

*Shades of Green: Poems*  
Akros, 2005

*TRANSPORT: RACING GREEN*

CHEAP FLIGHT HOLIDAYS  
*Villanelle for the Vapid*

*What do we mostly chat about at work?*  
Our holidays: the ones we've had or plan  
*when we escape beyond the daily task.*

For cut price flights, we only have to ask,  
transport us to a patch of sea and sun  
*worlds away from all our chat at work.*

The car that smiling waits with loaded tank  
will whisk us dangerously toward a tan  
*where we can balm away the daily task.*

Who would stay here in the semi-dark,  
explore the treasure islands around Scotland?  
*What could we find to talk about at work?*

Midges, and the drizzle, mud and murk –  
who wants to walk or struggle up a mountain?  
*that sounds too like another kind of task.*

Who wants to catch a ferry, ride a bike  
when bars and clubs and beaches offer fun  
*provide a stack of jokes to tell at work?*

Untaxed in fuel the many planes take off  
like flies that multiply and cloud the sun –  
*we'll have so much to chat about at work after*  
*we've escaped the daily task.*

I TOOK THE CAR TO THE DENTIST  
*(and my teeth are a bit crooked)*

I parked the car in a hurry  
*plenty of room* I thought  
fed a generous fee to the meter

*Plenty of time* I thought  
for the dentist to check me up.  
It was. I started back  
and began to drive away  
*nice day* I thought –  
when something caught my eye.

A notice stuck to the windscreen  
*Surely not? I did everything right* –  
I thought.  
but no. I'd parked a bit squint  
not exactly within the lines  
and such is an offence  
that would cost me thirty quid.

*It can't be* I thought.  
*does this carelessness offend?*  
*offend whom?* I thought:  
*the sky? the earth? the neighbourhood?*  
*the cats? the birds? the trees?*

*Never mind* I thought  
*I did wrong and I should be punished*  
*I should have come by bus*  
*should have set my alarm earlier*  
*and left more time* I thought.

*I expect to do too much*  
*in one morning. I should make*  
*the dentist my day.*  
*I expect to do more than*  
*one thing in a day* I thought  
*and that is unreasonable*  
*in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*  
*I am living in the past.*

*I'll make myself ill,* I thought  
*I'll end up with a heart*  
*attack* I thought, *I'll end up*  
*neurotic and boring* I thought,  
*I'll end up dead.*

*Take my time, what's the hurry*  
*I thought to finish myself off*  
*more quickly?*  
*I even still have my teeth.*

*And all I do today  
for good or ill I thought  
will be forgotten tomorrow when  
I return to dust – then I thought –  
**Let's hope they don't park me squint!***

## SHALL WE HAVE A BABY?

*verse for this adversity*

A baby coming – *thinks*: CAR SEAT  
my work, a school, the supermarket  
how on earth will we manage it –  
another life on this crowded planet?

*Thinks*: mortgage, then thinks loss of great  
free-wheeling life-style; money – lack of it  
a baby coming – *thinks* CAR SEAT  
my work, a school, the supermarket.

*Thinks*: decorating, nappies, cot  
convenient timing for the birth  
that conference to save the earth?  
the horoscope, a lucky date?  
name for a baby, *thinks* CAR SEAT.

## TOURISM: LOVAT GREEN

### BROCHURES

*A drop in the bucket*

A walk through history  
A ride through culture  
*The Tuscan Trail*  
*The Way to Assisi*

Five hundred pounds a day  
an adventure holiday

*You are met at lunchtime  
by a landrover  
and one of our famous picnics*

\* \* \* \* \*

Five pounds buys a blanket  
clothes, food, soap, tools, cooking pots

**Give water to the aged, the women  
who wander in search of it  
five years it hasn't rained**

\* \* \* \* \*

Franciscans want to restore the church  
continue their works of charity

but St Francis has appeared to declare  
that churches and charities cease  
and justices begin – not least  
for brother beast and sister bird

How much should I give for a drop in the bucket?

*OIL: SERPENTINE GREEN*

ALARMING TIMES  
*haiku round the clock*

An alarm clock rang  
I fell asleep again  
when I woke it was too late

A clock loud ticking  
in my sleeping head  
I woke and thought it was a dream

Our planet changes  
we know this happens  
at times it changes faster

Species get knocked out  
like Neanderthals  
adapted to frosty woods

What sort of being  
will survive, emerge  
from massive global warming?

A small desert rat  
with a human brain  
scuttling down sandy hovel?

some amphibian  
plying savage seas  
in sun-powered frog-skin vessel?

Or robotic node  
consuming knowledge  
in collective thought-machine?

