

End Times
the
Rhymes
of
Kate Tempest

For Katie



END TIMES

I can smell the thunder coming
I can smell the rain
Look, you're the only one I ever knew
Whose eyes could hold the flame
Without burning like the others' burnt
She told me Hell's to blame
And I told her Hell's a choice we make
And Blake would tell the same.

If all deities reside within
How come I feel that presence above?
The love that unplugs the heart
And starts the floods again within me
Drowning out the badness that I harbour
When my goodness battens down the hatches
And holds on to a partner.

She's saying 'Storm's coming'
Of course it is
It always is on nights like this
Cause the tower blocks are murmuring
And I can sense a turning wind
And I glimpse this man who isn't there
And I know that glitch for all it's worth
Because I pass out full of madness
And I wake up drenched in thirst
Like, give me whisky, give me beers to glug,
Just let me lose this fear
And I'll love anyone who's near
Enough to looking slightly like you.

All I'm trying to say
Is today's like all them other days
And all I'm trying to do
Is mark it down and make it true
To make it count for something
Cause I know nothing is eternal
And nothing means a thing
And nobody believes nothing
That's why we live in all this sin
And we mistake it for normality
For something to attain.

My dissent sets me apart
But today I smell that rain
Come to wash away these masks
The marks imbedded on our weary hearts
And this is merely metaphor
But metaphor is flexing jaw
And getting ready for the fight
It's come to fight with the surface world.

But we have lost our purpose
Hurled into a furnace
Where the burn is near celestial
Detestable outside, and yes, my chest is full
Of cider, gin and lightning
And my eyes will dim
But the rhymes will sing in times to come
Since I begun
My head's been filled with end
Cause these people wear too many faces
But I swear the truth will strike again.

You see, I wake up in the end-times
Curled up in the wreckage
Thinking life will happen
Whether you dismiss it or expect it
So look into my eyes
You'll see your own eyes reflected
I'm crying oceans into paragraphs
While behind out backs our shadows laugh.

We wake up in the end-times
Curled up in the wreckage
Saying life's going to happen
Whether you dismiss it or expect it
So let me look into your eyes
And see my own eyes reflected
I'm crying oceans into paragraphs
Cause behind out backs our shadows laugh.

But look, when I'm telling rhymes I shut my eyes,
Cause it helps me see stuff
These words, they're like the leaves
In the bottom of the gypsy's teacup
If you look at them right
You might see the future in them.

See, I always knew that we were here for more
Than wash the dishes, do the cooking,
See, I'm here to speak for everyone
That never got a look in
You know, all the ones who ain't good-looking,
The ones who hate the crooked
Wicked nature of the system

For everyone who knows, fuck it,
Just cause we can't see the bars
Don't mean we ain't in prison.

I believe every soul is born
Blessed with true wisdom
And that life is about getting back
To what was given before life.
How come we are all in these disguises hidden?
How come we sleep through life
And live in dreams?
Is it cause we can't tell the difference?

Now, all my life
People looked at me with real suspicion
But I've got to be what I've got to be
I'm the victim of my own condition
And the meaning is the same
No matter which language speaks it
The new paradigm begins
As soon as you're ready to perceive it
And that's the real talk.

These are whirlpool words you can drown in
But I'm so desperate for beauty
I'll turn scaffolding to mountains
I'll turn traffic into breakers
While this illusion overtakes us
I'm saying we need to learn to bite the hand
That bullies and berates us.

Cause we're going to wake up in the end-times
We're going to be curled up in the wreckage
Thinking, yeah, life's going to happen
Whether we dismiss it or expect it
So let me look into your eyes
And see my own eyes reflected
I'm crying oceans into paragraphs
Cause behind our backs our shadows laugh.

– *Broken Herd* (2009)

CANNIBAL KIDS

Round here

These cannibal kids want to be kings

But there ain't no royalty left

Cause round here

The sirens and screams float on the wind

And even the street shudders

Afraid of our footsteps.

Round here

These cannibal kids want to be kings

But there ain't no royalty left

Cause round here

The sirens and screams float on the wind

And even the street shudders

Yes, even the street shudders.

Round here

These cannibal kids want to be kings

They don't know that kindness is courage

Or that sympathy sings

Much louder than violence

They are bitter and drained

Eyes of ice stare from figures of flames

Puff-chested, restless, nameless,

They carry their pain

To the point of being painless.

These numb ones, young ones,

The new latch-keys of London

Just soaking up that humdrum

That makes them want to run
From the state they're in
Powerless, penniless,
Feathers clipped, they find eagles' wings
In the derelict brotherhood of gang-life
That bang-bang life
That shouts louder than a sarcastic teacher
Clapping hands twice
And staring down a frightened nose
See, they learned that respect comes from striking a pose
That demands it.

