



HOWARD
MINGHAM

WATERS OF THE
NIGHT

COLLECTED
POEMS 1974~84

Howard
Mingham

*Waters of
the Night*



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Confessional Poem

Hearts do not break.
They are torn and held
in pitiless fingers,
they are kneaded.

Now hearts are needed.

But what shock of joy.
What helpless blood
gushed happily.

Where now
from this butcher's shop?
In the street,
a puppy pulling.
There are cold cans
of cut horse.

There are bones, of course.

Hearts do not break.
If only hearts could break.

My own hatred dismays me.
They do not.
Devil, let us shake.

After the Rain

After the rain a holy,
Pagan light fell from cloud
And struck the pavement slab,
In all the canyoned silence moved no crowd.

But in the stinking mist alone,
In the incense of the dying rain,
I stood on the brown-soaked stone
And I heard the song of the drain.

'I am the hope and the escape.
I am the tunnel to the drowning sea.
I am the gay merry and the dismal
And I am neither the light nor the way.

'Into me rolls the runaway penny;
To all things I am sanctuary.
I am their church, their catacomb, their nunnery
And I am neither the light nor the way.

By the trickling cave on the kerb I sat,
My head stone-heavy in my helpless hands
And in the sour valley of the stonefaced flats,
The drain sang to me and I dreamt.

Of those distant, waiting lands
Where none made, no promise is broken
And the streams run clear to the honest sands
Where no man has stood and thus no lie been spoken.

'Yes, into me rolls the runaway penny
And longs the hopeless refugee.
I am catacomb and nunnery
And I am neither the light nor the way.

'I am merry in song and sing of the sea
And into me trickles the washed-out day.
And I drink of the hopeless refugee
And I am neither the light nor the way.'

Broken Water

Dog-black-and-white it flits
skips in a gutter,
happy rubbish on the wind,
jerks in a gust, like traffic,
ducks and drakes across the city

past halls smelling of polish and parquet,
past halls smelling of cats and cabbage,
past tower-blocks and announced cement,
past dinner-houses of children scattered in play,
past the troops that do not work,
past the force that do not work,
past the idle

It ducks and drakes across the city,
dumb as rag
and blind where children are not pretty,
where roomfuls of family
do not burst from the curtained crevices,
where workless people remain unending
deaf and simple and uncomprehending
it ducks and drakes
past the hospitals
with the azure pictures of threatened lakes.

Beneath your feet an essence is running,
thick as oil, thick as drumming, an early
dark madness we had forgotten:
the sewers are swollen,

boxes and cardboard and cartons of water,
all that is used, unused, undone
kept by habits that tremble underground,
all effort to contain exhausted
are vomiting sound, vomiting sound.
All the parts are leaving,
clocks and daylight,
shops, factory, obedience, girls;
a bull of water swells,
boxes and cardboard and cartons of water,
wet symbols like bells
clatter in a flow of water and loss,
decay itself, removing us.

In these unused canals a flood,
derelictions that rattle on the light
and call to the body of your unemployed blood.
Where are the gifts
of the chain-department-store
and further, further there is more.

Behind you the pigeons cooing like pneumonia
and as always as hunger, unsteady cats.

Your small heart is cracking like bottles.

Not thought nor faith nor objects holds
in this broken water or arthritic catch.