#### SAVING THE PLANET *something to die for*

To die: to give up life for  
to die for means to live for  
would we want to die for what  
we would not live for?

We cannot die for ourselves since death is the end of us  
we cannot live for ourselves since that is absurdity  
we die for what we can give and abandon generously.

Here is what we die for:  
our family name and honour  
our children and children's children  
the principle of beauty in truth  
a working mind and heart  
humans who live with the planet  
who thrive on thrift  
who love to share and build  
more life, life to die for.

#### WOUNDED DANCER *the earth as holy ground*

The dancer holds her breath

homo-would-be-wise walks the earth  
boots up and strides the earth  
which now lies inert  
the dancer hurt

In throes of anti-matter we  
participate in misery  
while fragments of freedom  
emerge from cracked ground

Out of death and dereliction  
anti-death and resurrection  
the dancer unbound  
as we throw off our platform soles  
to tread on sacred ground

Which feeds but is not consumed  
burning does not burn  
speaking does not denounce  
providing does not denude  
withers but does not perish  
like rock, like grass, like air, like water,  
like ideas like love like us, us  
creatures made of stars for Earth,  
planetarians for this planet  
world without end amen.

### *HEALTH: APPLE GREEN*

### WAXWINGS IN THE PARK *variety is the spice of life*

A flock of waxwings in the sycamore  
sycamore in February in the park  
park green and windswept in the city  
city grey yet glistening in the east  
east coast of Scotland facing Europe  
Europe, Scandinavia and Siberia  
Siberia which sends its icy greetings  
icy greetings holding back the Spring  
Spring to come, longer light and walks  
walks in the park perhaps to glimpse  
crested waxwings banded on the boughs.

In Scotland *occasional winter visitors*  
visitors who wear distinctive colours  
colourful from head to yellow tail  
yellow tail and sealing-wax red tip  
to every feather of the wings, wings  
for chasing insects, beaks for berries  
beret chestnut with the jaunty crest  
pinstriped through in charcoal black  
and black around the throat and blazing eye.

My eye surprises me in looking up  
looking up and welcoming the migrants  
migrants among our crows and starlings  
our gulls accustomed to the slanting sun.

## MY CHEST HURTS

*specialism*

My chest hurts when I walk fast uphill.  
I keep on walking. I'm in a hurry.  
Within that year  
my husband was ill: anguish and dread  
my husband died: grief  
my mother died: numbness  
I retired from my work, work of my life –  
and my chest hurts when I walk  
uphill fast.

I hear it said: women have hearts  
that give little warning before an attack.  
Mine is warning. It hurts.  
I phone the doctor and ask for a check.

The nurse at the clinic asks questions  
draws blood. Pressure normal  
cholesterol not abnormal  
but they send me to the consultant.

In the hospital I wait  
with the obese, the pallid, diseased.  
I wait an hour, another.  
At last my name is called.  
I tell the story and  
tread the mill

wired up and plugged in  
yes – walk until the chest hurts.

Wait again. Summoned again.  
The consultant is brief:  
'Your heart is OK'.  
Relieved, I ask  
'but what of the pain in my chest?'  
He has no idea: 'All I can say is  
I find nothing wrong with your heart.'

I go home with the hurt in my chest  
which is not my heart.  
I have it still  
when I walk fast uphill.

## CHOICES

*the Goldilocks principle*

Travel light heart is lighter  
own less room is larger  
eat less body is freer  
buy less purse is fuller  
less information head is clearer  
fewer clothes get dressed quicker  
fewer books love them truer  
play cd's listen to them  
less dashing slower living  
sleep deeper dream longer  
walk further walk around  
breathe easy feel happy  
why not?  
Does 'choice' mean we can choose  
how to live or only the colour of  
some new machine?  
Goldilocks knew the golden mean  
(too big too small, too hot too cold)  
the value of the in-between:  
that just-right balance knife-edge keen  
for human equilibrium.

*HOUSING: GRASS GREEN*



## CHILDBIRTH

### *Sonnet of a sort*

Jesus born in a stable. Sakina's baby  
too, born for seclusion in the cattle  
section of her clean-swept dung-washed home  
built of sun-baked mud bricks beside  
the well beneath the peepul tree; or  
in Lewis in her blackhouse Mairi's son  
born amid the peat-smoke safe and warm  
born into a family, a creature among creatures.

Pity the palace child, the castle bairn  
wetnursed and forced to 'play the man'  
Or 'be a little lady'. Pity the child  
Born to suit the diary of a working  
Mum or celebrity-addicted parent, delivered  
Like a product ordered on the internet.