But I know
Respect and fear are not compatible
But they're a long way from bat and ball
They don't play, they let daggers fall
From blood-soaked fingers
While their siblings lie bleeding in hallways dead
But like wisdom has always said
Blood begets blood and keeps spilling
So the pavements are stained
And our hearts are grief-stricken.

Cause round here
These cannibal kids want to be kings
But there ain't no royalty left
No, cause round here
The sirens and the screams float on the wind
And even the street shudders
Yeah, even the street shudders.

While that paranoid panic
Goes seeping through the granite
Of the breeze-blocks
Turning our cities into sheep-flocks
See me, I pity those whose knees knock
The victims of the media machine
Them poor souls who've forgotten how to dream.

You see, that cut-throat mentality,
That gets encouraged in business
They tell you, yeah, to be a success
You've got to step on some necks
So big money is made through that ruthless pursuit
And while they're shot in water
They're jailing kids for shop in copper suits.

Now, we were born
Into these blood-soaked cities of industry
Informed of the savagery
The infamy, barbarity of history,
Controlled, and contrived, and depressed
And attested, and stressed out and vexed
It's a message we've been fed
So we could propagate their system
Of division, inhibition,
Viciousness and contradiction
We were suckled on the milk that they soured
Told the future was ours
And then disembowelled and disempowered
We've been disgraced, deafened and deflowered
Our brains brutalized and our defiance devoured.

And so now they're shooting guns and robbing cats
And trying to claw a little back
But when the whole thing shatters
It always starts with a little crack
And then splinters
Stretching out for miles
Pointing fingers at smart-dressed men
With crocodile smiles.

But still we get the blame
Told that life is all exchange
Told that we are the child of capo
That we are the children of apathy
That we are the children of this rapidly changing reality
But I say we learnt it from them
From their rules and their ways
Cause their legitimate businesses deceive and disgrace
While us, we do what we can,
Because we live in this place
Where the truth can't be seen in the face.

– *Broken Herd* (2009)

REVELATION

Here there is dignity lacking
Intent to deface our own work
We've lost sight of our substance
We allow ourselves to be ruled
By the basest of functions
While slippered men walk old
Through the streets of my youth.

We're separated, we're polarised
Our own wisdom is hated
Cause too many minds
Have grown stale and frustrated
So now we feast on our sins
Our appetites bated with eating
The hunger increasing
With each fleeting mouthful
Till a meeting of minds becomes doubtful
Lips clenched against secrets
Strength dead before weakness
And so we're dormant
Prostrate before an ideal of power.

I'm saying, is this not what was written?
Is this not the hour
When each from the other
Is cloven and ravaged?
When our indifference has turned us to stone
When neither marriage nor love is forever
Then what of them Seven Seals?
And what of that coming flood?

I'm saying, how can we believe, though,
If we cannot trust?
How can we believe, though,
If we cannot trust?
Blood-covered fingers thrust into our guts
They want our very hearts from us
We need to wake up.

But how can you believe in that
If we cannot trust?
And how can I believe in anything
If I cannot trust?
I'm saying, unless we all come together,
We're all going to get crushed
This is not about you or me
It's about us.

You see, they took us away from ourselves,
And they told us to hate on ourselves
Now where are the meanings
If all things are meaningless?
And where is the peace in this city swamp?
I've watched us doing things
I knew we didn't want to do
But we're not comfortable with being true.

There is no trust
Because trust is dangerous
It leads to peace of mind
That's why I'm searching every face
For some kind of secret sign
Of someone who understands my hunger

And the thunder branded in my step.

And yes, I know the truth will languish
On the breath of the orator
But fuck it
I want bigger things from my people
Greater self-knowledge
Greater compassion
Instead of following our hearts, though,
We're following fashion
For fuck's sake!

I'm in it so deep that my guts ache
And yes, I fluctuate
Between being creative and destructive
Cause I was born into a time
When no mind ever truly trusted
But without unity there can be no strength
And yes, a lot of people heard,
But they didn't clock for what I meant.

What I mean is this
I'll say it straight and try to make it very clear
I believe we began as one
And we have to defeat that fear
That keeps us all apart
That's why you need to come here
So we can learn each other's names
And let our hearts be unrestrained
So you can know there's none to blame
Cause all deserve forgiveness.

So hold me close
And feel the wisdom that in my liver shivers
Yes, I will defy the chip,
Yes, I will battle with them lizards
For the safety of my family
Look, you are all my family,
It's just that we have all forgotten
That we are kindred spirits
See, I feel close to you like leaves feel close
To the wind that blows them down to earth
But I swear, we need to recognise our worth.

