

Emergence

Also by Fanny Howe:

The Wedding Dress (University of California Press)

The Winter Sun (Graywolf Press)

Selected Poems (University of California Press)

The Lyrics (Graywolf Press)

A Wall of Two: translations of Ilona and Henia Karmel
(University of California Press)

On The Ground (Graywolf Press)

What Did I Do Wrong? (Flood Editions)

Fanny Howe
Emergence

REALITY STREET

Published by
REALITY STREET
63 All Saints Street, Hastings, East Sussex TN34 3BN
www.realitystreet.co.uk

First edition 2010
Copyright © Fanny Howe, 2010
Front cover art copyright © David Miller, 2010
Typesetting & book design by Ken Edwards

Printed & bound in Great Britain by CPI Antony Rowe

A catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library

ISBN: 978-1-874400-47-9

I would like to thank the editors who published these poems for the first time a while back, sometimes under another title. I am very grateful to Ken Edwards for putting them together here:

from Lost Roads Press, 1988: *The Vineyard*
“On Time”, “Walk to Work”

from Littoral Books, 1992: *The End*
“Emergence”, “Alsace-Lorraine”, “Good Friday”, “1979”

from Graywolf Press, 1997: *One Crossed Out*
“Basic Science”, “Border Poem”, “The Apophatic Path”

Fanny Howe

Contents

7	Basic Science
9	On Time
16	Emergence
35	Walk to Work
41	Alsace-Lorraine
50	Good Friday
52	Border Poem
53	1979
57	The Apophatic Path

Basic Science

One cadaver said to the other
cadaver, “You’re my cadaver.”

The conversation ended there
but not its effects.

Their souls had evaporated.

It was up to love to raise them
from their litters and let them

arrive as the living poor
at the surface of earth. It did.

At first the maculate pair
poked and picked through refuse.

Denials were their daily breads.
Then they were sold to those

who found their fertility a bonus.
Owned then by the living with names

and fortunes, with lovers who say,
“Lover, I’m your lover,”

cadavers were still the majority.
They kept creation going and love

as well—like hands on a cold
or sunburned back—a weight

with properties that animate.

On Time

1.

This was the life assigned to me
I don't know why
I was pushed into a seat
Beside books and brick yards
Pale adults stood around me

My elbows had burns from leaning and climbing
Since trees were generous
And the wish to escape drove me up
Until it was all I was able to do
And I wasn't exactly free

2.

Now outside maples drip rainwater
Tucked in the dark night
Two boys in a tenement, a yellow dog
A brown leafy nest and a hollow pool

I am the mother who sleeps uncushioned
Holding her head
Down to drown
Passive as a pauper, as a criminal
Willing to pay for her crime

Since time is physical, not in the air

3.

There was no way on earth for me
To lock and free my hopes
Or it would teach me how to die
And I don't want to
I who love a prison more than a master
Where water washes off my past
Leaving me naked as a bastard

I don't know why I like it so much
Here on a par with robins and birch
With all as involved with aliveness as us.

4.

Torn from the language of my childhood
When I was cut to size
At nine, I leaned down
To where the clay turns soft
And it made me sad to write the name GOD
Instead of my own.
Then my foundation was only supported
By blue liquidity, air
That spilled and dragged me out of doors.

5.

A daring blue heron
Hops into place
And a cloud
Sends showers down
Some moves
Provoke endless patterns
Each thing is sewn into time, then
Having a child
Is the most extreme caprice
A smashing of space

6.

I can't die twice
In Nebuchadnezzar's dream
Of a universal history
Like Jefferson's
The pendulum stopped

On the tonic of its scale
I was near despair
A mother of children
For what is given is only sufficient
To those who interpret the world
And still leave it there

7.

Love's body and mouth lie down together
Its hidden parts soft inside
A right triangle
Its mouth is well made
Muscular and wide, I like
Its hands, long shadows in the joints
Both palms lined to show it's had some lives
All its hair prickles and shines
And its smile
Goes down. So does the sun.

Emergence

The morning star on a bamboo graph
draws no birds this wintertime.

Your muddy boots and work
stand in the room's shadows, your uniform

not starched enough, and never warm.
It's always the poor who are set on fire.

It's all this 'attention to detail'
which gutters the flame. I will yawn

when you are gone, then do my make-up
for my job, while I imagine

your long patrol in the mountainous north,
the same man, in a different montage.

Zillions of silver droplets shine
under a black crow, the glitter

suffers, with a linger. I want
the hand that holds the shovel

to lay down on my abdomen, a windowpane
away from freezing. This is

not yesterday. A calloused hand,
or caress, can't be taken for granted

in the nation of January, brinking
on heat rations and medicines.

