

*Remain in Ignorance.*

Benjamin Murphy

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*Collection 3.*

# Introduction

This collection of poems is very much a companion piece - neither prequel nor sequel - to the play *Flowering Desolation* that I wrote in a similar way in 2018.

Each poem has been carved out of a single novel which has been read, sliced up, and reorganised into the linear poem that is presented. These fragments of sentences have been removed of their original context and used as the raw material with which to craft new meaning, however the content of each poem has arisen naturally, always being led by the source text itself.

No word besides this short preface has been written by me, rather they are hijackings: unofficial collaborations for which I did not seek approval nor ask for forgiveness.

## Others in this series

Perfectly Careless, Final Separation *(2022)*

Wild With Rage *(2023)*

# Contents



## **Too Sudden and Strange**

Donna Tartt

## **Dying of Hate and Boredom**

Vladimir Nabokov

## **Remain in Ignorance**

Javier Marías

## **Between the Terror of War and the Horror of Peace**

Arundhati Roy

## **Searching for Death**

Rosa Liksom

## **Eyes like Empty Holes**

Kōbō Abe

## **Death of Hope**

Anna Kavan

## **The Longer and Lesser and More Perpetual Murder**

James Baldwin

## **Dominated by a Sense of Waste**

Kazuo Ishiguro

## **Maddened with Fury**

Erich Maria Remarque

# Contents



## **Infinite Space**

Ottessa Moshfegh

## **A Delicious Contempt for Eternity**

Knut Hamsun

## **Midday Glare**

Fernanda Melchor

## **Meet Her Eyes**

Jo Spain

## **The Delusion of Infidelity**

Patrick McGrath

## **Perverse Lethargy**

Leïla Slimani

## **Viscera**

John Cheever

## **Sicker and Sicker**

Margaret Atwood

## **In a State of Great Ruin**

V.S. Naipaul

## **An Overwhelming Desire to be Alone**

Richard Wright

# Too Sudden and Strange



*Donna Tartt*  
*The Secret History*

The nights fell too quickly and the hush that settled  
On the meadow in the evening filled me with a strange,  
Tremulous sadness.

Reality is too sudden and strange to comprehend.  
Other things - naked, sputtering,  
Indelible in their horror - are too terrible to really ever grasp at all.

Dazed, half dreaming, not quite sure where I was,  
I thought I was sick, though I don't believe I really was,  
And life has grown quiet around me:  
Little of interest, less of beauty.

The minutes crept by with a torturous slowness  
And then the cloud passed over the sun again,  
And the life went out of everything.  
Everything dark and quiet as the grave.  
But, I am getting sentimental.

Somehow I had thought there would be more than this.

# Dying of Hate and Boredom



*Vladimir Nabokov*  
*Lolita*

I long for some terrific disaster,  
For a spell of despair and desperate meditation.

A poignant chaos was welling within me,  
Mingling power and hysteria in one desperate scream.  
So artistically did I impersonate the calm of ultimate despair,  
The hush before some crazy outburst,  
As a forerunner of insanity.

A creature of infinite melancholy  
In a petrified paroxysm of desire  
That taste would conceal and compassion spare.

By this time I was in a state of excitement bordering on insanity;  
But I also had the cunning of the insane.  
I was above the tribulations of ridicule,  
Beyond the possibilities of retribution.  
Dying of hate and boredom.  
In the same precise and blind manner.

In order to break some pattern of fate in which I obscurely felt  
myself being enmeshed  
I immolated myself, but it was all to no avail.  
At the time I felt I was merely losing contact with reality.  
But not for a second did I forget  
The teasing delirious feeling of teetering



On the very brink of unearthly order and splendour.

The human element dwindling, the passion, the tenderness, and  
the torture only increased  
And everything soiled, torn, dead.

I noticed through the film of my general distress  
That the fog of all lust had been swept away leaving nothing  
But this dreadful lucidity.  
And a rush of roaring black time drowning  
With its whipping wind the cry of lone disaster.