But how can you believe in that
If you cannot trust?
How can we believe in anything
If we cannot trust?
While blood-covered fingers thrust
Their way into our guts
Trying to take our very hearts from us
We need to wake up.

For how can you believe in it
If you cannot trust?
And how can I believe in anything
If I cannot trust?
I'm saying, unless we all come together,
We are all going to get crushed
Look, it's not about you or me,
It's about us.

– *Broken Herd* (2009)

BEST INTENTIONS

We are the product of our times
Of our legacy of messiness
Of misdirected energies
And self-obsessive tendencies.

Well, I'll waste no more time
In wanting what can never be
Those friendships numbed to nothing now
I hope that you remember me

In kindness or in empathy
At least, like I remember you,
I know that I am who I am
For having been a friend to you.

I know now, first hand,
That regretting love will empty you
Of all that makes you love
And all that lovers pay attention to.

But I've been here before
Entangled, trying not to mention you
When all my blood and guts are filled
To bursting with the stench of you.

See, I lose me in loving,
And I do things I never meant to do
When all my weakness is my weakness
In my attempt to strengthen you.

For you is not one person
Not one version of a person
Or a device listed in these rhymes
To help me vent some raw emotion.

No, you is all the yous I loved in falsity,
All the yous I fell for in the darkness of this false city
All the yous who had my truth
And in return were false to me.

All the yous I had to lose
So I can make the most of me
All the yous whose secrets I still keep
Who are like ghosts to me.

Haunting me every time
I let someone get close to me
All the yous I lied beside
Whose cries seem like such boasts to me.

Who naked came, and naked left,
And squandered all my hopes in me
Who call out that badness
The most remote in me

Resuscitate the violent side
And stifle all the growth in me
Make me, like, lustful, needy, greedy,
What I'm really loathe to be.

You made me feel immortal
But in secret made a joke of me.

But whatever's come to pass
I hope that you, like me, are sure
That the love was always real
And the intention always pure.

And yeah, whatever people tell you,
They'll never love you more
I just wish I'd known to love you right before
And that's the score.

And whatever's come to pass
I hope that you, like me, are sure,
I know your love was always real
And your intention always pure.

And fuck it, whatever people tell me,
They'll never love me more
It's just I wish you knew to love me right before
And that's the score.

But every storm that's ever blown blows in me
The world pitches and heaves and pulls my tides
You see, I wear the lonely strength that sorrow brings me,
But I woke up this morning old and I realized

That my friends don't know the weight of my contrition
Or the flames that make a furnace of my throat
The relentless burning thrust of this ambition
Or the trust I bore and lost, now so remote.

This fucking tribe of enemies rise up against me
And I'm staring at them for faces but find masks

Cause eyes that once looked sweetly gaze back empty
And I cannot do the things of me they ask.

Well, fuck it, I must answer to my own looming potential,
Cause it rears its fearsome head and it screams my name
As these callous bleeding fingers grip that pencil
And I'm scrawling on scraps of paper, 'I'm to blame, I'm to blame,'
Yeah, I'm scrawling on scraps of paper, 'I'm to blame'.

Well, all that was, that is, all that will be,
Is heavy like the tears you waste on me
Well, if you fall in love, believe me,
I will write about it.

When it's come to nothing
And you begin to doubt it ever happened
I'll mull it over, churn it out,
Bring the ocean to the drought.

You tell me it's unhealthy
And hurt me when you try to help me
Then I'll tell you that I'm sorry
When the time for sorry's long deceased.

I will think of you
When all the city longs for sleep
I'll keep them up screaming out
The secrets I don't want to keep.

Then I'll call you up in tears
Knowing you don't want to speak.

But fuck it, whatever's come to pass,
I hope that you, like me, are sure
That the love was always real
And the intention always pure.

And whatever people tell you
Fuck 'em, they'll never love you more,
Just I wish I'd known to love you right before.

– *Broken Herd* (2009)

GIVE

Give me strength, give me reason,
Give me faces, give me feelings,
Give me breathing space
Give me ceilings stared at wondering
When are you leaving?
Give me softness
Give me seasons changing
Give me freezing hands in pockets needing hands
But your hands never held back
Still I don't hold back
Fucking give me something,
Alright, don't give me nothing.

Give me stature, give me calling,
Give me kisses falling
Down like pouring rain
Even though it's all in vain
Come on, give me one more morning,
Give me something good
That doesn't get boring
You know, like flesh for adoring,
Breath for the drawing
Booze for the pouring
Or the pause before the applauding.