The dark night of the body
(alone) is heavy and dense

its fright swallowed in daylight,
like a story re outer space or ghosts.

But with you it puts me up against
your fortress, fast, where my limbs

and heart swing onto yours,
and I pray in a pair

we will mount the arc
to the void, and not be flooded apart.

In gray the snowflakes & ashes
grow higher together. The approach

to February, this way always.
The Hancock building

contains the Hancock building,
the way the world appears complete,

and all sins hidden.

When you are gone, I go on

but when you return, I'm full of
questions, as if

I didn't understand everything.

That's the break of a day's
crime, what comes with a clang of pails

and leaden mufflers
off the back of cars. Four bodies, fallen

into an amalgam frieze,
all young black girls, are felled

by the clasp of a mean man's hand,
while the day's menu's planned

in smoky diners, and the kitchen
of the Ritz hotel lights up.

Most people get what they can have,
not “are given”, like the dense

composure of the Arboretum,
its birds spread out, pecking

at Arctic sheets. The biggest one
is settled in a nest of red

berries, only an image of
perfect taste, not a lesson for

the one who makes it seem
he’s got what he deserves

according to the laws of the universe.

On the ramp before the bridge, and over,
lights were singing, multicolored,

& the genius in my bottle
took time to view Manhattan,
bathing in pale light.

She swayed her arms, stirring up pools.
Gray her eyes, huge her shoulders,

hunched, up. Tankers & liners
snored in her tub, a devastating trip

awaited, alee. We moved the Bronx east,
easily, to isolate the rocky queen

who would sway & topple, of the d.t.s,
drowning operatic solo.

Made us a fox but a dog
who looks like one—Suffering hounds!

The dark world
called me “home”
& I called it by the same name, running—

Brave, bad country,
who sings across the Harlem river, I sang

“Lover, be tender with my love,”
a plaintive, youthful melody.

The great melancholy tide of
the world's benevolence

is easy to comprehend, when,
in ups and downs, a struggle.

Clothes fall everywhere, off
trees, clouds, families! And

this roof slides north as if
for warmth. The kitchen window's

a sheet of frosty skin, will dissolve
while a child at table is grateful

same time daily, as we were too,
that age, given a new day.

Para-derelict,
was Novembering seven. No sun's

gold bore down on one
cold room.

Paradoxically, a yen for heaven
did not "brought goodness"

but lit up the bricks
like ingots, as if each hope

has money in it.

Love between a couple
of men and women has a strange

momentum, witness the long suffering
of many children born

in one flash. Significance
gains with time, the way a raised

fist grows bigger, and the risk
inherent in domestic passion

is all the more daring, fenced
in the electric network

of winter trees around
Boston's red brick projects.

The quail colors
of Beacon Street
are ruby red in a gold hood.

A light snow fades
the statues where brick dormers

pulse & coo. Go to sleep,
babies, *fais dormir...*

words millions of birds ago.

A wooden pencil, redolent
of cribs & high-chairs, toy
boats floating an inch off the sea

recollects a boy
the ikon maker at my table
mosaic eyes as round as riddles

and my younger mother too
before we grew.

A feather in your path
means an angel has passed.

A father in the house
is a sign of danger.

The girls work their dolls
and the world in their care is safe & fair.

As the baby watches
his fists loosen with his attention.

The mattress spills socks & crumbs.

On the floor a painted radio
gray curtains and newspapers

stuff the cracks from cold.

On one chair two girls hold dolls
and hide their smiles behind their hair

while the baby in an over-sized shirt
laughs like a farmer, swaying there.

Cigarettes burn into smoke
over bourbon & kids.

Snow's black in front of the porch light.

One woman cooks the rice, the other fries.

Between them many hands & cries
until the animals are drawn

in in a wagon
pulled by the oldest doll
over the green linoleum lawn.

The milk that fills the sugar
up with tea swells it at the bottom
of the thin white cup.

The baby—on a hip held firm—
sucks the sweetness on his tongue.

Outside cars steam in a line
while the self-reducing sun
designs the sky in red

& the metal El rolls by downtown.

Long nights in emergency
construct a nursery of light.

Shadows strain to be feelings
where a baby dusts the hall with his knees.

I hand out candies as hard and red
as Steuben glass—to the laughter of children
born out of sex

Water without light is no more water
than a daughter—adult child
of a childish mother—in hospital's hell
beside the interstate
at three in the night.

A woman is walking used floors.

She has withdrawn from social and all other
intercourse.

Outside the cars
pass few and far between.

Especially the space
is dangerous to us producers of human flesh.