Even if one does learn to recognise certain obscure indications  
I was still continually obsessed by the feeling  
That some fatal stain had been left somewhere.  
Its essence: sterile and selfish vice.

Although I could never get used to the constant state of anxiety  
In which the guilty, the great, the tender hearted live,  
I felt I was doing my best in the way of mimicry.

As I approached the friendly abyss.  
I grew aware of a black wilderness.  
I was a ridiculous failure,  
Absolutely lost to the world and interminably  
Stunned by my new solitude.

Then came two or three dim days of hope  
Before the ultimate wistful submission to fate.  
Three or four little eternities  
Which positively welled with artificial warmth.

But it did not matter now, anyway

# Remain in Ignorance



*Javier Marías*  
*A Heart so White*

There are people who know only the fantasies  
That they themselves experience,  
Who are incapable of imagining anything  
And so have little insight.

Using one's imagination avoids many misfortunes.

The person who anticipates his own death  
Rarely kills himself,  
The person who anticipates that of others rarely murders,  
But no one knows the order of the dead or of the living,  
No one knows who will be the first to feel grief or fear.

He looked avidly at everything, at women  
And at certain men, shy men;  
Wherever he went his eyes gripped just as his hands did.  
I felt uncomfortable, ashamed.

I would have preferred not to know,  
Although once you know about something  
It's difficult to know whether you wanted to know about it  
Or would have preferred to remain in ignorance.

In order to flatter the person you love  
You denigrate everything else in existence,  
You deny and abominate everything

In order to content and reassure  
The one person who could leave you.

I always noticed the complete lack of passion or rage in him,  
Nothing but cold violence and a will to dominate.

It was more as if he were gripped by a kind of sombre tension  
Obligated to endure a fruitless wait that consumed him.  
It's always the most conventional things that contain  
The largest measure of madness.

I'd kept silent not only about all the things  
I've mentioned above, but also about the feelings of unease  
And the presentiments of disaster  
That have afflicted me ever since.

The people we know are as capable as we are  
Of the worst horrors and the greatest atrocities.  
Anything is possible.

I don't exempt myself from blame.

Recounting an event distorts it,  
Recounting facts distorts and twists  
And almost negates them.

The thought terrified me and I didn't want to think it,  
The secret that remains unspoken harms no one.

# Between the Terror of War and the Horror of Peace



*Arundhati Roy*  
*The God of Small Things*

The nights are clear  
But suffused with sloth and sullen expectation.  
It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable  
And the impossible really happened.  
Poised forever between the terror of war  
And the horror of peace,  
Worse things kept happening.

Human beings were creatures of habit  
And it was amazing the kind of things they could get used to.

She was twenty-seven that year,  
And in the pit of her stomach  
She carried the cold knowledge that for her,  
Life had been lived.

Death coiled inside her like an angry spring.  
There was something restless and untamed about her:  
Wide awake, fiercely vigilant,  
And brittle with exhaustion from her battle against real life.

Silence hung in the air like secret loss.

She had an odd, feverish glitter in her eyes,  
Unclouded by passion or desire.  
She managed to look almost fragile:  
Her own grief grieved her.  
Insanity hovered close at hand.

But the waiting air grew angry  
With mute resignation.  
Seven years of oblivion lifted off her  
And flew into the shadows on weighty, quaking winds.  
The liquid glint of her eyes in the dark  
Was no performance.  
The sound of the rain grew louder and exploded in her head.

Mayhem with clinical detachment,  
Emerging through chaos unscathed,  
Somewhere between indifference and despair.

# Searching for Death



*Rosa Liksom*  
*Compartment No. 6*

He watched her curiously, his mouth slightly open.

“Another person’s soul is a dark chasm,” he said quietly.  
The girl could feel the man’s breathing,  
The calm beating of his heart.

His momentary passion quickly evaporated,  
Replaced by a hint of deep sadness  
And he looked so grave  
That the girl couldn’t bear it and turned her head away.

