The Apple and the Mountain
Also by David Kennedy

Poetry

The President of Earth: New & Selected Poems
The Roads
The Devil’s Bookshop
My Atrocity
Mistral

Criticism

Necessary Steps: Poetry, Elegy, Walking, Spirit
Elegy
Douglas Dunn (Writers & Their Work)
The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary Poetry and Elsewhere
Women’s Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970-2010:
   Body, Time and Locale

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The Apple and the Mountain

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‘Hortense Breastfeeding Paul’ was first published in The Emma Press Anthology of Motherhood.

Anyone working on Cézanne owes a debt to more than a hundred years of scholarship. I have found the following bloggers and writers particularly useful:

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To Christine, with love
The Apple

— I will astonish Paris
with a single apple!

I will recompose the city
parish by parish, arrondissements

one by one becoming effects of
Calville Blanc d’Hiver,

Reine des Reinettes,
of Provence’s crisp green odours.

The fruit’s bright red, opaque
yellow thoughts will turn

the sour smack of soot and zest of iron
to dew at day break.

Eiffel’s rivets will bleed
with memories of geologic saps.

Paris, you are empty
but for a single apple,

painted as if God had painted it,
from all angles, all apple colours at once,

and long queues of citizens
turning slowly round and round it

in astonishment, moving
on the thoughts of its perfume.
Jas de Bouffan

‘Where the winds live’
in Provençal,
two or three times
painted tilted,

taken aback,
just background for
the chestnut trees
accumulating

in him deeply
year after year
and he in them.
Trees happening

and happening
as stubborn poles,
supple structures,
light breaking through

or broken up.
Systems for knowing,
feeling, breaking
through or not, not,

in him deeply.
Veins in the eye
and in the leaf
‘where the winds live’.
Still Life with Bread and Eggs (1865)

Deep in black space
   objects floating,
       primary objects,
   things of our first world

and the first world of painting:
   two onions, two eggs,
       the wine glass still found
in cafés today, a hearty loaf,

pain de campagne
   or rough-cast baguette
       on a bunched white cloth,
   set foam, sculpted tripes,

domestic fleece, and
   a black knife
       at an angle,
   a simple tool with which

we make the world
   and a jug.
       Animal, vegetable,
   mineral. The same objects,

the world distinguished
   into groups, appear
       and appear in paintings
two, ten, thirty years later,
an emotional vocabulary,
   a continuing conversation,
       dialogue of forms
           and planes, things

of our first world, floating free,
   being reconfigured
       deep in black space
   or sunlit space.
Portrait of Louis-Auguste Cézanne, Reading L’Événement (1866)

Papa in his armchair throne
in his cap
palette knife patois
living room
at the Jas de Bouffan
rough impasto evidence
of work, of a person at work
reading republican news
in France profonde
far from Paris polish
Salon finish
manière couillarde
from the balls from the guts
like the thickly buttered
smears and daubs
of Paul’s Sugar Pot,
_Pears and Blue Cup_
behind Papa’s head
as he reads L’Événement
itself a blank
as if the future’s not set
the knife’s dirty lesson
not done
Scipio the Negro (1867)

The brush keeps asking
‘how is a body?’
The arm loosely braced
against the stool

runs with so much light
it might be bronze.
The back hums differently,
idling motor; light strokes,
dark strokes, are a rhythm
ticking over; quick shifts
in intonation. The head,
asleep, the claw-like arm

it rests on, both in shadow,
are true to light withheld,
an answer the brush
may not want but has to take.
The Bridge at Maincy (1869)

The paint runs cold. The bridge straddles stiff waters. Everything joins forces with brown or green,

the brush strokes not accents or inflections, diacritics of light, but stacked or propped

like broken tiles on collapsed shelves, weight become structure. The bridge straddling

stiff water, the frozen trees, are geometry filled in, clotted with colour somehow weathered

as if a moment built of light, of built light, had suffered time. The paint runs cold.

The two trunks, entwined front left, are the struggle to find form, picked up in girders of branch
and trunk, the rickety,
    warped wood straddling
stiff water, the dissimilar arches
    of speckled stone.

The paint runs cold.
The strokes press in.
A drama of planes
    and angles and curves.

An old bridge, doing its work.
No-one would linger here
even if the strokes left room.
The paint runs cold.
Black Marble Clock (c.1870)

The traditional lemon’s
a joke: this isn’t still life

but a big, ballsy, ‘so what’
collection of wrongness.

Black marble clock with no hands,
the stiff white cloth that rises

under its own starch, scored,
grooved, in repeating panels,

cunty conch, jug that’s either
glass or metal (who cares?),

man-size cup and saucer –
bloke’s salon, man cave comforts

of the mineral, opposite
of a flower arrangement.

Now imagine who would have
this picture in his wallet.
Hortense Breastfeeding Paul (1872)

Hortense dozing, 
dreaming, the contents 
of her content 
  hidden from us, 
dreaming, dozing 
in a long tradition, 
Isis nursing Horus, 
  Memling’s nursing Mary, 
Corot’s breastfeeding mother, 
but the painting,

like Hortense, 
is turned away from 
this knowledge, 
  neither sacred nor sexy. 
Hortense’s closed eyes 
do not return a gaze, 
so do not confirm 
  anything we think we know 
about mothers, breasts or babies. 
  Soft curves 

of pillow and bedding 
  are breast-like, body-like, 
echoing Hortense. 
  And the paint is quiet, 
a sleepy ‘nothing to see here’ hum 
  done quickly. 
The viewer is not required. 
Everyone knows what they know 
and need to know: Hortense 
is breastfeeding Paul.