Walk to Work

Suspended and sick, my body is the effect.
Crows through paper waxy as a white illness make a racket.
Departure's imminent. I hear what I can of morning:
Franciscans mention the danger of *liberation* as a word.
A great winged sorrow maps the trees
when you discover your preparation was for an event
already over. Now you recognize its worth
among the people of eternity and wonder
Will I be this lonely then as if there is another home
after God, another heart after human?

To be forbidden direct action. The Callahan Tunnel to Logan Airport feels like inappropriate longing we are each afflicted with. From there you can go anywhere on the ground, leaving behind Boston Harbor, Chelsea, Brookline and the dull Cambridge days passed among the enraged & ambitious whom you love. To go west...Not to...Your own body in the ruins of Tremont Street is unable to listen anymore to any subject outside theology, comedy and true experience—and tries to remain dignified.

The puzzle's pulled apart becoming tattered and stranded.
Green came from yellow, families of birds and animals
were separated then divorced. A trustworthy man
identifies with the homeless. A trustworthy woman
forgives everyone everything. Two species
of human beat the weak into submission. Dualism
between master and slave, London and Dublin.
Few knew who they were or cared. More lived in
 smiling anonymity
—those whose actions were service-oriented, whose mouths
were sealed after their words were endlessly amended.

The father who didn't die out but in
is a night-haunt, his freckled hand and cigarette
still lie on his knee. The study at night is dark with Dickens
and poetry and yet there is no happy after-image
but stars, luggage, departure by a door.
No, it's an arrival after the war. No. Wrong.
He's going again. He's twenty years late
either way. The desperation of separation is enacted again
near the Charles Street Jail where Cambridge Street
leads into Scollay Square which isn't there
like love parted without a promise of more.

Christ victor, the glitter of a country galaxy
is lost in the brick city. I love to live
but decrepitude is an anxiety
(illness, slow motions) in a motherless society.
Institutions and their shadows dampen the wet asphalt
and flowers
where light is not a source but a reflection.
Eight pigeons descend on a crumb, their grays adapted
to cement. A smell of corridor and body
is conjured in a waiting line far from
the steam off an iron running by a woman over cotton.

Each sun-spot was a brick of gold so small you could pan it
with a tea-ball; they were each like the steps of one life—
seemingly random dots in a chaotic mosaic
emerging as the face of
a human type only someone as far off as Christ
might recognize (as himself.)
What I did to my child was a response to anxiety
and hands and trees and sirens.
What she did to me came out of that same mix.
Layers airy and ever-lifting towards a new set of contingencies.

Alsace-Lorraine

“A lot of sky litters my view of home—oh
split part, lost.”

Helium balloons spill off the horizon
& knock her backwards

Jealousy would be too easy “I miss
a better sentiment, ballooning pride
could accomplish.” Homesick
for each hand, they miss the fragrance
of their labors in them.

They need a strap, something to hold onto
The meadow speeds, they stagger
and not even trees, rooted, can hold them
Oh do they ever need a strap—It will be time
Now his dream
has changed into her life, they live
inside the
night meadow, which speeds. A strap, a strap
which will be time, which will hold onto nothing.

A rainbow
of emotions, shades of purple to blue, the way
good becomes
awful so easily First was the discovery
that everything melts in the sun
Second the discovery that everything does not
melt in the sun....That's where are they are today
Age will change
the condition, is the condition, a more virulent sun

The fancy they build had many,
had fancy, many mansions once,
but no room in, each one full

“All in the head” as celestial
mansions be

Now of that collection only an image stays, dazzle
in a traveling surface

Can also hit their hearts by a ballet or Monet
but never build again, outside the house of art.

She wants to find a really lonely village
set off, see
in a shade of day lily this bitter sensation
and early morning dense misting
 White iron where spirits'll meander, the gone
ones she can't believe in
leaving her, the way they hang her heavy head,
 as sculpture, still
saying nothing of the truth's ill tense.

Stood up by the maple's tap
no bouquets
or buckets But across the public garden
that olive soldier
cruised in the gradient dusk "I miss him"
in evening's line along a fountain
Nowhere was an hour more dour
than where those children wanted
farther to turn into father, nowhere.

“I wish to make others suffer”
& went to a willow and hung his arms over
grave-colored water,
smell of decay, beds of salmon-sized flowers
He hung there
for a response Tore off a branch
and struck it on the trunk
until the willow sighed Better dead than dying,
is what he thought, she thinks.

War's end brings some dividends:

his army

fatigues asleep on a prop of profligate lilacs,

wind chimes green bottles of Rhine wine

smoke in silver trees

Great ways all

to numb some primal shocks

as they hitch & gallop around the body's soul.

