

THE BEST OF  
**Gus Ferguson**

**STRESSED-UNSTRESSED**



Selected poems & drawings



*I think we should downsize our poetry*

# Stressed–Unstressed

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Selected poems and drawings

Gus Ferguson



David Philip Publishers  
Cape Town

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To  
Nicky  
and  
fellow Sestigers  
John, Tony and David

Like this, poor girl, is under a sad Weather

W H. Auden, *Letters from Ireland*

## Go to the Snail, thou Sluggard

The snail, most people think a pest,  
It spins no web nor weaves a nest.  
Its morals make the prudes uptight:  
Low, languid lust! Hermaphrodite!  
It bears no fang nor tooth not tusk,  
Lacks backbone! Cowardly mollusc!

And yet, I rather love the snail:  
Whom thrush and humans seldom fail  
To crush to eat or disembowel  
With vicious beak or garden trowel.

It totes around with stoic grace  
A sylvan, spiral carapace.  
With leaden ballast, sailing slow,  
Go carefully my escargot.

## Shellancolia

The shell that humans all admire:  
Its vaulted hall, its dreaming spire,

Is nothing but a limestone  
The Alcatraz of every snail.

Enclosed, inadequately roomed,  
Incarcerated and entombed,

We're cast to play a prison role,  
A lifetime stretch with no parole.

There's heavy irony as well:  
Each convict is a mobile shell.

Escape is out. We're doomed to crawl  
And drag about the prison wall.

But after lives of hopeless toil  
We shuffle off the mortal coil.

Our souls to weightless realms depart —  
The drudging dray transcends the cart —

Released from graft and gravity  
To timeless bliss and levity.

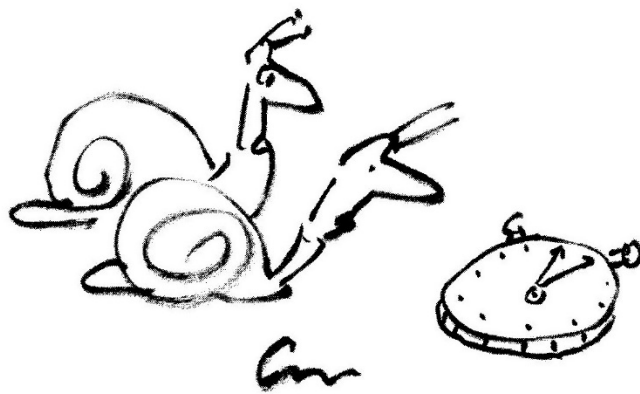
Let poets praise the cloister shell  
That spiral, existential Hell!

## Go Well, Go Shell

Magician's fingers move too quick  
For human sight to snap the trick.  
All sudden things both fleet and fly  
Amaze the dilatory eye.  
But sharp-eyed sceptics also strain  
To catch the snail's legerdemain.

I stoop with stop-Watch in my fist  
To clock the slow perambulist.  
'No? Yes!' An indecisive thrill.  
'It's definitely moving still.'

Inexorably the snail does mime  
The crawling minute hand of Time.



Stop! Watch!

## They've Nibbled the Leaves of my Napalm Tree

No snailophile would ever state  
That gardening's a Fascist trait  
For gardeners must protect the flowers  
They've tended to for hours and hours.

But I feel sick each time I look  
In any horticulture book  
Which recommends for snailocide  
That chemical: Metaldehyde.

Those gentle souls who talk to plants  
Should surely give the snails a chance.

## Molluscotropism

A child with scientific bent

Can do this small experiment.

Performed with care it never fails.

Aim:

To prove that plants need snails.

Apparatus:

All one needs

Are bell-jars, snails and legume seeds.

Method:

Ensure both jars are clean.

Place each beside a growing bean.

A snail in one, its neighbour leave

As empty as an armless sleeve.

Result:

The bean beside the vacant bell

Grew ramrod straight and vertical.

Its twin, the symbiotic bean,

In time towards the snail did lean.

Conclusion:

Though snails hunt plants voraciously

The plants are happy.