Give me sanction, give me closure,
Give me back my life, give over,
Give me a body that doesn't hurt
And a mind that isn't about to desert me
(No, I've got that)

Give me thirty fags
And a dirty bag of drugs
And a drink, I'm thirsty,
Give me a minute
And I'll give you an excuse
For those things that hurt me.

Just give me a mike
And sit and observe me
Give me a crowd
And tell me they heard me
Give me a driver to swerve me about
When the days are too short
And my heart's fallen out of its fortress
Give me trumpets
Give me them torches burning
Give me concern
Give me nauseous gurning faces
And them lessons I can't learn.

Look, I give it all when I'm giving,
I give it all
That's how I know that I'm living
I give heart and I give love
And I give blood and guts
But I never give up
So come on, give what you get,
I can live with regret
I will give it all night
But don't stay too long, though,
Just give me a smile
And kiss me for a while

I might fall in love with you
After you're gone, though.

Just give me a morning I wake up
And don't feel sick and regretful
With a head full of shame
I reach for a pencil
And I try and explain
What can't be explained
And I'm like, oh . . .
Give me the same as what you're having
You look so happy
You look so carefree
Oh no, wait a minute, you look scary
And you look like you can't bare me.

Oh well, give me water,
Then give me sleep
Give me food to eat
That doesn't leave me weak
No, fuck that,
What I need's a box of wine
Cause every face is yours
And your face ain't mine
Right, I need to get stern with myself,
I've extremely high hopes
I also have wet eyes and a dry throat
And a whole heap of rhymes that I wrote.

So give me time on my own
No, no, give me people to talk to –
I'm going mad and I'm weak-willed

Keep still, breathe very quietly,
I need recovery
Somebody cuddle me
Give me time on my own
No, shit, I need people to talk to,
I'm going mad and I'm weak-willed
Keep still, breathe quietly,
I need recovery
Somebody cuddle me.

Look, I've been awake all night just writing,
Sick of myself
Fighting the urge to get rid of myself
I'm so exposed that I've hidden myself
Honestly, I can't live with myself,
I've been awake all night just writing
Sick of myself
Fighting the urge to get rid of myself
Look, I can't stop giving myself a hard time,
I can't stop giving
And I can't stop taking
And I get lost in this give and take
And now it's sunrise
And your eyes are a cliff-face
And I fall off every morning
Yes, I'm appalling.

Calm me down
Give me kind words
Come here and put your arms around me
Your heart-beat's drummed mine out
Since you found me

So give me some space
No, wait, come here,
Crowd me.

– *Patterns* (2011)

RENEGADE

I'm a renegade
I'm out for the truth
I will shout it from the rooftops
You can find me down with some booze
Out in New Cross
Or paddling around in the Thames
With my shoes off
Shaking my head, thinking
Too many are too lost.

But you can recognize me
Cause I'm you, mate,
It's never too late
To see deeper than the surface
Trust me, there's a lot more to it,
There's a world beyond this one
That creeps in when your wits have gone
And all the edges start shifting
I mean it, a world that is breathing,
Heaving its shoulders and weeping
Bleeding through open wounds
That's why I'm grieving
I'm down on my knees and I am feeling
I'm feeling everything I'm feeling.

So come here
Give me your hand
Because I know how to hold it
Look, I will write you a poem,
And I'll set it on fire

Cause I am stunned
By how the light in your eyes
Resembles brightening skies
Fuck it
I would fight for your life
Like it was mine.

But I'm writing tonight
I've got a jam-jar of wine
I'm rolling smokes
I'm spitting bars to myself
With a swollen throat
I'm sitting on the steps
Catching the Holy Ghost
Thinking about how it feels
Every single time you hold me close.

Look, we're not flesh,
We're all energy
I care about genius
I don't care about celebrity
We only build them up
To burn their effigies
And there's more
And I can feel it so raw
And it's calling me back to before.

That's why I walk through these landscapes
That's why I rip the mike hard
Till my hand shakes
But they're more illuminated than the masons
Look, I stand straight-faced,

With the mania inches away
But I never flinch
Cause I have ink in my veins.

I don't care about the surface
I care about the infinite
I carve a niche
And I hide within it
I lay down in the garden of your spirit
Asking pardon from the elders
They tell me, Kate,
Every minute is the minute to begin it
Make it broader
But the thing that brings me strength
Also gives me such torture.

But fuck it
Every time the seasons change
I'm completely overwhelmed
I hold the helm
Like the hilt of a sword
I'm a born worker
I'm the second-best rapper
There's not enough people have heard her
The first, that was a con,
I've got a first coming on
I'm an old soul
With a young mind
Cause Blake showed me
That those who don't exhibit their influence
They're only holding candles
To the sunshine.