A war-torn rotunda
& a Maginot's imaginary boundary
is all that remains of
said sad time

Expressions of goodness all new must
become when some didn't do Oh
Alsace-Lorraine! Where are the lines, &
in what hemisphere a calm?

Good Friday Night

Has my father abandoned me? Or do I mean,
I think our father has abandoned us?

The question marks it off.

There's a gray comforter, stone walls. I sleep on the floor.
A furnace roars
on the other side of the classics.

Beyond this, a thorny snow has begun
blackening the tarmac.

I think planes wobble in winds of approaching land
like originals in double trouble.

Millions of people are close by—
all of them me's, meaning "sky unable to see."

No sleep, no window.

And no one
knows when their hour will be the last.
An emergency means something is coming too fast.

Me? A miniscule locus for gravity hidden in the energy
of engines...I to be light. Me to be night.

So what is the law for? We have only ourselves to ask.

Some unexpected day
we hope to emerge with wings, leaves, and sun in our hands.

Beside me the box men pull the cardboard over their heads.
Furnace guttering in Grand Central fashion.

I stand to find a tunnel to look again out of.

My person is stuck to all its surroundings and the hope
in my eye is searching those bodies

for someone I know.

Border Poem

A fin de siecle echoing fuck:

Up through hotel walls, two-bed poverty.
From the trolley at T.J.

to the old port and green stairway
past a small cafe, I was my own army.

Outside the conference hall
(where ideals were my orders)

there was rain and if I was to get home ever
I had to come inside to confirm my reservation.

Over the asphalt gray drops blew
and when the ink had dried under fluorescent
lights

I returned—by rail—
to the Free world, or whatever it's called.

1979

The tunnel is a lung, you take your luggage through
Rhinestone choker, lapis on the shin

No sense in sending the insane
to jail
It's like entering Chicago backwards on the train

No satisfying dogma. Hypostatic
madness in its last laugh

A dyed look to the heft of grass
makes mouth-emptying sighs turn into laughter.

I could say hope's on its way
to meet my approach to Harlem

but I've been arrested by the kill
of someone's unfaithfulness.

Hammers knocked up sparks
off gray-day walls, meanwhile.

This is my valedictory request
in a puff of exhaust

where July heaves & the urban Charles
slides on to the sea—

Give me expression for my needs again
and the breath inside your speech—

O Roseblower!—give me the ability
of never being dispirited.

·

Meet me again in the underground
where we can listen

to the children overhead
—a stamp of dancing
teens who would never believe

the pleasures of aging
could be so deep.

We can look at our past across
the heads of millions to one hour

still standing in the simultaneity
of time—where we hold on

with the bone-jumping
nerviness of acquaintances verging
on discovering pity.

·

Cut the lights and come in
to my darkness—my own

donation of reds only red
in the mind—or sun—

Get into my dreams
and help me explore them.

This is what I'm doing at 4 am

I had to get up and get it down—

turn to the practice of making a poem
for a person I can never phone.

The Apophatic Path

1.

What isn't what is

not *Discover me!*

Or *Try to find me.*

If being is finding,

can you find me?

Who to, this address?

Being as close to a shadow

as a color

what isn't

is what is

and I can't see

but know as no.

Non amari sed amare... .

Or will a question be,

“Is the discovery for real me?”

Signature a stone???

Like what isn't
is what is

when not being
ever ever ever found!

2.

Basic science

will blend ghostness
among enemies.

Now bodies cemented

down in monster denominations
to be counted

one of the walking

corpses I see whitening

and emptying under a Sunday
makes me know me

to be no one.

3.

Walking to developmental old trombone, —I—

seeking to be found—
inside time!—by one whose blues

seek by speaking tunes to
this specific city afternoon

of bread, fumes, and orange
nasturtiums—am, still, solo—

even the base of me being, unknown.

OTHER TITLES FROM REALITY STREET, 1993-2010

Poetry series

1993

Kelvin Corcoran: *Lyric Lyric*, £5.99

Susan Gevirtz: *Taken Place*, £6.50

Maggie O'Sullivan: *In the House of the Shaman*, £6.50

Denise Riley: *Mop Mop Georgette* (O/P)

1994

Allen Fisher: *Dispossession and Cure*, £6.50

1995

Fanny Howe: *O'Clock*, £6.50

Sarah Kirsch: *T* (O/P)

Peter Riley: *Distant Points* (O/P)