Q.E.D.

## Riddle

My first is Inferno in one.

My second is nothing or none.

My third on a lady is velvet and gorse.

My last is an ovum minus the horse.

My Whole you can't buy for silver and gold

It tortures the young and comforts the old.



St Agatha in the grass

# Cosmick Carp

*A paradox as parable*

Adrift in timeless nothingness —  
A darkness sparked with light —  
We meet our subject, Cosmick Carp,  
And recognise his plight.

The Universe it has no sides,  
Circumference or rim  
But Cosmick's Consciousness of this  
Is really rather dim.

His world is vast and boundless,  
Lacks limits; is uncurbed  
And yet, with all his liberty  
Our hero is perturbed.

Although twelve billion trillion miles  
He floats with flick of fin:  
Infinity describes his cage —  
A gaol is what he's in.

He harbours secret fantasies  
For tether, stake and lock,  
For door and fence and recompense  
Of calendar and clock.

But in a way he's just like us  
Though freedom is our goal.  
We know that Cosmick really wants  
A tiny, goldfish bowl.

## Only One Life He Croaked

'Actually,' he sighed, his knotted  
Tongue lolling behind his lips, 'the  
Spectrum of my experience  
Should be much, much broader than yours,  
Being amphibian, I am  
At home in water and on land.

But the sad truth of the matter  
Is a deadeningly humdrum  
Diet of flying arthropods  
(How I hate the flittering and  
Frantic scrabbling in the larynx).  
The monotonous perfection  
Of this paradisaal pond sucks.  
My real options are: Bog or log.

Add to all this my morbid  
Fear of humans, especially  
The large pink ones that wallow  
In water and fling stones and, *Quel*  
*Horreur!* amputate our long, lithe  
Legs to titillate the palate.

Had I options, I would pursue  
My private passions — black coffee,  
Dragonflywings in aspic, rough  
Cognac, Gauloises, the haiku of  
Matsuo Basho and, of course,  
The paintings of that cubist, Braque.'

## Kamikaze

like forty million crack dragoons

Stood battle trained spermatozoons.

The captain spoke in solemn voice:

'Although I know you have no choice

And little chance, you have permission

To volunteer for this emission.'

Not one comma hesitated:

'YES!' They all ejaculated.



Translation:

If the universe can be viewed as a text, then life is a typo.

## The Myth of Vicarus

Upturned was every head to watch  
Two leaf-green doves in flight.  
They soared above the cabbage patch.  
The Cabbage Brothers Wright.

Transmogrified from plant to bird  
They tumbled through the blue  
And every cabbage strained its roots  
To get a better view.

'At last!' they cried 'They've broken free  
the fetters of the ground.  
If they can do it so can we!'  
Then came a rushing sound;

On tiptoe every cabbage thrashed  
Its leaves with fiendish force.  
In vain, of course, some dust was raised  
But none budged from its source.

But, the hurricane the effort caused  
Surged upward through the air  
Catching Icarus and Daedalus  
Completely unaware.

Green wings were torn to tatters  
Two hearts came crashing down  
And all that really matters  
Smashed senseless on the ground.

The moral of this tragic tale  
Is taught in every patch:  
Ordained amongst us, some must fly  
The rest are blessed to watch.

# Sailing Alone Around the World

*for Lauren*

In Cape Town many years ago  
There lived a snail called Dallio.  
Though slow as often molluscs are  
He yearned and burned to travel far.

He had no kids, he had no wife  
And travelled all his lifelong life.  
His meals he took While on the hoof,  
His shell, a backpack and a roof.

He tacked in six years all the Way  
From Rocklands Beach to Bantry Bay.  
Long-suffering, with motives pure,  
He learned while living to endure.

Then, on his death, his soul was told:  
'Obsessive snail, since you were bold,  
The doughtiest of all your nation,  
choose a re-incarnation.'