A cold, powerless desperation crept into her breast.  
She lay awake waiting for sleep to come  
And free her from herself and her fears.

She hoped in vain.

Terror came and went; she was filled with fear, then anger,  
And then something else, something she had to let go of,  
And finally nothing but great regret.

She learned to listen a little more calmly  
To her own tense breathing  
And the restless beat of her overwrought heart  
Devouring her blood.

She was careful not to step on the threshold  
When she went outside  
And disappeared into the darkness of the limp eternal forest  
Searching for death.

# Eyes like Empty Holes



*Kōbō Abe*  
*Secret Rendezvous*

He was swept anew by a cold sense of loss  
With eyes like empty holes.

The sky was as black as an internal haemorrhage.

He sensed the presence of people, but saw no one.

(The key to success lay in doing everything as discreetly as possible).

The man's body shook with an unpleasant foreboding,  
A sudden relaxation of the joints in his body  
Made him realise how intense the worry and strain had been,  
But no amount of mental resolve  
Is equal to the shock of reality.

Drowsiness fell on him like the dropping of a curtain:  
Days spent sleeping curled up with death.

The time is finally drawing near.



# Death of Hope



*Anna Kavan*

*Ice*

I was lost, it was already dusk.  
I felt the humidity in the air  
And knew there would be a storm before long.

The death of hope had tranquillised her white face.  
There was too much tension in the atmosphere,  
Her proximity was too disturbing.  
If she had ever known kindness it would have been different.

In the deepening dusk every horror could be expected,  
Every kind of deception.

I dreamed of her whether I was asleep or awake.  
I was totally absorbed in that obsessional need,  
As for a lost, essential portion of my own being.

Disorganised, and showing every sign of acute fear  
I was committed to violence and must keep to my pattern.

She wished for hatred.  
Stood before me in silence with hanging head,  
All trace of assurance gone.

It did not seem to matter what I did now.

# The Longer and Lesser and More Perpetual Murder



*James Baldwin*  
*Giovanni's Room*

Somewhere, at the very bottom of myself,  
I realised that I was doing something awful to her,  
And it became a matter of my honour  
Not to let this fact become too obvious.

Before anything awful, irrevocable, had happened to me,  
When an affair was nothing more than an affair.  
Something had broken in me to make me so cold  
And so perfectly still and far away  
And I remember that at that moment  
A certain disappointment,  
An unprecedented sorrow entered into me.  
It would not help if I were able to feel guilty  
And at moments like this it felt that we were merely enduring  
And committing the longer and lesser  
And more perpetual murder.

His body, which I had come to know so well,  
Glowed in the light  
And I remember the shadows gathering  
In the far corners of that room, in which I never felt at home.  
The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness.

I was suddenly ashamed that I was with him.  
I looked at him and said nothing.  
He looked at me and I saw in his face again  
Something which I have fleetingly seen there  
During these hours: under his beauty and his bravado,  
Terror and a terrible desire to please.  
It became a stranger's face,  
Or it made me so guilty to look on him  
That I wished it were a stranger's face  
And the very harshness of this judgement,  
Which broke my heart, revealed,  
Though I could not have said it then,  
    How much I had loved him,  
        How that love,  
            Along with my innocence,  
                Was dying.

Eventually we grew still, we fell silent, and we slept  
As though we were accomplices in a crime.

I had never slept with a boy before.

# Dominated by a Sense of Waste



*Kazuo Ishiguro*  
*The Remains of the Day*

The light in the room was extremely gloomy  
On account of the rain,  
A solemnness hung in the air,  
And so we moved two armchairs up close to the bay window.

I decided not to get drawn into an unseemly argument  
With her and made sure to pause  
For a telling moment or two.  
In fact, every now and then, when she was not speaking,  
When her face was in repose,  
I thought I glimpsed something like sadness  
In her expression.  
The thought provoked a strange feeling to rise within me,  
Causing me to spoil the pleasant atmosphere  
With unhappy talk.