So if you want to talk
Just come find me
I'll be on Lewisham Way
Watching the dawn melt away
Look, I used to spit these bars out
To strangers on the train
I couldn't hold it down
I had a brain full of flames
I used to hang out
With the alkeys on the benches in the park
You know, we used to talk about their lives,
And why they walked out on their wives.

I used to storm the stages uninvited
I was too excited
I has something to say
And I couldn't hide it
But I learnt about patience
And I learnt about stamina
And every single moment stacked up
And added to the presence
And now I keep cool
And I consult my presence
And I give thanks for my blessings.

But everything's so physical here
You know, the alcoholic in the offey
Filling up his trolley
Till the world disappears
I'm so hungry for something sustainable
Something with truth
Something unchangeable

Something like you and your room
When the rain falls
Cause the windows are open
And it's splashing on our skin like the sea breeze
You can love me forever
But never need me
I'm pretty sure you can be
What completes me.

So this one's for the hopeless romantics
For the broken, the strangled,
The pure, the puerile, the pedantic,
The fearless, the frantic,
Living in the belly of the Beast
With the rats and the rancid
And these blankets and streets
And we starve while they banquet and feast
But Banquo will rise
He has a message for the guilty.

This one's for the hard-living
The filthy, the gutter-mouths,
This one's for the city that built me
That will knock me down
If I don't learnt right
I burn bright
I turn might into meagre
In the blink of an eye
So come on, meet me in the bar,
We'll raise out drinks to the sky
And I will show you
That you're fucking incredible.

Look, we're not flesh,
We're all energy
I care about genius
I don't care about celebrity
I don't care about the hype
But I care about integrity
Cause you only build them up
To burn their effigy anyway
And I'm getting closer
To my essence everyday
Renegade.

– *Patterns* (2011)

HELL IS EMPTY

I tell of him that summoned
Them storms in vengeance
Poisoned by the wrath
Of his remembrance
Him that gave languages
To impose a sentence
His name was Prospero
And he prospered by what he knows
Knowledge he keeps for himself
And it is used by the bad to enslave and to mystify
Know the language
That fills up your mouth is imposition
And subject your ambition
To a bootless inquisition.

Look, Prospero won't survive,
He grew wise
He got fat upon them books
He despised when he should have dismissed
Well, that to this is all relative,
Madness on those who can't measure it
Sadness for those who seek sedative
But gladness for those who know pleasure
It's all self-constructed
For those who knows how to clutch it
But give by your art, your fever disguise,
You need to let the heat within rise and evaporate
If you're the type who sees
The sea's tide against you
You will never navigate.

I know language is for those
Obsessed with real meaning
Don't love your oppressor
Or trust your oppressor
But don't begrudge the oppressor
The oppressor's oppression
Because each has to learn
Their own lesson
If all the people were prophets we'd profit,
We were born with the truth
But we lost it in logic.

So find it
Remind yourself of the timeless,
I swear, you are the planet that bred you,
You are the knowledge that fed you
And you are the language that led you
Now own it
Make it make sense,
Make it relevant, and never believe
That the words of the wise
Are not your words to read.

See, when you hear
The quiet voice of vengeance in your ear
That's when you know that Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here

When your tongue tastes of shadows
And your friends are shedding tears
That's when you know that Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here

When your heart is consumed
With regret and with fear
When a demon jumps up straight
Rejecting your spear

When the view is so bleak
It starts infecting the seer
That's when you know Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here.

So fuck it, call me Caliban,
They gave me language so I could rain down
These curses in verses
I'll take them on word for word
Cause I know that the worst is
To watch my good friends caught up in circuits
You see, the serpent,
He rehearses his curses,
He makes the valiant vicious
And I know now not to waste wishes.

So go ahead
Conjure a storm on the head of your enemy
You will find yourself victim
Of negative energy
You need to extend your empathy
Make yourself sensitive
This island was mine for a home
I was free to make rhymes as I roamed
And my mind is alone
As I arrive all alone
I'm the captive of consonants.

Look, I beseech you to be more confident,
Cause we run around nonchalant
Dejected and restless, we're like,
'Oh, we can't change nothing
'So why should we try?'
But we can change
We can rampage till we stand strange
We have our hands chained
Clutching at freedom
You know, the freedom
Of mean what you say
And say it with meaning
Change your own mind
Before you try and change the sequence
You need to live with your energy
Not by your reason.

This is the last day of my discontented season
No more will I tolerate this greed –
It's demeaning
Leaving a breeze for the stifling heat
Of elitist depictions of what we can reach
Look, they want you to fear it,
To not get too near it
So they can continue
Pretending they're smarter
Sit still, though, receive it from self,
Like Siddharta,
The past is just what we came after.