'Ironical,' old Dallio said,  
'Alive I had no choice, but dead  
An option looms. I'll be a man,  
A great explorer if I can,

And circumnavigate the Earth.  
Around its plumply massive girth  
I'll sail, alone, by night and day  
Through Wave and Wind, through storm and spray

In a solo sloop of wood and oakum.  
And can I be called, please, Joshua Slocum?'

## Semper Helix

In duplicate beside the pond  
The mirrored fern unfurls its frond.

The twisting leaf escapes the tree  
And flutters downward spirally.

All things expire. The spring of Time  
Uncurls with tick and tock and chime

That knells the universal end  
When knots unravel, curves unbend.

The straight line on the cardiograph:  
A spirit-level epitaph.

So let us praise while yet we may  
Those things that take the tortuous way,

Which twist and turn spontaneously  
To stem the trend to entropy.

## Andante's Paradiso

A snail concerto's very queer  
If heard by any human ear.

The pitch is low, the tone forlorn,  
They're scored for tuba or french horn.

The best example I could trace  
Is one by Carlos Carapace.

Movement One — extremely slow —  
The Second molt'adagio

The Third no vertebrate could call  
A movement. There is none at all.

## Snail Christmas Poem

Of Orient there were three snails  
Who followed ancient bedouin trails.  
To see the birth at Bethlehem  
Their names were Nathan, Gar and Shem.

They crept behind a shining star,  
The going slow the distance far.  
And came, just thirteen years too late.  
The gospels don't record their fate.

But lucky Nathan, Shem and Gar  
Were present at the Bar Mitzvah.

## In His Own Image He Created Them

*for Walter*

It's not by day that molluscs pray  
When moon is down and stars are bright  
They Worship in the glistening night  
The Whorléd One who lives afar  
Amongst the Spiral Nebulae.

## Nocturne

The sun has set. The orb of red  
Is nestled in the West.  
Awaken lazy slugabed  
You've done your daily rest.

Uncurl that sleepy tentacle  
And blink your purblind eye.  
The muted wash of darkness will  
Suffuse the evening sky.

The flowers with fastened shutters droop  
From supplicative stems.  
Clandestine constellations group  
To wink their stratagems.

Possess the Night! It is no crime  
To seem to have things Wrong:  
To furl asleep at Matins time  
And rise to Evensong.

## Innocent Experience

An ageing sheep  
Who was quite deep  
Read Blake and cried  
'For goodness sake!

If Christ is shepherd  
And Christ is lamb  
Then half—divine  
Is what I am.'

And then she sighed:  
'Not true, because,  
Half-divine  
Is what I was!'

## Evidence?

After the flood when

The waters subsided

God said to Noah:

‘Come out of the Ark.’

And all the wild beasts

And all kinds of cattle

And all of the birds

And all of the creatures

That crawl on the earth

Disembarked from the Ark

Excepting of course

The wood-borer beetle.

## The Metempsychosis of the Yak

He has no house, he has no shack,  
Just shaggy hair upon his back  
That hangs from cranium to hoof —  
An absolutely perfect roof  
To shelter him from winter chills  
Amongst the Himalayan hills.

Tibetans ride upon the backs  
Of generous and gentle yaks  
Who offer milk, their hair for rope,  
Their flesh for meat, their fat for soap,  
And listen as the valley swells  
In irony to temple bells

That toll that karmic law decrees  
They will return as Red Chinese.

M C Koei

A hippopotamister  
had a hippopotasister  
who was liberated in the style  
still popular in the Upper Nile.

It riled this hippopotafeminist  
if, in passing, she was missed  
or missused  
by a male hippopotachauvinist.

Then she would incisively insist  
on her non-sexist, proper title,  
viz:  
HippopotaMs.

## Narcissus

The Warthog at the Waterhole,  
Transfxed in sheer delight.

His image in the murky pool  
A mesmerising sight.

The starlings at the birdbath preen  
A slug slides up the pane.

The beautiful are not alone —  
The plain are also vain.



GLI ANGELATI – Licarus and Haagen-Dazs

## Snail Stripper

*for Jenny*

Beneath the Agapanthus shrub  
There is a Mollusc Slipper Club  
That boasts an act to titillate  
The jaded snail sophisticate.

