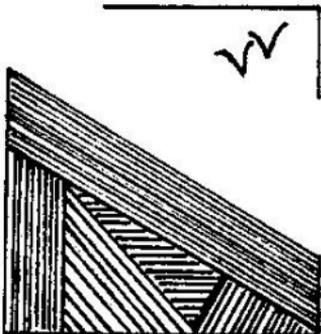
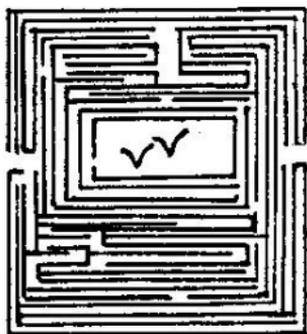
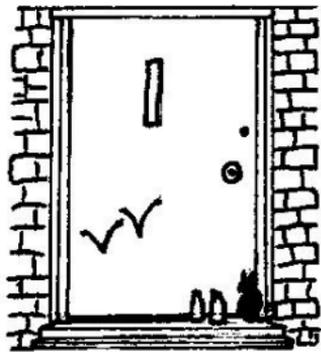
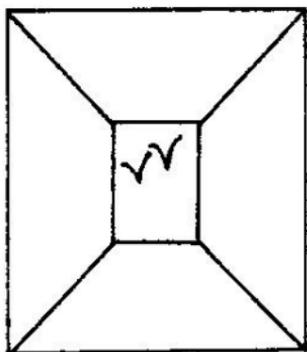
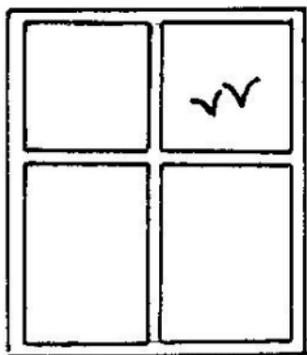


Doing Nothing



# Brian Wake

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Doing Nothing

Brian Wake :Doing Nothing

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## DOING NOTHING

That you can sit  
all day, they say,  
amazes; doing little  
other than watching  
the cat or sunlight  
stretched across  
the floor, or flowers  
in a vase.

Surely there are times,  
they say, when you would  
rather wander  
over hillsides, dazzled  
by quick birds  
in flight, or forests  
where the green is thick  
with living and the patterns  
of the trees form ways  
through history.

It is, they say,  
a mystery how you can seem  
content to sit so long.  
The cat's tail  
drums a bad dream  
and she turns. Sunlight  
sprawls across the floor  
and wall. The flowers  
in the vase  
do nothing.

## INTO HIDING

Hiding from me at bedtime, my daughter  
sneezes and giggles from inside the wardrobe.  
I wonder where she is, I act. Pretending  
not to see her four small fingers  
clutching the door.  
But, fearing the dark far more  
than she does me, she surrenders.  
I gasp in mock surprise.  
Soon she will be sleeping.

In Germany once,  
whole families hid in cupboards  
while friends pretended not to see.

But forty years on, most would say  
forget, forgive, let ancient horrors be.

Me? I am reminded tonight  
of the mother who, on hearing footsteps  
on the stairs, hurried her children  
into hiding; four hearts thumping  
in a wardrobe.

Like mine, perhaps her daughter  
would have giggled had she sneezed.  
Sneezed and giggled, giggled and sneezed,  
sneezed away four lives.

I smothered her, says a broken woman  
in broken English  
so the others might survive.  
It was Thursday, the ninth,  
in nineteen thirty nine,  
November. I remember, she says  
thinking even then  
how all her little movements  
were as earthquakes when  
matched against the stillnesses  
to come.

## FOUR DOGS

Four days,  
they said, a dead man  
- frozen where he died -  
staring into the eyes  
of those he had forgotten.

Four days dead  
dead and yet had seemed  
alright last night moving  
about his room, they said,  
his head held downward  
as if in searching.

For days  
his dogs had watched with him.  
No food but dust  
and a jagged fist  
clenched inside their bellies.

At last they smelt  
their master's bones  
at last began devouring him.  
One a limb, another  
growled on veins, another  
poked away the eyes  
and snorted as it fed,  
while the fourth  
- his special one - they said  
tore apart  
the heart.

## **ADRIFT**

My father talks of being twenty  
days in an open boat. Adrift.  
My father and others.

Wartime, and the ocean  
was a blood-slick  
clinging to continents.

They had been hit  
and only the dead escaped  
the long days  
measured by the spinning  
of the boat beneath  
a cruel sun. Each day  
a million years  
of cracked tongues  
along the chalk of teeth.

He remembers giving up,  
that final thoughts  
were of crooked, beautiful  
backyard walls and thin  
but glorious lines  
of smoke from little chimneys.  
In winter, rivers of gusting snow  
down white and moaning lanes.  
In summer, flowers and things  
they wished they had done  
or said.

He recalls them believing  
themselves to be dead  
yet each alive to mourn  
his own death

My father talks of the years  
having flown, of being  
twenty days adrift.