So when you hear
The quiet voice of vengeance in your ear

That's when you know that Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here

When your tongue tastes of shadows
And your friends are shedding tears
That's when you know that Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here

When your heart is consumed
With regret and with fear
That's when you know that Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here

When the boat sails away
And you get left on the pier
That's when you know that Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here

When you're trying to understand
But the text isn't clear
When the demon jumps up straight
Rejecting your spear

When the view is so bleak
It starts infecting the seer
That's when you know Hell is empty
Cause all the devils are here.

– *Patterns* (2011)

LINE IN THE SAND

Nothing's new
Nothing's old
It's all now, it's only ever now.

Blue eyes squinting out
From deep beneath a weathered brow
How intricate is the fabric of this endless deception
But what's real is the puddle
Becoming the reflection of the moon
You need to give back the light that shines on you
Do you come from the city
Or does the city come from you?

Everything is perfect
And it will flow as it must do
So go seek out them demons that clutch you
Embrace them
And turn them into angels
Of patience and passion
I battle with the night
Cause in me is the spirit
Of Old England's dragon
I'm dragging my feet
At the edge of the chasm
I'm the young scribe who never dressed in fashion
And my skin's scuffed
Cause I bleed from your talons
I'm still tough, though,
And we will come to blows
If you give it enough

Though I'd rather smile warmly
And give you some love.

Cause too many round here are bitter
With the vicious streak
How many more times must I listen
To them kissing teeth
Eyes so focussed on the floor
That they miss the peaks rising
I'm hoping for more
I'm out for the whole horizon
It's all mine
Like it's all yours
But some were born to be warlords
They clambered up from up all fours
To draw swords
They learnt to walk
Across blood-spattered floorboards
They've got poison on their veins
Some were born to find pleasure through pain.

But some were born to peace
Me, I was born to embody
All the words that I speak
And the purpose I seek
Seeks me at the same time
Look, I fall down a lot,
But still my brain climbs
Yes, these are strange times
And yes, I know full-well
I'm a strange kind.

But fuck it
I came to be heard
I'm trying to change minds
And yes, it's very taxing,
But I will keep on trying
Cause I'm a soft-eyed oxen
Rolling with the raw tribe of lions
That's why, if you try to find me,
You'll find me defiant.

For now I'm walking home alone in the late night
Never been attacked or get stage-fright
No, I take flight with the mike in my hand,
Cause since time began
The brilliant have always had to fight
With the bland.

Yeah, I'm walking home in the late night,
Never been attacked or get stage-fright
No, I take flight with the mike in my hand,
True child of the land
I'm like the wave that came to wash away
The line in the sand.

But nothing's more real
Than the things that we feel
That we'd give the whole world not to feel
New day, same deal,
I'm in a state at the back of the bus
There's a voice in my head saying
'Kate, when are you going to grow up?'
I come home in a state and I throw up

All my friends they nurse babies
And they give in to their addictions
And they go crazy
But nothing's more real
Than having something to live for
Although really we should all die less
And live more.

Young ones
Spilling the crimson that fills them
And they glorify the guns that kill them
And we reckon it ain't nothing
Because we reckon we ain't nothing
In the scheme of things
But that's wrong
Because we all have it in us
To be queens and kings
This screaming wind
Hollows my bones
Because we live so close together
But we feel so alone
Well, nothing's more real than doing right
After years of doing wrong
And having friends that you love
And a place you come from.

That's why I'm walking home alone in the late night
I've never been attacked or get stage-fright
No, I take flight with the mike in my hand,
True child of this land
I'm like the wave that came to wash away
The line in the sand.

Look, I'm walking home alone in the late night,
Never been attacked or get stage-fright
I take flight with the mike in my hand
Cause since time began
The brilliant have always had to fight
And I fight for this.

Cause my feet
Are good friends with that street
And my teeth
Know the feeling of fists and pen-lids
And my belief has been broken
But my faith remains true.

Street lights flicker on as I walk past
They make a private salute
You see, I'm all city,
(Except I've got the hair of a hippy)
The dusk's coming down
It's making all this chaos so pretty
I'm seeing all these derelict buildings
Hearing the laughter of children
I'm watching the paint peeling off the walls
And I know this is my dominion
This is my United Kingdom.

And I'm trying to be brave
In the face of all this treachery
We're just stray cats
Looking for a warm hearth
The storms pass
And then they rise again

A tempest, trying to find a friend
In an empty sky
Well, the soil clings to my fingertips
Cause I've been digging through the earth of my soul
Trying to think of this
Watching spring giggle
As she wiggles out of winter's grip.