## CHANGING STANDARDS

### *Imaginary homes*

House and garden were our idyll  
roses at the door, swallows in the eaves  
cabbage patch and river running near  
or farmhouse with hens and pigs  
eggs and bacon naturally  
peas and beans and barley-o  
soup and home-made beer.

Then an elegant apartment  
was what we most desired  
with the latest style in furnishing  
and colour-scheme or mock-  
Victorian for the chic;  
festoons of indoor plants or  
window-boxes look so enchanting.

Now some seek a castle ruin  
with heritage lottery funds to make  
it habitable plus solar panelling?  
Or a ruined croft with three acres  
of thistle and sand to grow

potatoes start a craft shop –  
dropped out of city life.

But anything will do for most of us  
a room to rent, a basement flat  
a barn, a yurt we build ourselves  
steaming the hazel saplings  
sewing th canvas, sleeping  
on the clammy ground with old  
rugs and blankets anything.

## ECO-HOUSE SPEAKS

*a garment to wear*

I'm displayed as an eco-house:  
not many of us yet, we are  
hand-built, crafted in detail  
with every latest invention  
up-to-date, state of the art,  
no two alike, we are each  
unique, built less to last  
than to be adaptable you could say,  
organic you could say, breathing  
you could say, a living system.

Take walls and structure:  
as with clothes it is the layers than count  
for warmth and we have layers  
and cavities. Take roofs: the slope is  
not so much to drain off the rain,  
more to catch the sun in solar panels.

We keep heat in, we let damp out;  
we have a circulation like the body;  
we have a heart that pumps renewable  
energy; we have waste disposal systems  
that recycle waters, make compost,  
dispose of nothing that has another use.

Light and free to live in, we stretch out  
our arms in moveable positions, our  
legs in swinging doors. As for windows,  
they are made from whisky barrels  
for letting in the subtler spirits.

We insulate  
and use the ceiling space. Our kitchens  
are partly garden or so it feels: herbs  
growing, vegetables cooking, salads  
appearing, grains and pulses heaped  
in abundance; slow food, good food, languid  
home-made wine, home-made bread  
with its own metabolic cycle.

We have no heavy tread upon the earth;  
our footprint is hardly traceable  
though we are firmly grounded  
and can withstand storms and  
hurricanes like a reed in the river.

To live in an eco-house is to wear a garment.  
We are not machines for living in, as  
Le Corbusier manufactured.  
Machines are too demanding;  
we are intuitive and gentle;  
we save you from alienation within  
yourself, between yourselves and from  
Nature you long to know better and  
cannot avoid any longer without  
tantrums; this very place, any particular  
kind of place, a certain chosen milieu,  
that's where we belong as eco-houses,  
belong and belonging transform.

### *POLLUTION: BOTTLE GREEN*

#### PLASTIC BAGS

*the planet eats plastic*

Is that a bird or a plastic bag?  
Cat in the tree or a plastic bag?  
Snow on the hill or some plastic junk?  
Duck on the pond, kite in the air  
or some swirling, whirling plastic?  
Is that a slippery fish or submerged  
not again – yes – plastic bag?

Hérons gulp them, gulls and cormorants  
choke on them, cattle munch them,

babies suffocate, yet we carry on  
carrying out and carrying them around  
as if they were convenient *and* harmless,

We even buy books to put in them,  
advertise on them and put our rubbish  
in them before we chuck them out –

Out where? Into the bin, onto the dump;  
we dump the plastic for the earth to eat  
and suffocate, for the sea to drink and drown,  
for the planet to absorb and become  
terminally ill, as a matter of harmless  
convenience.

## CARBON TRADING

*regular verbs*

I pollute you pollute he/she/it pollutes  
we pollute you all pollute they pollute  
in the present tense day after day  
and in the past I have polluted  
you have he/she/it has you all have and  
they have polluted  
but in the future we'll have carbon-trading:  
I shall pollute and you will sell your credits  
like coffee beans among baby-sitters;  
they will pollute with impunity  
having planted a few trees. We'll pollute  
with sanitary towels nappies cleaning bleaches  
aerosols chemicals our fossil-fuel burning  
our nuclear waste  
our artificial clothing our trash consuming  
our luxury goods and fashion-fawning  
our factory-farming our throwing out  
of old computers.

You and I

plod on with heavy footprint on  
the earth's eroded soils and over  
several times the earth's whole compass  
while the poor tip-toe barefoot through  
our toxic rubbish-heaps and drink  
from contaminated waters breathe  
our manufactured fumes beneath the

blackening clouds of global dimming.

