

***POEMS BY BRUCE WHITELEY:
1960-1984***

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No. 1

Was it thine, my love, whose stomach growled?
Who belched an onion smelling cloud?
Was it thee who laughed a bit too loud
Above the merry-making crowd?
Was our first kiss a trifle wet?
As though we didn't realize yet
That passion mustn't be upset
And that involvement brings regret?
But that was years and years ago.
Console yourself, it doesn't show
That under that cosmetic glow
A heart once beat that didn't know
That passion's sordid, ugly, rude,
And love is, after all, quite crude,

Bruce Whiteley
Apr. 1960

No. 2

A fragile ash of unsmoked cigarette
Lay in its tray and de me wade through thoughts
Of man's eternal destiny and all
The insignificance, futility,
Mortality and transience of his
Brief instant on and eons in the earth.
The ash still held its rounded shape, and yet,
I knew it had no form, except in im-
itation of its source, a paper tube.
I grew profound, then sneezed and wondered what
I'd use to clear the scattered symbol from
My wife's immaculately polished board
Before she brought the morning tea and we
Needs must discuss the evening's steak or chops.

Bruce Whiteley
Mar. 1968

No. 3

I weed neglected beds that have comprised
The last remaining contact with the wild
Which city life has almost exorcised,
And by the happy chatter of my child
Am told repeatedly that this is work,
Not play, a fine distinction in his mind,
And one with which I heartily agree.
Behind, unseen, determined not to shirk
His self-appointed task, with hands entwined
By fern, hydrangea, balsam and sweet-pea
He staggers to my basket full of weeds,
Adds the product of his best intention.
A trait like that inevitably leads
To years of preventative detention.

Bruce Whiteley
Sept. 1968

No. 4

Between two lectures yesterday I made
A co-ed in the cloakroom, a neat feat
In any language and in that so staid
Environment, a long established seat
Of learning, quite a satisfactory mode
Of protest 'gainst convention, taste and all
The Kantish cant I can't accept or load
Upon myself, unless to let it fall
And show its imperfection through its crash.
Unknown to me, or her, the Dean had lurked
Behind the door. He thought our demo rash,
But asked me for her name and as he smirked,
Seemed ready to align with our team.
It's not the cause that draws. It is the scene.

Bruce Whiteley
Nov. 1969

No. 5

I grow so weary of not listening
To speeches to professors, deans and all
The staff, the typists and the glistening
Mass of students, sweating in the hall,
Expressing thanks to all for going through
A year of typing, deaning and professing
(In short, for doing what we're paid to do).
It's doubtful if he knows whom he's addressing,
If they're alive or figments of his mind,
But on he goes, continually stressing
His gratitude to someone he can't find
Upon his rough-drawn list, and not confessing
His ignorance of whom he's thanking or
For what. He only knows he must say more.

Bruce Whiteley
Dec. 1969

No. 6

The enmity between that picket fence
And me at last has ended in a kind
Of mutual acceptance and I sense
A strong predisposition not to mind
Its meaning as a symbol or a thing.
There the monster stands--three coats of paint and
Nine hard hours work, a silly ring
of White to mark the boundary of my land.
I never wanted it, the house, the site,
The lawn, the job, the garden, or the fence,
But got involved one hungry, rainy night,
Became committed, have been ever since.
And 'though it's only eighteen inches high,
The dogs and kids can jump it, but not I.

Bruce Whiteley
June 1970

No. 7

While standing on the beach, I wonder why
I'm standing on the beach with rod and reel,
Assorted hooks, sinkers, and all of my
So necessary junk. Perhaps I feel
Relaxed. At four AM? With wind and wet
To chill the bones that lately lay entwined
In my warm bed with my abandoned wife?
Perhaps I need the fish. What fish? Nor yet
Is it that odd affliction of the mind,
The hunting instinct. Nor the outdoor life.
The pleasure of the fishing game is found
Not in the sundry reasons that abound.
The final grave conclusion that I reach:
It's wondering why I'm standing on the beach.

Bruce Whiteley
Mar. 1971

No. 8

My four-year-olds will satisfy adult
Interrogations with a single word:
"Because." And when I indicate the fault
Of imprecision, they think I'm absurd
And place a stick upon a brick "because,"
I wonder if their wisdom isn't more
Profound than mine, which has its many flaws
Admittedly, but seemed, somehow, a door
To rational behavior. I would try
Sometimes, to ask myself precisely why
I'd do this thing or that and have to lie
To find a good excuse to justify
My act. Emerges one of nature's laws:
One does or doesn't do a thing "because."

Bruce Whiteley
May 1971

No. 9

Don't you know that madness is contagious?
Try hunting for a sane psychiatrist,
An exercise that teaches one to deal
With disappointment. Perhaps outrageous
Behavior is just mild and we have missed
The point the nuts are trying to reveal,
To wit: the padded cell, electric shock,
The dope, or any torture we can find,
Are treatments insignificant compared
To close association. When we lock
The patients up, we purify the mind
Of each, distilling madness unimpaired.
We end up achieving a perfection
Capable of spreading the infection.