Yes, a lot of us are fucked,
But a lot of us are trying our luck
And yes, a lot of us are hiding and stuck,
And a lot of us are lost
But there's a lot of us getting across
I'm right here
Writing rhymes in the moss
I'm right here
Shining light through the fog
I'm right here
Spitting fire at the gods
And yes, a lot of us went mental,
But a lot of us stayed gentle.

That's why I'm waiting for the end
With a pint and a pen
And yes, the night will descend,
I'll be right here
With my arms round my friends
I'm too real to ever try to pretend
I have a lifestyle to defend
I'm South-East to the death of me
I'm never going to swallow
All this bullshit you're selling me

I'm never going to do it your way
So stop telling me
That my way ain't the right way
See, I'm the heavenly body
That fell to earth with a crash and a thump
But then I took the wrong turn
And I ended up a staggering drunk.

But fuck it
I speak from the heart
And I do what I love
And I believe in the music I love
That's why your rules ain't enough
To stop me from making my own
From sixteen I knew the power
Of conversing through chrome
So just give me a mike
Give Archy his amps
And give Ferry his drum-kit
We ain't got time for dumb shit
We're all about the sound of rum shit.

For now I'm walking home in the late night
I've never been attacked or get stage-fright
No, I take flight with the mike in my hand,
True child of this land
I'm like the wave that came to wash away
The line in the sand.

Yeah, I'm walking home alone in the late night,
Never been attacked or get stage-fright
I take flight with the mike in my hand

True child of the land
And even when nobody else does
Well, I understand.

– *Patterns* (2011)

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The most obvious novelty of demand is the demand on the reader's voice, for what might be called a new kind of psychosomatic co-operation with the vitality of the statement. Or, to go back to a phrase I used earlier, it is the demand for a new kind of 'musical interpretation'. The voice has to make a shift, from the speaking mode to what – for want of the right word – one might call the 'performing' mode. That is, it is a demand for creative musical input from the reader. The lines compel the reader to co-operate physically. Each line is like a dancer who, if you are going to read the line at all, forces you to be a partner and dance. Or is like a singer whose voice you can join only by singing the same melody. You can pronounce the line as silently as you like, but that launching of the inner self into full kinaesthetic participation is, so to speak, compulsory. Otherwise, you can't read the line. You have to back off, stay a wallflower, and call it 'unsayable'. As everybody knows, between the sitting or standing person and that same person dancing there gapes an immense biological gulf. The same between a casually talking or silently listening person and that same person suddenly bursting into song. The gulf is so great that many people need special conditions before they can get across it. Some can never cross it at all. It is easy to underestimate this. In fact, what is required is that the familiar person becomes, in a flash, an entirely different animal, with entirely different body chemistry, brain rhythms and physiological awareness.

– Ted Hughes, *Myths, Metres, Rhythms* (1993)

Kate Tempest is a spoken-word poet and rapper from Lewisham in South-East London. She started rapping at squat parties when she was sixteen years old, graduated to the MC battles and rap slams of the London Hip Hop scene, and now, at the age of twenty-four, appears across Britain at music festivals and performance-poetry events. In 2009 she released a limited-edition CD of her spoken recordings together with a booklet of her words under the title *Broken Herd*, and this year she is releasing a book of new work and live recordings under the title *Patterns*.^{*} In 2008 she formed a trio with guitarist Archie Marsh and drummer Ferry Lawrenson called *Sound of Rum*, in which she performs her lyrics to music. An ancient Japanese poet she used to read wrote that a poet shouldn't write until the cherry blossoms are out on the trees, so she has cherry blossoms tattooed on her writing arm. Among her literary influences she cites William Butler Yeats, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, W. H. Auden, and above all, perhaps, William Blake.

Like Blake, Kate Tempest sees London as a modern-day Hell, the bloody maw of Old England's dragon, the City of Revelations, the Day of Judgement we've been warned was

^{*} This limited edition issue sold out within a few months and hasn't been re-released, and at the time of writing the second publication has not yet appeared. The text here has been transcribed from the numerous recordings, both official and unofficial, of her performances, of which it is no more than an echo. The lineation, accordingly, is speculative, based on the rhythm of her delivery and the rhyme patterns. For this reason, there are bound to be inaccuracies and variants from the published texts. But this anthology, it needs to be said, is not a substitute for these publications, but an homage to the power of Kate Tempest's spoken-word performances, an opportunity to make them known to the readers of this periodical, an attempt to articulate their forms and something of their effects, and, as always, an occasion for writing them down, and in doing so coming closer to their poetry.

coming, the book she's reading; and with a prophet's voice she stands on the roof-tops and declares the choices we have to make in these end-times: not with the voice of doom but of hope, exalting us to raise up our eyes from the pavement before our feet and see the new dawn rising, find beauty in the street, in the peeling paint of the walls, beneath the surface world, in the faces of the people she passes, in the common bond of a smile. She is openly, unashamedly messianic. As she tells us again and again: she's come to be heard, to change minds, to change something.

