I'M A CHILD (1971)

I'm a child because when I was young

I was too slow to join in the games.

And I'm wild because finding my tongue

I found that it wouldn't run tame.

I'm a fool because when I was shot

People thought that I bled for a joke.

But it's cool. Because when I get hot

I laugh or I cry till I choke.

And I'm hid because when I'm lost

I don't ever want it to show.

And I'm a kid, because needing to trust

who actually lets anyone know?

I got coy because worn on my sleeve

my heart falls in love with the view.

And I'm a boy because I love what I leave

whether it's boyhood or you.

If I'm daft, it's that needing a wall

the handiest matter was mirth—

and I laughed—thinking, starting to fall,

the sound might balloon me to earth.

Just now I smiled, because when I'm stung,

I like to deride the bee's aim.

I'm still a child because when I was young

I never learned what wasn't a game.

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ANGELS \*(December 71, but messed with periodically over the decades)

Angels in triangular gowns

come sanctify our songs.

Let the neon gongs

of your haloes hum along!

May your clouds float low and slow

to row us in their boats of snow

through the blue of heaven with you

in great seraphical throngs.

Angels with isosceles wings

come hallow our guitars.

May our eyes be wide as whales

yet wink as small as stars.

May our banjos and your harps

consort in flats, carouse with sharps,

to rouse the Lord's lost scales and chords

from dead-beatifical bars.

Angels in vertiginous hosts

come consecrate our psalms.

May the moon sleep in our mouths,

the sky wake in our arms.

Bless our voices, give us vowels,

of glide and swoop, of trills and growls,

soaring, porous, to your chorus

of celestial salaams.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

LOSING VOICE (1972)

I was wearing mismatched socks, moving through a mismatched crowd,

acting slightly out of focus, chuckling half out loud,

when some guy from the USA spun round and told me, "Bull.

You're just an empty gas-tank trying to make us think you're full."

I was holy grailing through my head, from land to land to land,

rejecting God and love as hip departures from the bland,

when a chevalier of France approached, and smiled, and said, "Mon Fils.

Don't garb your soul in sang-froid just because it groans for peace."

My love was writing poems, I was prying them apart.

Saying little, but pooh-poohing the gauche gushings of her heart.

She sobbed all over my disdain, and moaned, "It's just not fair.

It's easy to feel nothing when you're made of ash and air."

I was spoken for and dumbstruck, I mouthed but could not say.

I was left catching at shadows as their shoulders shrugged away.

I cried, "I don't mind losing face, but I hate losing voice!"

"When you're just an empty gas-tank,"

"When you garb your soul in sang-froid,"

"When you're made of ash and air," they said, "you haven't any choice."

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P.T.O. TWICE (1971/1972—this is a three song mash-up version)

I've been stood up. I've been sat down.

I've been wrapped round pinkie fingers, I've been messed around.

I like me. You like you.

I make you sick. Well, I guess we're through.

What better state of mind in which to go elsewhere?

What other state of mind is there?

 Oh yes, I'll get over it, but I wanted to go through it.

 Oh yes, I'm well out of it, but I wanted to do it.

 Oh yes, I can start anew, but I wanted to continue.

 Thought I lost my heart to you but you don't have it in you.

You made me cry real tears. I wish I could frame them.

You made me feel real fears. I wish I could name them.

I liked me. Then I lost you.

I liked me less and I lost me too.

What better state of mind in which to go elsewhere?

What other state of mind is there?

 She says I'll get over this, but I wanted to go through this.

 She says I'm well out of this, but I wanted to do this.

 PTO, and turn the page. Seems I am no page-turner.

 Check her out. She's all the rage. Nineteen. A wage-earner.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

SCRATCH MY NAVEL, MAVIS (1972)

Scratch my navel, Mavis.

I need a tickle, love.

I'm laden down with Hovis,

and I'm much too full to move.

The telly, she has said, Goodnight,

and played, God Save the Queen.

Your mother, she was so polite,

but thought it time I'd been.

It's strange to think of parting,

when we've sat and hardly spoke,

just pegs to hang a dream on:

she's my bird, and he's my bloke.

You make me feel I could almost speak,

and tell you things I mean.

But it seems the evening's over

with the setting of the screen.

So squeeze me nicely, Mavis,

and nudge me through the door.

We've had too many coffees

to roll around the floor.

My head is full of movement,

and things I can't quite say.

My eyes are on the pavement;

the rest is on its way.

But I'm wondering just what love is,

and life, and that like fluff.

Could we scratch my navel, Mavis,

and contemplate such stuff?

Let's scratch our navels, Mavis,

next time. TV off.

\* \* \* \* \* \* \*

SORROW FOR THE LOSERS (1972)

I feel sad for all the losers

I envied when they won

The boy who got the girl I wanted

crying now she 's gone

Becoming real before my eyes

his fingers filled with air

pursuing words that fail to come

and hopes that are not there

Sorrow for all the losers

whose disguises are my own

planting frills and plastic flowers

in territories of stone

for shy or ugly people

whose futures show no bends

whose landmarks are the dappled

shifting shadows of their friends

We smile, we haunt the spaces

where voices fail to reach

and silences are cobwebs

in the corners of our speech

I'm sad for all the losers

left with too much time to feel

brushing at the dappled

shifting shadows that unreel

I'm sad for all the losers

left with time to feel

brushing at the dappled

shifting shadows of the real

\* \* \* \* \*

CONVERSATION OVER TEA WITH MATTHEW ARNOLD & JOE ORTON\* (1972)

Tell me, would you care for a sandwich of high seriousness?

I fix my mood a dozen times a day.

I mix my drinks, I shift my face,

I like to drift from place to place,

I never quite unpack my case, they say.

I'd like to paint a picture in a dozen tones of stance.

I slyly pull God's leg when I pray.

For 40 winks I'd buy a bed

with someone sweet whose hair was red

and ease the heartaches in my head away.

They're auctioning a gross of fat ladies from the circus—

just to watch them wobble and be gay!

Derision stinks! Dear me, I beg

your pardon! Have another egg!

Unnotch your belt another peg, and stay!

I'd dearly love to find something to loathe, but there,

there's grains of jewel in every flaw, they say.

And he who thinks, knows, yes, it's wild,

that contraries well reconciled

will gain in shine and shade and style,

the way that rainbow is the child of grey.

Oh, Mr Orton, may I have your autograph before you go?

Hysterically I've cheered your every play.

The Truth's a jinx! But I approve

it being said at one remove—

on wings as contrary as you've

assessed the distance from, I move–

the two of you are quite a groove. Hooray!

\* \* \* \* \* \*

LULLABY OF THE LILACS\* (1972)

Down roadways in Persia my caravan rolled.

The sun had been trimmed to a circle of gold.

The white-misted sky hung heavy and cold.

I don't know your country, I don't know your ways.

I've lost my last friends, and my heart's made of haze.

I can't say I'm lonely; I've been through too many such days.

The lilacs were bobbing in barely a breeze,

riding the ground mists that lapped at the trees,

like indigo lamps rising out of the weeds—

dancing their dancers' small answers

to why we all go where life leads.