Bruce Whiteley
May 1971

No. 10

While working in the garden yesterday,
I understood a quite important part
Of Dickens. Later, while I watched a play
By Chekhov, I determined I would start
At four o'clock next morning for the beach.
While fishing I was busy with a thought
Divorced from fishing. So it goes with each
Of my endeavors. (Naturally I caught
No fish, but figured out a scheme which would
Facilitate the brewing of my beer)
Self-recognition of a weakness should
Result in self-improvement, but I fear,
I saw this trait, and pondering upon it,
I should have cut the lawn, but wrote this sonnet.

Bruce Whiteley
June 1971

No. 11

What the world needs today is a brand new,
Spanking new, never-before presented
Moral code which could possibly renew
With vigor all that the late lamented
Ten Commandments have completely lost for
All. The negative approach won't work in
These so positively times. We need more
That "thou shalt not" and more than God lurking
'Round the corner with his archives full of
Sin. We must evolve a set of rules that
Modern man can use to fight the pull of
Modern man's temptations. No use old hat.
A new idea that might do very well:
Behave yourself, or go to bloody hell.

Bruce Whiteley
Oct. 1971

No. 12

Collecting people seems inhuman but
Most people do. (Can you imagine stamps
Collecting stamps, or paper dolls that cut
Out paper dolls?) And yet, aside from tramps
And misfits, who can live without his own,
His very own, practitioner? And who
Exists unspecialisted as to bone,
Heart, kidney, eye and thigh and so on through
The list? I have all those plus legal man,
Bank manager, a dentist, garden boy,
A wife and kids and yet it seems I am
Deprived, uncivilized, mere hoi polloi.
I met a man to whom I must defer.
I haven't got my own pornographer.

Bruce Whiteley
Oct. 1971

No. 13

My business friends inform me they'd reject
A product that they found they could not sell.
And my technician friends would all elect
To scrap a system which, however well
Designed in theory, didn't work in fact.
The engineers I know, quite out of hand
Insist machines must go and all react
Alike to buildings that refuse to stand,
Bridges that could never span, supports which
Don't support, dams that can't, or will not dam.
And even politicians choose a pitch to
To get themselves elected if they can.
Meanwhile, the true believers never fail
To swallow down both Jonah and the whale.

Bruce Whiteley
Nov. 197

No. 14

Hypocrisy would seem to be the bane
Of moral modern men and we all judge
Practitioners of this so ancient art
More harshly than those others who proclaim
Themselves quite honest rogues. We don't begrudge
The murderer the chance to play his part
In keeping surplus population down,
And rapists have a Freudian excuse
To justify their games. All whores possess
A heart of gold, at least. But how we frown
On cops who take a bribe, and what abuse
Rains on the subtle queer. It seems the less
The worst's disguised, the better, is the norm.
We'd accept Lucifer, in uniform.

Bruce Whiteley
Dec. 1971

No. 15

There are some rights which I would fane reserve,
Preserve intact, as being only fair.
Despair of all the rest makes me conserve,
Nervously, what vestiges I still dare.
It seems my moral being has been formed,
Bestormed by sundry outside pressures which
Switch any inclination to conform
To the normal off, a rebellious twitch.
I would that I would dislike those I do,
Who being nigger, coolie, wop or kike,
Should strike my bourgeois being as the true,
Blue, unadulterated human type.
When the conditioned obligation ends,
I'll have a multi-racial group of friends.

Bruce Whiteley
Mar. 1973

No. 16

I've often thought about the architect.
It's said he studies hard and it's well known
His diagrams consist of complica-
Ted twists and turns that should reflect
A genius, which is ultimately shown
By this room I teach in. The dark of day
And light of night are one to these four walls.
The air may soon be filtered, now it's stale,
Like all the suffocated, commonplace
Sounds of workmen bashing bricks in the halls.
The students barely breathe while I retail
Poetic subtleties to fill the space.
When bad ideas become realities,
Nor life nor art can ever, ever please.

Bruce Whiteley
Mar. 1973

No. 17

Proclaim my fame for I have found
A round three solutions. They simply came.
I'll name them. One: exterminate, I'm bound
The sound of this is harsh, yet one could claim
The aim is merciful and not without
About a dozen precedents. And two:
You pack your bags and go. There is no doubt
A shout of indignation will ensue,
Due to patriotic nonsense or some
Dumb response to words like 'home" or 'country".
Three: we intermarry. At last I've come
To one without a hitch, presumably.
Two nice things about miscegenation:
It's fun. It avoids annihilation.

Bruce Whiteley
Mar. 1973

No. 18

While almost dressed and ready to go out,
She stalks the bedroom, dining room and loo
Until exasperation makes her shout,
"Goddamn it all, where is my fucking shoe?"
We are already late and I confess
I am annoyed. "Put on another pair,
I say, which is, of course, male foolishness.
She'd have to change her dress, re-do her hair.
Two three-year-olds, enlisted in the chase,
Pulled forth to search the darkness under beds,
Are grateful for disturbance. How they race,
Crawl gladly in the dust and bump their heads.
At last the voice of innocence comes through.
"Look, Mummy, look. I've found your fucking shoe."