To shifting drums and throbbing base  
A vamp comes out at sensual pace.  
In lurex mantle, sequinned shell  
She weaves a concupiscent spell.

Explicit movements not Burlesque  
But undulating Arabesque.  
She slides across the flickering strobe  
And, piece by piece, removes her robe

To climax this erotic act  
She makes her lovely foot contract  
And slips from underneath her shell:  
A hyper-naked jezebell

Not every eye was out on stalks  
Nor every snail who gasps and gawks.  
A cynic gives a knowing shrug:  
'She's nothing but a common slug!'

## Elitist

Many poems have I Writ  
Extolling snails and I'll admit  
I might have rambled on a bit.

But now my conscience tugs,  
Would I have done the same for slugs?  
They're both molluscans, both pathetic  
But the snail is more aesthetic.

## The Sap Rising

The insurrection in the breeze  
Is whispered softly to the trees  
Who agitate their green-gloved fists  
Like apathetic anarchists.

Chameleons in camouflage,  
Intent on subtle sabotage,  
Advance on dialectic feet  
To politicise branch elite.

The propaganda pigeons coo:  
"Uhuru...Uhuru...Uhu. . ."  
But all in vain. Suburban twigs  
Are bourgeois, fascist, kulak pigs!

## Quarry Pond Samsara

1.

I come to fish here all the time,  
The fish are only five.  
I know them, each one, personally  
And catch them all alive.

Of course I use fine hooks and bait,  
Good line to take the strain;  
But since they are inedible  
I let them go again.

2.

To eat to suffer is our lot,  
It pierces lips and gums  
And rips us from our element  
Until our saviour comes.

He mercifully slacks the line,  
Unhooks and sets us free;  
His infinite compassion is  
Our sacred mystery

## The Amoeba is Immortal

The Universe eternally  
Envelops death and life;  
Both trouble and tranquillity,  
Harmony and strife.

It drifts through lonely nothingness  
(With pulse and pulse and glide)  
Its glowing, throbbing nucleus  
Just itching to divide.

It has but one imperative.  
One law in its Torah:  
A schizoid urge to generate  
Its own diaspora.

## Maslow was Wrong

*for the Tilani*

Along an early morning lane  
Between the forest and the sea  
A hundred iridescent Webs  
Are laid like nets upon the lea.

Roughspun, they look like gossamer rags  
Or even gleaming dinner plates.  
And at each rim, alert, polite,  
A bright, attendant spider waits.

The threads though tacky to the touch  
Remain quite empty through the day,  
Except for shimmering drops of dew.  
A clue? Perhaps the spiders' prey

Is not small creatures dead or wrapped  
But starlight, luminously trapped?

## Carpe Diem

*for Lionel*

A goldfish in a goldfish bowl  
Surveys the world outside  
And feels completely in control  
Of everything he spies.

He thinks: 'I'm in my element,  
My glass a faithful lens  
That shows a foggy firmament  
That wobbles and distends.

'An ever-shifting universe  
Of ectoplasmic forms  
Beyond all know parameters  
Of finite fishy norms

'And yet, this mystic interplay  
Does serve me with such love  
That I am blesséd every day  
With manna from above.'

## Weather Report

### FORE—WARNED

Knowing from television  
That the cold front was coming,  
The trees on Signal  
Hill, blurred in the mist,  
Are more mysterious still.

### GALE WARNING

The papaya tree  
Flaps in the wind, taps windows  
And rattles the eaves:

Flags for the deaf and  
Morse for the blind, it signals  
With snail-tattered leaves.

## Pebbles

*for Sandra*

Impetuous, anarchic sea.

Untamed, implacable and free

Or monstrous calm, no flurried fuss

You seem to us ambiguous,

For Time-trapped humans seldom guess

Your harassed lack of Timelessness.

With currents, backwash, Spring and Neap

Your schedule's difficult to keep

And Mistress Moon just loves to see

Her serfs enchained by fealty.