After we had been waiting in silence for a few minutes,  
I finally brought myself to say:  
“I find I do not have a great deal more left to give.  
A very genuine consolation to a life  
That has come to be so dominated by a sense of waste.  
The rest of my life stretches out as an emptiness before me.  
I have no idea how I shall usefully fill  
The remainder of my life”.

In any case her mood seemed to change at that point,  
And our conversation rapidly lost the rather personal tone  
It had begun to adopt.  
And it is quite illogical that I should feel any regret  
Or shame on my own account.

We stepped outside together,  
She paused for a moment, then she said  
“What can we ever gain in forever looking back  
And blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out  
Quite as we might have wished?”

# Maddened with Fury



*Erich Maria Remarque*  
*All Quiet on the Western Front*

Exhausted, stripped of any will to go on.

We cannot even look at one another  
For fear of seeing the unimaginable.  
We are maddened with fury.  
To an extent, we have become used to it.  
We can't help it, we just throw ourselves into it.  
But now we were able to distinguish things clearly,  
All at once our eyes had been opened.

What wretched creatures we are.

Why can't we get up and go away from here,  
Back through the years,  
Until all this misery has vanished from us?

But at the moment all I sense in them  
Is the pain of the dumb animal, the fearful melancholy of life,  
Everything else is in suspended animation.

I am lost in feelings of remoteness and quiet turmoil,  
And I give way to them.  
I am young, I am twenty years of age;  
But I know nothing of life except despair, death, fear,  
And the combination of completely mindless superficiality  
With an abyss of suffering.

My eyes are stinging  
And I stare into the vast and inexplicable melancholy.

How tenuous a boundary separates us from the darkness.

# Infinite Space



*Otessa Moshfegh*

*My Year of Rest and Relaxation*

I looked out of the windows at the darkening sky.  
I was growing less and less attached to life,  
Trying to cancel out thoughts about death  
With thoughts about nothingness.  
My nerves were frayed and fragile, like tattered silk.  
I'd remember that I was alive for a second,  
Then fade back out.

She was a slave to vanity and status  
And always on the brink of hysteria or outrage  
But I found her desperation especially irritating:  
That must be a painful way to live.  
I was bolder in my desperation:  
I went straight into black emptiness,  
An infinite space of nothingness,  
Absorbed by the darkness.

She worshiped me, but she also hated me.  
Her loyalty was absurd.  
All we had left in common was our history together,  
A complex circuit of resentment, memory, jealousy, denial,  
And the waning intensity of suffering.

“I'd rather kill myself than be all alone” she said.

I started to feel strange - not guilty per se,



But somehow responsible for her suffering.  
Maybe I did take some pleasure  
In aiding her self-destruction.

I could understand her disgust,  
And I felt calm for just a moment

# A Delicious Contempt for Eternity



*Knut Hamsun*  
*Hunger*

All at once the hideous position I was in  
Drove in on me with all its force.  
How amazingly everything fell to pieces on all sides.

Cold and hungry, more and more miserable, I pushed on.  
My deranged consciousness ran away with me  
And sent me lunatic inspirations,  
Which I obeyed one after the other.  
I let myself sink to less and less honourable deeds each day.  
I had not a single desire or longing unfulfilled  
So far as my thoughts could reach.

But my brain sank deeper and deeper into chaos.

I sat there, a prey to the weirdest fantasies,  
Gurgling to myself, humming lullabies,  
Sweating in my effort to be calm.  
What sort of new and painful sensation was this,  
Which was being added to the others?  
I was possessed by rage,  
And I thought of frightful acts of bloodshed  
Simply out of a delicious contempt for eternity.

The more I thought about it,  
The more unreasonable it seemed that  
I was a white beacon tower  
In the middle of a dirty human ocean  
Full of floating wreckage.

I didn't want to fall, I wanted to die standing.  
I was dying with open eyes, helpless,  
Staring up at the ceiling.  
All hope, was gone.