Would that I had not you would not  
he/she/it might not you all would never  
dream of they would cease at once  
from all declensions and conjugations  
of the user-friendly active regular verb: *to pollute*.

## PILL AND POTIONS

*noughts and crosses*

Once there were diseases  
malaria, polio, TB  
smallpox, cholera, dysentery  
typhoid, plagues and leprosy.

These raged mostly in distant lands,  
where we send doctors with band-  
ages cheap pills, new expens-  
ive vaccines that we want to test.

In Britain it's hearts and asthma  
aids, cancer, and addictions;  
to change our lifestyle would be a nightmare  
and someone profits from our afflictions.

The market, the economy,  
making money, celebrity  
while an abyss of deep dis-ease  
opens within our society.

Toxic waste contaminates  
even the unborn foetus  
but what is a human life  
compared with share-holder status?

While diseases play noughts and crosses  
our hospitals are riddled through  
with mutated bugs and we haven't a clue  
what in the global world to do.

*THE SEA: SEA-GREEN*

## WHITE SANDS OF THE WEST

*feed our creels*

Alexander's surviving cohorts after campaigning for years in Central Asia, yelled 'the sea! the sea!' and pranced about like goal-scoring footballers as they threw off their trappings and ran down to embrace the wine-dark Aegean.

Had they lighted upon Luskentyre or Valtos,  
the long-white western beaches of the Uists,  
Eigg's singing sands, Barra's cockle strand,  
Iona's north sands or any shell-blanch'd *Camus* in the west –  
they would have known they'd reached the Tir nan og  
where Ulysses set sail beyond the sunset:

Jade, turquoise, emerald, luminous, the Gaelic *glas fhairge* –  
colours wildly pure that strike and change to deep gentian  
as first sunset streaks then moonlight shimmers a path  
directly shafted to the entrance of our spellbound hearts.

'Sea-roads of the saints' and of the Viking plunderers –  
Columba's expert mariners sailed alone to bring  
their tough survival skills to rock cliffs and coasts  
where they built their humble citadels. Living off goats  
and seagulls, sheltered by solid stone, they fished those  
churning whirling waves along with seal and whale,  
dolphin, and porpoise, diver, cormorant, and gannet;  
they gleaned the shores along with otter, heron; they  
gathered herbs and sea-weeds to make medicines and  
then illustrated all in gospel manuscripts of stories  
from the east, transferring them into a creed or manual  
on god-in-sea-nature:

Lir, Mannanan, tide and current,  
wind and storm, mountain and cloud, gulf stream and  
jet stream, tectonic plates and sea-bed shifts  
bless us, today, tomorrow, our going out and coming in:  
*destroyer and provider*, send the shoals and feed our creels.

## EARLY MORNING WALK

### ALONG THE SANDS OF EAST LOTHIAN

*Sea Idyll*

Old red sandstone outcrops  
pods and strings of seaweed

yellow sand and scuttle of running bird-life;  
ranks of oyster catcher  
redshank, greenshank, dunlin  
raft of eider duck floating in the shallows.

Graceful tern, kittiwake  
sandpiper and curlew;  
rock pools full of yellow-brown periwinkles;  
limpets scrape our bare feet  
red anemones wave  
or close, while a hermit crab edges homeward.

Where the tide's retreated  
jelly-fish, men of war  
studded along the ribbed and wormholed margins;  
watch out for bits of glass  
plastic bottles, old shoes  
dead gulls; bones and feathers in oily patches.

#### THE SHANTY TOWN KIDS OF KARACHI *day-outing 1968*

The Shanty-town kids of Karachi  
that great port  
had never been down to the beach  
a good hour's drive from the city  
where the rich  
owned weekend chalets and where  
giant turtles crawled up the sands  
at hightide midnight in Spring  
to lay their hoard-hole of eggs.

The children lived in a dusty encampment  
with one water pump in heat and disease;  
their parents swept the marble floors of the rich  
or the airport halls  
and children minded the babies while their parents  
minded the babies of others.

In rags and shoeless, the shanty-town kids  
eighty or more  
went down to the sea one day in a hired bus.  
Sheltered in a beach hut by special arrangement  
we took them down to the water;

they waded in with their clothes on  
soon dried again in the heat;  
they frolicked and played and laughed and cried  
then fed and tended we drove them back  
to their hovels.

## THE SEABIRDS' PROTEST

*non-violent resistance to extinction*

The birds of the sea convened a parliament at St Kilda;  
from Orkney and Shetland, the Small Isles, the Outer  
Hebrides they gathered one week in late summer  
when chicks could fend for themselves, though few chicks  
had hatched that year or the year before or the year before.