And if her themes are Biblical, so too is her mode of address: the 'I'm saying', the 'You see', the 'Look' with which she begins her stanzas, like the 'Verily, verily, I say unto you' of the Bible, against which she sets the devil's 'Fuck it'. Her words are always addressed to a personal pronoun which we are invited to inhabit: the 'you' and 'we' of the family she breaks bread with, or the 'they' and 'them' that she accuses. Certain stanzas are repeated as in the choruses of songs, often with the pronouns reversed, so that 'your' eyes become 'hers', 'I' become 'you', and even, sometimes, 'they' become 'we'. These refrains are often sang in her performance, her voice breaking into a sort of mantra in which her growing following joins in, finding in her poetry the same unifying force of a popular song, except here the chorus isn't the once-heard-never-forgotten jingle of the commodity that can't be shaken from your head, but her credo of defiance sung out on the streets she walks alone at night: a defiance both of the real fear of the lizards and latch-keys who hide in the shadows, and of the manufactured culture of fear that keeps them there, and you, me, we, us and them scared of our neighbours and each other in the London of today.

What appears in her verse to be the ego-centrism and overblown self-affirmation of rap becomes, in her mouth, the

embrace of her talent and potential as something outside of herself, as something communal, as collective in origin, as something lying sleeping within all of us, but which it is her duty, her task, her burden and her work to wake up and listen to, to communicate to others, to honour and respect and be equal to. And so she calls herself an ancient scribe, a heavenly body, the 'we' she is trying to embody.

In doing so, she speaks the speech of the streets of South-East London: peppered with 'likes', saying 'them' for 'those', 'is' for 'are', 'ain't' for 'isn't', 'don't' for 'doesn't', 'nothing' for 'anything', and in performance her 'i' has a Jamaican drawl. But that doesn't mean she doesn't know a paradigm from a metaphor: and she weaves the different languages into images of arresting beauty: oceans cried into paragraphs, words like leaves in a gypsy's cup, her pen pushed to pad like sea to beach, the flames that make a furnace of her throat.

The framework on which she builds her poems, however, is not their images but their rhyme-pattern. She calls her verse 'rhymes', and it's the rhyme that sets the rhythm, that binds the performance together. Her poetry only comes to life if it is read in what Ted Hughes called the 'performing' mode, rather than the speaking mode of most contemporary poetry, sung to the accompaniment of a spoken music and a sprung rhythm that rejects a regular metre. When she performs her rhymes, she often dances up and down on the spot, beating their rhythms through her body, dancing the words in her mouth, not dancing to the words but dancing them out, beating them out in the air with her hands, hitting the rhyme, turning the corner, catching the next line, weaving and diving through the streets and stairwells of her verse, too fast for the kids with knives in their eyes, pointing her finger at passers-by, picking them out, waving them over,

addressing them personally, talking to them, asking them – are you with me, are you me, I, we, us? And if you're still not sure, she'll come back to you again at the next chorus, spot you hiding at the back in the shadows, pull you up onto the stage and draw you into the light, offer you her voice, give you your first line, beat out the rhythm on the floor, show you how it's done, dance to the rhythm of your beat, beat the same floor that you stand on, clap your words and thank you for listening, send you on your way, catching her vibe, riding its wave, hearing her rhymes, hear them beating in your heart, in your feet, in your footsteps, along the pavement, in your life, lifting you up, turning scaffolding into mountains, pain into joy, poverty to riches; because she's shown you the truth where you always knew it was, under your nose, in front of your face, in the face of your friends, in the person sitting next to you, in the room you're sitting in, listening to these words, hearing them in your mouth, speaking them to others, hear them speaking them to you – the word become flesh.

Poetry, real poetry, doesn't need silence in order to be heard, a clear page on which to be written, a comfortable seat and a willing audience to listen. Poetry contains all the conditions of its hearing within itself, its own space and the warmth to heat it. You don't need a chair when the words lift you off your feet, a call for silence when you can hear a pin drop, or the willingness to listen when your ear has become that of the crowd, when the words catch fire on the breath of the speaker, and in a transmutation of matter into spirit, the sounds with which we communicate our most mundane needs to each other burst, instead, into tongues of fire, leaping from the quiet air and setting it aflame with words branded in your memory, locked in your heart, that you carry about with you and reach for when groping in the dark.



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