# Midday Glare



*Fernanda Melchor*  
*Hurricane Season*

He was lost in the middle of nowhere  
With one eye on the sky  
In the midday glare.  
A great cloud veiled the sun  
And he wanted to sleep but every time he closed his eyes  
He felt himself plummet,  
Unable to explain the overwhelming urge  
That came over him.

About to fall into the abyss,  
Lulled by the numb languor of that divine emptiness,  
Devoid of even the solace of the incandescent fires of hell.  
His body felt numb  
With a kind of cold fury,  
But he couldn't make out anything other than dust  
And darkness and that stench of death.

With time his fears abated.  
Life's suffering was over now  
And the darkness would soon fade.

# Meet Her Eyes



*Jo Spain*  
*The Perfect Lie*

She stops talking.  
I compose myself enough to meet her eyes.

She bites her lip then, colour flushing in her cheeks.  
I nod, and let her guide me outside,  
Her arm tucked under mine.  
She was tense.

Even though I want to stay angry and confrontational  
I feel at peace for the first time in a long time  
And I feel more human than I either want or deserve.

Rather than sinking into the depths of despair, I cope.

# The Delusion of Infidelity



*Patrick McGrath*  
*Asylum*

She avoided my eyes, she became vague;  
From this evasion all else followed.

I realised a little later that it wasn't shame  
That made her reluctant to talk to me  
But the first sharp shock of horror  
At the appalling transgression she'd committed.

Sex with the man: the idea of it,  
Long active in her imagination,  
Frankly articulated,  
Had a terrible power.

She couldn't oppose him at all, it wasn't possible,  
For she had begun to surrender herself  
And no longer felt distinct and separate from him,  
Rather that she was incomplete without him.

She drifted through her days in a state of detachment  
And abstraction, functioning as she was expected to  
But not ever, really, totally, there.

She was at times almost overwhelmed by anxiety,  
And it was only with difficulty  
That she roused the flame of her love  
And forced it to burn with enough fierceness

That it crowded out other feelings.

Her mask had slipped.  
Jealous men are inherently weak.

There is often a ghostly resemblance to logic  
In the thinking of delusional patients,  
And it was apparent here.  
The delusion of infidelity.

At no point did she turn from him in her mind.  
Was she really so blind to the danger  
She had placed herself in?  
She freely chose to do this,  
Nothing can excuse or obscure this fact.

Waves of despair came without warning,  
And at these times she just wanted to lie down and die,  
But she was holding on, she wouldn't let go,  
She wouldn't surrender to it, not yet.

From sleepy indolence he had suddenly reared up  
First with resentment and scorn.

These spiralled out of control,

And eventually,

He murdered her.

# Perverse Lethargy



*Leïla Slimani*  
*Lullaby*

Her head aches so badly that she can hardly open her eyes.  
She doesn't sink into sleep  
But into a sort of perverse lethargy,  
Where her thoughts become scrambled  
And her unease is intensified.  
All she can do is let events carry her away, wash over her,  
Overwhelm her, while she remains passive and inert  
At the edge of a frontier that she is about to cross  
And behind which she will vanish.

She watches herself in the mirror when she cries;  
Sometimes feels afraid that she will grow old.

She feels a gratuitous, futile, selfish desire  
But she is sure that everyone has had the same thoughts.  
Her face is like a peaceful sea,  
It's depths suspected by no one.

Euphoria gives way to days of dejection  
A new sadness had come between her and the world.

Months passed without her even realising.  
She is immobile, like the corpse of a flayed torture victim,  
left out as a warning to the others.



The whole world had forgotten her.

Every day she would encounter companions in madness.  
She has the intimate conviction now,  
The burning and painful conviction  
That her happiness belongs to them.  
All of this brought her forcefully back to her childhood,  
To that age of obedience and obligation.

She feels suddenly sentimental.  
Her lower lip trembled slightly  
Seized by a feeling of panic that she cannot hide.

Hoping to cause a scandal  
Just to binge on others sufferings  
Like a tax levied on the happiness of others;  
As a way of distracting herself from her solitude.