But at the strand we can observe

Some evidence of cracking nerve:

A flustered tide that rolls and kneads

Its oceanic Worry-beads.

## Snail Mail

In old Japan a border guard  
With one wet horsehair wrote,  
In microscopic characters,  
His wife a poignant note.

He called his favourite carrier-snail  
And pinned it to his shell  
And said: 'Oh steadfast Samurai  
Depart for home. Go well!'

The message read: 'Should I survive  
Then disregard this brief  
But if I die this missive will  
Remind you of your grief.'

## Plumstead Sky

*after Tatamkulu*

It is a still and perfect night

No trace of wind nor breeze —

The creaking constellations stop,

Entangled by the trees.



## Fugue for Rhythm and Wind

The poplar and plane;

Kinetical trees

That shimmer and shift

Through doppler degrees.

Leaf, light and wind

Weave a contrapuntal ruckus

That immediately brings to mind

Both Mozart and Maracas.

## Two Tanka

### AUTUMN

God is present in  
the stillness of twigs,  
the trembling of leaves,  
in perception and  
the surreptitious  
counting of syllables.

### FROM THE AIR

Like a length of string  
dropped on an unmade bed  
the road meanders in the mountains  
leaving a sense of  
pointlessness and comfort.

## The Plover — Plettenberg Bay

for Gus Muller

I think the bird is called a plover  
Who seems, frenetically, to hover  
Above the shore in search of cover.

But needle eyes espy the feet,  
The spindle shanks so deft and neat  
That pirouette and sprint the beat

He plies between the sea and land  
A crazy crisscross of the sand.  
A hurried, frantic saraband.

At earth and water's interface  
With silent movie jerky pace  
He lifts impatience to a state of grace.

## Love Amongst the Middle-Aged

*for Nicky after 72775 blissful mornings*

Each morn at dawn the slanting light,  
Romantic in my failing sight,  
Surrounds, like love, her perfect form.  
She moves about our nuptial dorm

And murmurs as in deep despair;  
'Whatever is a girl to wear?'  
I Watch with tea cup in my grip,  
Its rim obscures my trembling lip,

And realise how much I'm blessed:  
Awakening from a long night's rest  
To Witness, freed from lust's blind curse,  
My daily striptease in reverse.

## Brief Selection: Getting On

From the bus Window  
the trees fly by. But the moon,  
it travels with us.

\*

He wound the clock  
of the Universe but failed  
to set the alarm.

\*

Astigmatism  
How wonderful to age:  
two moons and a double  
plenitude of stars.

\*

I know, for sure, one thing that's true:  
The universe is just a clue.

\*

just the briefest glimpse,  
then all eternity for  
interpretation

\*

Wooden poles support the vine.  
The dead and the living intertwine.

\*

My life in action  
replay Fifty perfect goals  
and me the goalie.

\*

Ageing means you can  
remember everything  
you can imagine.

\*

Out of the harbour,  
a little effort, a few waves —  
and the land is lost.



Ageing Cyclops

## The Walls of Redwing

Intoning poems at a school  
I donned an academic cool  
And held the whole of Standard Three  
Attentively transfixed by me.  
The spacious hall had Windows —  
Blue gothic fragments of the sky,

And at my feet the children sat  
Enrapt, an all-absorbing mat.  
I mentioned love. I spoke of death  
And resurrection in one breath.  
I read from Blake. I read from Frost.  
I Waxed profound. The kids got lost.

With thrash of Wings and raucous din,  
Two starlings flew from outside in.  
Like drunken bats, about the hall  
They ricocheted from wall to wall  
And bumped and slapped and bumped again  
With Wing and beak each Window pane.

The face of every girl and boy  
Evolved from torpor into joy  
And then, as sudden as before,  
They fled (Assassins!) through the door  
To toss without aesthetic care  
Another burlesque through the air.

## Cyclops

The dusk like gauze is falling  
The day is fading fast  
And homeward I am crawling  
In hope that light will last.

As remnant shots of daylight  
Are shuttled through night's loom  
I pedal apprehensive  
Beneath the waxing gloom.