Manx shearwaters skimmed the waves, gannets glided  
on wide wings, arctic terns soared  
from the north; puffins, guillemots, razorbills and  
even a pair of albatross, who acted  
as moderators. The talk was mostly of climate change  
and how it was altering the relative temperature  
zones of the sea and convection currents, affecting the fish.  
The skuas shrilly denied this, squawking 'No proof' and then  
'Climate is always changing, the earth has always moved  
and we have always managed to adapt.'

But the lack of sand-eel supply due to factory ships  
which dredge the least living thing that moves in the sea;  
chemicals oozed from salmon farms; oil escaped  
from tankers and the huge disturbance of deep drilling;  
the dwindling of cod and whitefish with trawlers forced to dump  
them dead in the depths again after catching them  
for fear of being over quota; seals, dolphins, whales  
suffering a similar fate; submarines  
prowling and fouling, prowling and fouling, prowling and fouling –

'Silence' cried the albatross, 'Order, order!'  
The chatter and cries were tumultuous, so that none  
was properly heard. 'It's time to take a vote and resolve  
on action: either we become extinct  
or we leave the coasts of Scotland for good and find  
another home. We might persuade the humans  
to pay attention to their seas and make new rules  
for their protection, as they have begun



to do to save their land?' With a show of a thousand wings  
it was agreed a protest must be made,  
that birds of every species would gather on Arthur's Seat  
to darken the windows of the parliament  
and drown with their cacophony even the grind of traffic  
even the drone of debating within the chamber.  
'We'll fly around encircling them and swooping lower  
closer and closer. They'll remember Hitchcock  
and become afraid!' – 'How will fear make them act  
when reason has not prevailed all these years?'  
'Fear and pity for their descendants who will never  
watch a gannet diving or a puffin  
landing or the arctic tern in a pearl-grey sky.'

Thus it was arranged and final flocking took place  
for three weeks in October. It was noted  
in Edinburgh that the sky was black with birds from the sea.  
'Return to the waves', the people shouted, 'or  
we'll have to drive you back.' It was in vain, in vain.  
The birds continued in non-violent resistance;  
they waited over the winter as one by one and then  
in their tens, in their hundreds, in their thousands they perished,  
large and small, littered the parliamentary precincts  
with their delicate feathered souls and desperate beaks.

### *TREES: FOREST GREEN*

#### THE GREAT OAK *Sonnet for a chieftain tree*

*The Great Oak* stands stalwart at Eardisley  
first recorded in the Domesday Book  
a royal forest and a royal oak  
a tree for kings, itself a chieftain tree.

Within the trunk's capacious hollow core  
King Charles' men could hide or locals flee  
who knew the secret of the ancient tree –  
and children picnic on its mossy floor.

Beetles make their home and butterflies,  
fern and lichen, fungi, weasel, stoat,  
the woodpecker, the flycatcher, the bat,  
a thousand and another thousand years.

With earthen roots as deep as heavenly height  
balance *above below*, darkness and light.

#### THE MAGIC APPLE TREE

*'Comfort me with apples'*

*Cherry blossom pink and apple blossom  
white or apple blossom's deeper pink  
as in Samuel Palmer's magic apple tree  
created for immortal Avalon  
or for a taste of wisdom from the muse  
from Venus, Friday's child, with Strongbow cider  
fermented for a feast at harvest home.*

Now hidden on a misty Scottish coast  
old apple trees survive and are restored  
each one to give its quintessential taste  
in gardens of Lindores, its ancient abbey:  
a gift to every sense and to more life  
for birds, flowers, insects, thriving where  
*the apple* reigns, cherished, venerated.

#### THE WISHING TREE

*'this lone, wind-blasted hawthorn in the wilds of  
Argyll is one of the few known wishing trees in Scotland'*

*Grant me a wish O ancient thorn  
Queen of the land maiden and crone  
grant me a wish as I beseech*

Every inch of your twisted limbs  
studded encrusted pressed with coins  
each one somebody's fossilised wish

*What is your wish, replies the tree  
as it rests in its own infirmity  
Speak to me of your heart's entreaty*

*I wish for a Scotland green and free  
a world and its peoples in harmony  
where humans and creatures share the earth*

*I wish for seasons and climate at peace  
sun air water lands and seas  
an equilibrium poised alert*

*I wish for my poems to share a story  
for my children's children's true destiny  
for ripening death and rebirth*

The wind was keening the tree was silent  
clouds were luminous shoots were greening  
blossoms were budding from every coin

Tree of the May, Queen of the Light  
berries of blood and blossoms white  
my wishes are granted by this sign.