Slightly ashamed of this fetishism, this frivolous desire.  
That spectacle of open hate:  
She didn't dare admit her secret shame.

Even when they scream, when they cry,  
When they fall into despair.  
Despair does not make her yield.

# Viscera



*John Cheever*  
*Falconer*

The longing moved up from his genitals to his viscera  
And from there to his heart, his soul, his mind,  
Until his entire carcass was filled with longing.  
But, in some part of the considerable wilderness  
That was himself, a flower seemed to bloom,  
And he could not find the blossom and crush it.

He possessed some memories  
But they were eclipsed and indisposed.  
Bathtub rings, unflushed toilets,  
An international renown for sexual depravity,  
Clinical alcoholism and drug addiction, broken arms, legs,  
Brain concussions, and now a massive attack of heart failure.

This was coming close to self-pity.  
A beautiful illustration of the bounds of his mortality.

Sensing the stillness at this proof of his living death  
The instant seemed conspiratorial in its intensity,  
He endured no true sadness.

# Sicker and Sicker



*Margaret Atwood*  
*Surfacing*

I refuse to panic, I force my eyes open  
Through tears and a haze of vomit.  
The disease is spreading.

It arouses in others disgust and pity  
And the desire to torment and reform.  
To them watching I must have appeared grotesque.

I was disappointed in myself,  
The failure unbearable,  
Getting sicker and sicker.

Madness is only an amplification  
Of what you already are.  
Soon, it will be gone.

Withdrawing is no longer possible  
And the alternative is death.

A ringing in my ears and then a silence.  
On the other side is terror.

Redemption was elsewhere, I must have overlooked it.

# In a State of Great Ruin



*V.S. Naipaul*  
*In a Free State*

Mist falling like rain.  
He looked for company but needed solitude;  
He looked for attention, and at the same time  
Wanted not to be noticed.  
When he is like this he have the power  
To draw all the strength from me.  
I worship this man without shame,  
But he had wanted me to keep on being helpless.  
And it was strange, I thought, that sorrow lasts  
And can make a man look forward to death,  
But the mood of victory fills a moment and then is over.  
Those quivering wet eyes remained distant;  
He decided to be sombre, to give nothing away.  
He was surrendering only to his own tenderness  
And melancholy, which at such moments overflowed.  
I begin to feel lost.  
I don't feel I can go on.  
I could see how much he was suffering,  
And I could see that he was frightened.  
He had freed himself of me  
And the effect of this was  
That my sadness became like a sickness of the soul.  
I was a free man; I could do anything I wanted.

Man: in a state of great ruin.

It's like watching yourself become a ghost.  
You do terrible things  
To prove to yourself that you are a real person.  
The only lies for which we are truly punished  
Are those we tell ourselves.  
This is what I do, this is what I bring on myself  
And after I watch him leave  
I feel that I too have nowhere to go.

# An Overwhelming Desire to be Alone



*Richard Wright*  
*Native Son*

As much as he hated and feared himself  
He had an overwhelming desire to be alone.

This thing was getting the better of him,  
But hope was always waiting somewhere deep down in him.

The thought of what he had done, the awful horror of it,  
The daring associated with such actions, formed for him  
For the first time in his fear-ridden life  
A barrier of protection between him and a world he feared.

He was trying desperately to understand.

Only fear and emptiness filled him now:  
An urgent need to hide his growing and deepening  
Feeling of hysteria; he had to get rid of it  
Or else he would succumb to it  
And a deepening sense of fatigue drugged him with sleep.

When he was strong enough to stand without support,  
He rose to his feet and wiped his forehead on his sleeve.  
He was coming back into possession of himself;  
For the past three minutes it seemed  
He had been under a strange spell,

Possessed by a force which he had to obey.  
Was he not heightening the horror of his own end  
By straining after a flickering hope?

To live, he had created a new world for himself,  
And for that he was to die.  
Soon it'll all be over he thought.

He was alone, profoundly, inescapably.  
It was not with anger or regret that his eyes closed, slowly,  
And he was swallowed in darkness.

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