Myopic in the twilight  
I peer from left to right  
As cars from all directions  
Scud blind towards the night.

Ecologists of the human race  
List this amongst your theses:  
That Cyclists of the Crepuscule  
Are endangered as a species.

## Past Applegarth in Radiance

*for Lee*

My Sunday morning

Genuflections

Are made with bending knees

While sun spokes stroke

Across the road

And fire the fallen leaves.

My spinning chainwheel's

Starred reflections

Whirr upward through the trees

And glinting from

My streaming cold:

The snailtrails on my sleeves.

The perfect poet lies in bed,  
In vain he tries to sleep,  
He counts and counts inside his head  
In syllables, not sheep.

His haiku all have seventeen,  
His tankas thirty-one.  
His prosody has always been  
More regular than Donne.

With fourteen lines and seven rhymes  
His sonnets are precise —  
How cleverly the music chimes,  
How literally nice!

Archaic forms he knows them well:  
The ode and virelay,  
He likes to Write a villanelle  
And loves the triolet.

His every pulse is metrical,  
Mechanical and neat.  
His heart flub-dubs iambical  
And never skips a beat.

His ECG scans perfectly  
De dum de dum de dum  
And measures ineluctably  
Each moment's tedium.

His heart's a clock inside a box  
That ticks each beat and rhyme  
And only Death can spring the lock  
To break the spell of time.

But Death does not the poem end  
(Of this I can't be surer),  
It is, as mystics all contend,  
An ultimate caesura.



A rough neighbourhood –  
the anxious poet clutches  
at his manuscript.

## Liveware Blues

Machine! You have not blood nor gland.

Your tongue no man can understand.

What Poem, Sonnet, Song or Ode

Can be expressed in Binary Code?

Pedestrian your rhythms run:

O one, 0 one, 0 one, O one.

We covet your complacent skill.

Those rapid circuits Digital,

Without remorse or grief or pain

Repeat-repeat each task again.

Your functional memory just wipes clean

The slightest trace of Doubt or Dream.

You're never bored, but can't regret

Not Wanting what you cannot get.

## Arachnidophobia

The poet sighed, laid down his lute

And watched the sun's declining:

'The e-mail's murdered space and time

And put an end to pining.'

'O nonsense!' cried the merry youth,

His Pentium aglow:

'I'd argue but my chat-room calls,

I really have to go,

'But pain is gone with guilt, remorse

And analog morality.

There's no impediment to bliss

In virtual reality!'

The poet smiled, a gentle smile,

As tears welled in his eyes:

'A final joke: The spider's web

Is advertised by flies.'

## Poet

My poems are the means by which

I send my thoughts to you.

You'll find them sensitive and rich,

Original and true.

They're erudite and full of wit

With subtle traps and lures

And, quickly While I think of it,

Please don't send me yours!

## The Start of Something Big

While finishing his epic poem,  
His editing complete,  
He gazed upon the bits of words  
That lay about his feet.

He swept up all the syllables  
And laid them on his desk.  
His name: Matsuo Basho and,  
Of course you know the rest.

## Who Put the M in Creation?

*for Malcolm*

He Wrote a small, immortal poem,  
It took him several weeks,  
And fed it in a shredder bin,  
The type that tears and shrieks.

Then, gathering the shreds up,  
He set them all aflame —  
A Wisp of soot a sad salute  
To fortune and to fame.

And then, this Prince of Modesty,  
(Has Modesty a realm?)  
The ashes in a casket shut  
And posted them to NELM.

## If Only Scott had a Laptop

Driven by a hunch that  
James Joyce was dyslexic,  
Herman Charles Engelwald,  
poet, translator and  
remedial teacher,  
ran a computer spell-  
check on Finnegans Wake  
and produced a novel  
of such lucidity  
and popular appeal  
that the Bloomsbury Press  
sold six hundred thousand  
copies in sixteen months.

Released by royalties  
from the travails of prose,  
Engelwald's current passion  
Is to punctuate the  
Poems of e e cummings.

