**A Clock Full of Coal** *by Neil Gower*

*For Percy John Gower, 1907-1960*

A slow burn at four o’clock

where your pitted knuckle

winds each Sunday night;

a tacit rite of love, from the hearth.

For Nancy – all *cariad* and *cwtch*,

whose own taut hands can slice

fresh bread paper thin and wring

shirts all but dry - you turn

the tick into the walls, set chimes

to measure school, fireside baths,

shifts, first pints in The Cwm

“to clear the dust”: the run-off

that will settle and build within,

black, by minute and month

to cast you gasping, wracked,

between pit and pendulum

on a makeshift bed in the parlour.

But for now, the boys upstairs,

chain-smokers in waiting,

breathe easy and pull sheets

tight to the tick, the chime;

the chimney breast is warm.