourself  
yet trouble comes.

You: they: whoever:  
yet trouble comes.

Set your face from trouble:  
yet trouble comes.

Be anonymous:  
yet trouble comes.

Mortify yourself:  
yet trouble comes.

Give away your riches:  
yet trouble comes.

Pray out your heart:  
yet trouble comes.

Quietly face the final ditch:  
yet trouble comes.

Deny trouble's coming:  
yet trouble comes.

*Innominate*

You think you have a stance  
from which you speak?

I'm not sure; I don't attend your vocative.  
I don't speak from a stance;

I don't even have a name.  
My wilderness is borderless;

Bid me with a finger,  
and I'll consider, and maybe do

the opposite. I don't have a vocative  
or even a set of tenses. Learn from me:

I'm a voiceless vast. But to speak—  
I have to steal from you.

*Deuterine Days*

Days' lodgements: poor sprite  
who wished for nothing more  
than the days' delight. Why was  
a flaming temperament  
put in a form so slight?

*Ariel bows out*

With all my faults I do not know  
where I come from: where I go.

I have my being here illicitly.  
I go: I shall never here be free.

THE END

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