Bruce Whiteley
Undated

No. 19

I knew that he was too much horse for me.
To see that crazy eye so whitely peer,
Leer, and sight down, oh so maliciously,
The tightly flattened barrel of an ear
Made fear a sensible response and flight
The right reaction. But I stayed to show
I know not what. And with my guts so tight
I might have known that this ill wind would blow
No good to me, I stepped into his stall.
And all that I remember is lashing,
Clashing hooves, noise, my muted strangled call,
A pall of pain, the odd sense of crashing
Flashing through my mind and then, through the pain,
The sound of happy horses munching grain.

Bruce Whiteley
Aug. 1973

No. 20

I've often thought that somehow something makes
The jakes another good antiquity
That we should have retained for our souls' sakes.
It breaks my heart whenever urged to see
The modern substitute for the complete
Retreat our ancestors enjoyed. The sight
Of bright, tiled sterility just numbs. Feet
Beat no determined pathways through the night,
Delighting in a sense of doing just
What must be done. The contemplative man
Can find no solitude. Great big lusty,
Busty broads are now rinsed so spick and span
They hardly know they're part of creation.
A high price to pay for sanitation.

Bruce Whiteley
Dec. 1973

No. 21

We always have the question of the blame,
The shame to be imposed collectively
On we who only live here. It's the same
Lame crap that crucified the Krauts thirty
Dirty years ago. They were all involved.
They solved the Jewish problem unified
In genocide and nothing yet evolved,
Resolved, proposed and seconded has tied
A diversified society so
Thoroughly together since. I'm sure that
Fat, jolly frau buying bratwurst used to know,
As fraulein, all of Dachau's details pat.
But, come the revolution, I'll decline
To grub in any guilt that isn't mine.

Bruce Whiteley
Mar. 1975

No. 22

With the glass falling overboard I knew
That I would soon be hidden in the fog.
I eased the starboard sheet, released the clew,
Battened down the jib, hoisted up the log.
I livened up the deadlights on the mast,
Caulked up the mizzen and quickly pooped the
Decks. Seeing I was sailing far too fast,
I overhauled the painter 'til the sea
Was all around the boat. Then quickly I
Began to beat a broad reach just abaft
The bowsprit, where I held the tiller high
In order to reduce the vessel's draught.
While emptying the portside petrol tank,
I lit a fag, blew off the deck, she sank.

Bruce Whiteley
June 1975

No. 23

You just can't beat an albatross for grace.
Watch one turn on the tip of a three-
Foot wing, missing by a thin hair the face
Of a high, racing, hissing, breaking sea,
Or swoop a careless hundred yards or two,
Off to the right, without a flap, then ride
The willing air back to the left and through
The thousand deft maneuvers which decide
If he will eat today or not. Never
Watch him land upon the sea. Then those big,
Flat feet, like snowshoes, come from wherever
He had tucked them in his tail and heels dig
In the water as he slides. It's not right.
An albatross should always be in flight.

Bruce Whiteley
Oct. 1979

No. 24

We've been exactly nine long months at sea
Today and have but five or six days still
To go. The fact that most impresses me
Is that this bloody ocean seemed, until
Now, as endless as the universe, and
That cape had stayed so far away so long
It was a kind of never-never land
And getting there a way of life. How strong
The distance felt more than the sea's worst gale.
We'd beat a hundred miles some days and think,
Well done! But the remaining miles to sail
Would stretch before us, make our spirits sink.
But now, at last, we've reached the final phase
And look for Table Mountain through the haze.

Bruce Whiteley
Nov. 1979

No. 25

Dear Madame, do you really want my balls?
To cast perhaps in plastic and to wear
About your neck suspended from a hand-
Wrought chain, custom-made, in Hong Kong? The brawls
We've had would surely indicate that there
Is some resentment to my maleness and
That I'd be a perfect mate, if, of course,
That minor operation were performed.
The proof of my perfection on your breast,
Admired by friends as tokens of your force
And envied by those likewise unadorned
Might lend to you an air of being blessed.
Might also lend to you a barren life.
You really want to be a eunuch's wife?

Bruce Whiteley
Feb. 1981

No. 26

The victim's not the one whom we despise,
The ill effects of hatred will increase
Like cellulite upon a matron's thighs
And bigots end up morally obese.
There's one distinction between good and bad;
The one improves, the other self-destructs.
So, if you want the worst life to be had,
Perform vile acts of rottenness deluxe
With regular persistence and you'll find
Yourself so thoroughly deformed that no
Hope of a hint of joy will reach your mind.
Only your ills will continue to grow.
To put it simply; whatever you do
Unto others; you're doing unto you.

Bruce Whiteley
July 1984