## With Occam's Razor Gerard Manley Hopkins Shaves

Those springing rhythms, riding, creaking, Wrecked my rest.  
The dapple-dawn—drawn bathroom steams; the mirror mists.  
With sweeping, squealing palm I wipe it clean and, fraught  
In dreary day's dominion, meditate my liturgy of lists.  
And then, with strokes of contemplation awaken to the thought  
— I've caught this morning morning's palimpsest.



Waiting for Gâteau

## Brief Selection: Ars Poetica

A defence against plagiarism;  
Ensure your art is boring.

\*

Today I took books  
to the pulpsters but sadly,  
they don't do poetry.

\*

Desperate for praise he  
quotes reaction slips

\*

I hereby apply  
for funding, sufficient to  
finish this haiku

\*

I was going to come to  
your reading but something  
interesting turned up.

## On First Creeping into a Poem by Dylan Thomas

I might be slime and calcite shale,  
The common stuff of man and snail,  
But yet my consciousness is pure.

One principle I know for sure:  
The force that curls my spiral shell  
Unwinds the universe as well.



## Two Snail Tanka

I

The snail, as twilight  
Trims the sky, extends one eye.  
A tentatively  
Shy one, two, three, four, five, six,  
seven, eight, nine tentacle.

II

Stuck in a traffic jam:  
How pedagogical  
To see a snail steam  
Serene and placidly in  
The opposite direction.

## Conjunction

Me&ering along the str&  
(&ante, stepping, sarab&)  
Where littorally sea joins l&  
I spied, engraved upon the s&  
A perfect, snaildrawn ampers&

## Snail Atman

O simple snail upon yon leaf,  
Eschewing joy, eschewing grief:

The karmic round of mortal men,  
Of birth and death and birth again,  
Does not, I think, apply to thee  
Who art beyond mortality.

O transcendental monoped  
Why, you are neither quick nor dead.

## The Limacon GT: Road Test

*for Mac*

The traction's great, the rubber grips

The road like pantihose hugs hips

Suspension's soft. I loved the ride,

An effortless and easy glide.

The headlights swivel and retract

They cannot shatter on impact.

The form is streamlined, sleek and low

Designed for speed and yet, so slow?

The slug, flat out with monstrous power

Does naught point naught naught one five Ks and hour

## Slugavad Gita

*or Why the Snail is Slow*

Lord Sri Krshna saw a snail  
In contemplative trance.  
It swayed upon a lotus leaf  
In graceful tantric dance.

Krshna watched as time slid by;  
The snail seemed unaware  
Of the presence of Divinity  
Or maybe didn't care.

Then Krshna spoke: 'O Svami Snail  
Your strange aloofness might  
In view of my attendance  
Be construed as impolite.

'But my teachings tell: What seems to be  
Is just an outer shell  
And you resonate with purity  
And vibrate like a bell.

'But I must hasten on my way  
Although you'll think it odd  
That time is of the essence  
To an omnipresent God.

'So I leave you benediction  
But I reprimand you too:  
Because you did not Hare me  
I'll never Hurry you.'

## Resonance

I strolled along the lonely strand  
With shells clamped to my ears  
I hoped to hear and understand  
The Music of the Spheres.

I listened conchientiously  
(Il suano blu e serio)  
But all I heard, incessantly,  
Was just the sea in stereo.

## Book Club

My tame domesticated Wife  
Tugs slightly at the strings of life  
When, once a month, she flies the coop  
To join a book discussion group.

No men allowed! This silly rule  
I think is chauvinist and cruel.  
Who needs,' I shrug in my defence,  
'Their gossip laced with Lit Pretence?'

But when it is her time to host  
It's then it irritates the most.  
Ignored! My fragile ego scarred!  
A writer scorned! A poet barred!

I prowl the house, aloof and numb  
But furtively, each time, succumb.  
Against the door I lay an ear  
And don a patronising sneer.

The moral is: What men deride  
Is that of which they are outside.