His garden is a blizzard  
of white roses

## GARDENER

Winter was the time for taking  
stock. Forgiving the ice  
its cruelties, he would  
spend his shortened days  
slicing ways through the snow.  
Evenings, a silent man  
brushing specks from pages  
with the back of his hand;  
sparing the beetle  
in its search for heat;  
noting the tap of twigs on glass,  
wind sounds and the occasional  
rush of gas from scorching coals.

Though mostly still,  
he was soaring. Though silent,  
orchestras thundered.

In the cold moments of light,  
he would trundle the park paths.  
A summer man crouched  
against a hostile season.  
Without flowers to tend,  
he would fill in  
cracked flags with cement  
and his time brushing up  
fragments of poems.

## ACCIDENT

For seconds, seconds and seconds  
the traffic rolls and slides,  
and (sideways) twirls,  
and windscreens swell and crack  
(a star explodes in diamonds).  
Some parts bounce and bounce,  
bounce, bounce, bounce,  
and peeling metal gurgles grease,  
and tyres sigh and rasp  
and severed hoses splutter oil,  
and severed veins pump blood.  
A fountain gushing, climbing,  
red, fiery, volcanic.

A child is rolling in all this.  
From quick, uncertain, forward - falling steps  
is snatched and bundled, spun to twitch  
and clutch at air and kick and kick again  
and stop  
forever.

He could rebuild the fallen columns of Rome;  
re limb the marble Gods of broken Greece;  
or force a beat from every Pompeiian rockheart;  
a second look from every eye of stone,  
who could repair this ruined child.  
A little history trickling into greater times.  
No more or less than spine-snapped children  
under chariot wheels, or Heroded torsoes  
writhing in the dust. No more  
than murdered child-shapes uncovered

for their bones by passing dogs.  
No less than princes choked for kingdoms.

The pavement cliff is cloudhigh  
(oceans crash against its walls)  
or else is earthquake-gashed  
and far below is nothing  
but eternal falling.

A child has fallen here  
whose blood could hardly change  
the tints of tears,  
and should a thousand Samsons  
give him strength, still  
would the healing earthwound  
grind his bones.

Against the spinning traffic  
flesh has brushed, and tiny hands  
have pressed at metal, caressed  
the jagged iron, glimpsed the sneer  
of chrome that twists and grins,  
cracks and sprinkles silver.

All sirens silent, blood removed,  
all fragments swept away,  
the air is heavy. A breeze  
becoming wind is squeezing  
through the quiet streets. Then rain  
(light and at first almost not)  
steady, then heavy, rain,  
uncontrollable rain.

## STONES

Stones are surfaces, nothing else.  
They cannot break  
except into a thousand stones. Smooth  
as the air that oozes  
from the space we take. Sharp  
as splintered bone,  
or the crooked flicker of lightning.  
Our touch is their structure.  
They exist only on the tips of fingers,  
the tips of tongues.

Stones are the shape of water.

As warm as ripe suns stretched  
across the mirrors of lakes, or cold  
as moon-steel speckled  
against dark falling snow. Colder  
than eyes closed against the shade  
and light of land and sea -  
as the earth appears from distant worlds.

Stones are the decisions the eye makes.

Their taste is of salt-wind on burst lips;  
the flavour of hard earth.  
Their sudden dryness  
is a mouthful of cloth. Stones  
are the colour of fog.  
They have its silence.  
Its invisibility is that of stones.  
To look is to discover

stones are everywhere, knowing, sensing.  
Touch them and they move. Survive  
by seeming less than living things.

## **MURDER**

From among the quiet ruins  
of Summer; the plaited whips  
of leafless vine;  
the corpse of a spider  
spinning from the gallows  
of its web; the hush  
of leaves shifting crisply;  
a sudden cat  
has roared onto a thrush.

In a scuffle of screaming  
brown and black and blood,  
its dozen rapiers slice  
and plunge. The bird's wild eyes  
meet only teeth; wings  
are spread on claws.

Its murder done,  
the cat comes home for food.  
Beneath the warm dead thrush  
the worms are turning.

## COWARD

When I am an old, old man  
fatter or thinner· whichever way I go,  
I'll hide myself inside my age;  
tick off the whipper-snapperness  
of waiters serving too-cooked steaks,  
or bargirls who short-change me  
on a luke-warm gin.

I'll take a stick to dogs and kids  
who rush at me from alleyways.  
I'll grin (behind my frown) at boys  
who thump their balls against my house.  
I shall spit upon the ground and sing  
obscenely; thunder 'bullshit' loud  
at meetings or in church.  
I'll fart in bus queues.  
A veritable posturer.

Not yet there, I saw my meat  
Witttaching arms and stutter for my change.  
I have sharpened a good stick.  
Time ticks on. I dress  
my dog-wounds in a ball-bouncing house.  
'Bullshit',  
I whisper,  
'Bullshit'.

## MERSEYSIDE POETRY MINIBOOKS SERIES

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Since 1966, **BRIAN WAKE**'s poems have been published in numerous magazines, anthologies, and newspapers in Britain, Europe and North America, and have been used on TV and radio.

Among his previous collections are *Old and Pneumatic Poems* (Asylum), *Ghosts of Myself* (Second Aeon) and *Stars* (Driftwood)

**WINDOWS**

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