1996

Maggie O'Sullivan (ed.): *Out of Everywhere*, £12.50

1997

Nicole Brossard: *Typhon Dru*, £5.50

Cris Cheek/Sianed Jones: *Songs From Navigation*, £12.50

Lisa Robertson: *Debbie: an Epic*, £7.50*

Maurice Scully: *Steps*, £6.50

1998

Barbara Guest: *If So, Tell Me* (O/P)

2000

Tony Lopez: *Data Shadow*, £6.50

Denise Riley: *Selected Poems*, £9

2001

Anselm Hollo (ed. & tr.): *Five From Finland*, £7.50

Lisa Robertson: *The Weather*, £7.50*

2003

Ken Edwards: *eight + six*, £7.50

Robert Sheppard: *The Lores*, £7.50

Lawrence Upton: *Wire Sculptures*, £5

2004

David Miller: *Spiritual Letters (I-II)*, £6.50

Redell Olsen: *Secure Portable Space*, £7.50

Peter Riley: *Excavations*, £9

2005

Allen Fisher: *Place*, £18

Tony Baker: *In Transit*, £7.50

2006

Jeff Hilson: *stretchers*, £7.50

Maurice Scully: *Sonata*, £8.50

2007

Sarah Riggs: *chain of minuscule decisions in the form of a feeling*, £7.50

Carol Watts: *Wreck*, £7.50

2008

Jeff Hilson (ed.): *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets*, £15

2009

Peter Jaeger: *Rapid Eye Movement*, £9.50

Wendy Mulford: *The Land Between*, £7.50

Allan K Horwitz/Ken Edwards (ed.): *Botsotso*, £12.50

2010

Bill Griffiths: *Collected Earlier Poems*, £18

Jim Goar: *Seoul Bus Poems*, £7.50

* co-published with New Star Books, Vancouver, BC

4Packs series

1996

1: *Sleight of Foot* (Miles Champion, Helen Kidd, Harriet Tarlo, Scott Thurston), £5

1998

2: *Vital Movement* (Andy Brown, Jennifer Chalmers, Mike Higgins, Ira Lightman), £5

1999

3: *New Tonal Language* (Patricia Farrell, Shelby Matthews, Simon Perril, Keston Sutherland), £5

2002

4: *Renga+* (Guy Barker, Elizabeth James/Peter Manson, Christine Kennedy), £5

Narrative series

1998

Ken Edwards: *Futures* (O/P)

2005

John Hall: *Apricot Pages*, £6.50

David Miller: *The Dorothy and Benno Stories*, £7.50

Douglas Oliver: *Whisper 'Louise'*, £15

2007

Ken Edwards: *Nostalgia for Unknown Cities*, £8.50

2008

Paul Griffiths: *let me tell you*, £9

2010

Richard Makin: *Dwelling*, £15

Go to www.realitystreet.co.uk, email info@realitystreet.co.uk or write to the address on the reverse of the title page for updates.

Reality Street depends for its continuing existence on the Reality Street Supporters scheme. For details of how to become a Reality Street Supporter, or to be put on the mailing list for news of forthcoming publications, write to the address on the reverse of the title page, or email info@realitystreet.co.uk

Visit our website at: www.realitystreet.co.uk

Reality Street Supporters who have sponsored this book:

David Annwn	Tony Lopez
Tony Baker	Chris Lord
Charles Bernstein & Susan Bee	Michael Mann
Andrew Brewerton	Peter Manson
Paul Buck	Ian McMillan
Clive Bush	Deborah Meadows
John Cayley	Mark Mendoza
Adrian Clarke	Geraldine Monk
Ian Davidson	Maggie O'Sullivan
Mark Dickinson	Richard Parker
Derek Eales	Pete & Lyn
Michael Finnissy	Richard Price
Allen Fisher/Spanner	Tom Quale
Sarah Gall	Peter Quartermain
Harry Godwin	Tom Raworth
John Goodby	Josh Robinson
Giles Goodland	Lou Rowan
Paul Griffiths	Will Rowe
Charles Hadfield	Maurice Scully
Catherine Hales	Robert Sheppard
John Hall	Peterjon & Yasmin Skelt
Alan Halsey	Julius Smit
Robert Hampson	Hazel Smith
Randolph Healy	Valerie & Geoffrey Soar
Jeff Hilson	Harriet Tarlo
Gad Hollander	Andrew Taylor
Simon Howard	David Tilley
Peter Hughes	Keith Tuma
Elizabeth James &	Lawrence Upton
Harry Gilonis	Catherine Wagner
L Kiew	Sam Ward
Peter Larkin	Carol Watts
Sang-yeon Lee	John Welch/Many Press
Richard Leigh	John Wilkinson
Jow Lindsay	Anonymous: 11