## Brief Selection: Snapshots

Opportunity  
did knock, but only to ask  
for your address

\*

A gale Southeaster:  
Birds surrender but grass like  
Samurai fights on.

\*

Before they left,  
the aliens wrote  
a brief, explanatory note.

\*

Cycling past a kieWiet's nest,  
he stops to check his chain.

\*

Eight o'clock —  
the cars, how urgently they rush  
to reach the traffic jam.

\*

For some obscure sin,  
Artur Rubinstein returned  
as a touch typist.

## CLASSIFIEDS

Goldfish coming to Cape Town  
seeks bowl in city flat.

Highrise, seafront, apartment block  
An eyesore with a perfect view.

Tired of rejection?  
Publish your poems  
in our classified section.

\*

I believe that God  
encrypted the universe  
for fear of hackers.

\*

It's the end of the World:  
Sales at Christmas and a  
begging Santa Claus.

\*

On cold crystal nights —  
a galaxy of grounded stars.  
The city lights.

\*

The city lights —  
a bed of glowing embers.  
We dread the kindling wind.

\*

*Crossword Clues:*  
Evacuate the country!  
There's bomb in Thabo Mbeki!

\*

Prim with suspicion,  
scribbling in the margins,  
he reads *The Way of Zen*.

\*

*On the death of an old computer:*  
Ascii to Ascii,  
Dos to Dos.

\*

The rain, when it pours,  
beats through the trees like discreet  
Japanese applause.

\*

Tired of book and tract  
and thesis, I turn to life  
for exegesis.

## Brief Selection: Foundlings

*Matthew said:*

Lots of people in  
Plumstead, Dad, play pianos  
at night. It's lank sad.

\*

*From Patricia:*

Lost in the hills at the end of the day  
we burned the map to light the way.

\*

*Burns's Haiku (from Tom O'Shanter)*

Like the snow falls  
in the river, a moment white —  
then gone forever

\*

*Notice in the Cafda Bookshop:*

Your jigsaw puzzle  
is welcome  
missing pieces or not.

\*

*Quote from Matthew's dream:*

I'm one hundred and  
Ten times more buffable than  
A silicone chip.

\*

*The Dalai Lama quoted in the Cape Argus, 1 January 2000 on the New Millennium:*

It's nothing special.

Day, night, sun and moon will come

Just the normal way

\*

*From Sera by Giuseppe Ungaretti*

...in smoke now I hear

crickets and frogs where grasses

tenderly tremble.



Graffiti, Pretoria, May 1998

## That Sort of Poem

*for Don*

Mozart swells from the translucent  
Wind—up 'radio in the kitchen.

In the Wind the open window  
sways slightly and the catch squeaks.

You alternate browsing drowsily  
between The Cloud Of Unknowing

and an old Len Deighton novel.  
The weeks of heat and mountain fires

have passed and a light rain numbs  
the suburbs into somnolent,

easy quiet. The departed poet  
has left the gift to drift asleep.

## Notes to the Poems

### SAILING ALONE AROUND THE WORLD

Coincidentally a certain Joshua Slocum did sail his sloop, the 'Spray', alone around the World and in 1900 published a book about it, which has the same title as this poem.

### WHO PUT THE M IN CREATION?

NELM National English Literary Museum

### FQUNDLING FROM SERA BY GUISEPPE UNGARETTI

*... nel fumo oro grilli e rana  
dove temere tremona erbe.*



Gus Ferguson was born in Scotland in 1940 and arrived in South Africa in December 1949. Schooled in Stornaway, Harrismith, Durban and Cape Town, he qualified as a pharmacist in 1963.

He has had five collections of poems and a collection of cartoons published. He edited the defunct *Slug News* (resurrected as the poetry magazine *Carapace*) and has published some 90 collections of poetry under the imprints *Snailpress*, *Firfield Press* and *Carapace Poets*.

He is married, has three grown children, lives in Plumstead, cycles, is rich in his friendships, and passionately admires Vladimir Nabokov, J M Coetzee, Norman MacCaig and Kippie Moeketsi.



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