Notes Relating to an Idea of Blue
Also by David H W Grubb

Fiction:

Beneath the Visiting Moon
The Almost Child
Sorry Days Are Over
Sanctuary
Fire Child
Hullabaloo and Secret Pianos (short stories)

Poetry — selected titles

The Burial Tree
And Suddenly This
From the White Room
Falconer
Last Days of the Eagle
Mornings of Snow
Figures and Masks
The Mind and Dying of Mr Punch
Replies For My Quaker Ancestors
A Banquet for Rousseau
The All Night Orchestra
The Rain Children
Turtle Mythologies
Dancing with Bruno
An Alphabet of Light
Conversations Before the End of Time
The Man Who Thought He Was
The Memory of Rooms (Selected Poems)
The Elephant in the Room
Out of the Marvellous
It Comes With a Bit of Song
The Man Who Spoke To Owls

As Editor:

The Gifted Child at School
An Idea of Bosnia
Sounding Heaven and Earth
Notes Relating to an Idea of Blue

David H W Grubb

Shearsman Books
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Poetic Pilgrimages (Poetry Salzburg, 2011)
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Part 1
Notes Relating to an Idea of Blue

The man was actually seated away from the tourists. He was the last to leave. It was then that I noticed his wine glass was full of stars.

I had spent all day in the field, away from the others. There was nothing left to say and we would soon set off in totally different directions. Years later he wrote about that day and how he loved.

The way that planes fly above our routines and tasks as if they were nearer to something else. The silver of it. The density of it. All those prayers. All those shoes.

The blue piano waits for Mister Punch. The faces of so many children. Meanwhile Judy is having it away again.

Behind the stack of deckchairs the body of a dead hedgehog. It was heading for another winter. Broken leg. Shoebox coffin. The small hole filling with blue.

The lupin rising like a saxophone seeking jazz. The drowned boy, always coming back for more of our noise.

The boy in the tree house saying “what we really need up here is a piano.”

Reaching up in search of his father’s letters he found a baby in the box. The box was red; what an artist might call Russian Red.

We write these things down so that we might find meanings and sometimes we do not tell anybody, especially those we love.

When the Hurdy Gurdy man departed some of us kept looking at the place he had performed and the shadow that remained.
The Honky Tonk Angels and the Silences

This is really about an orchestra at night
and moments when you realise the room works best
when the river is sleeping and poetry invades the kitchen,
for we all love the men in red hats and yellow ties and what
it is to believe in clowns on horseback and the tricks that flash
and now honky tonk angels appear between the silences telling us
that every bird knows what it is about which is why their nests are
small blue boats that hide in our world until the eggs get up and fly.
I think I forgot to tell you about the man who draws on the walls as
he sleepwalks and when he wakes up everything has become blue; the pills,
the water in the jug as he takes the pills, the face of his wife as she
hands him the pills, the angel who keeps popping in to see if he’s OK;
and then there were the blue horses in Ireland as they came into the yard
and moved out into the fields with the gorse jumping up and down
and those deserted cottages clinging to their beings in case some day sad
ancestors might return with the old songs and thin dreams and they
of course would be happy to share the stories of angels as well, the way
it was sometimes a voice only, a snippet of psalm or the sound of a bell
catching silver at midnight or a letter that suddenly jumped right into the
heart. I think I forgot to tell you also about Michael who now goes
out each night to plant the potatoes, kneeling down to place them one at
a time, no doubt whistling beneath the essential moon, covering them in
earth and words and his idea of Heaven. Finally, if it is the only thing I
do remember to tell you; it is said that when an angel has done whatever
the message is about there will be a pause and you will feel it raining at
the back of your head as if you had just been read by a brilliant poem.
Sometimes I like to think that ancient trees can see us as we gather in our
days and that the rooms in old houses are never empty and that a
woman who whistles does it to hide the memory of a man’s obsession.
When we brought the dead horse down from the top field we had to use
ropes and the tractor and six men. We stood around drinking cold tea and
there were stories. And all the time I thought of the horse’s head beneath the
sacking and the early morning light that was still inside it.
Much later we will come into our beginnings; grandmother smelling of
lavender, dog licks, father changing the subject, the god who does not love,
the gardener who takes his teeth out and drinks cold tea, dead birds and
dead babies, pathways in Cornwall that lead to nowhere, wind songs and grass whispers, the meaning of the meanings, adults who never look you in the yes as if you are untidy pets, shadow play and adult play and the silences that appear to say everything and sentences that crack, snap; the declensions of the dead, the husks of small histories, the ornaments in the rooms as we move houses and pack what we want to remember, and remember what we want to forget; faces, forgeries, forgivings. And the silences of the eyes, the way a smiles slides across a face, the joke that cannot have any meaning, the tick tock rescue of the clock or the watch, these gestures of identity and secrets, these lonely and dead estates. Nettle territory and wildness. Stone territory and wind jabber.
On cold days you can hear the silences, island moments, what we heard but never said, entering spaces where the words were waiting, wanting.
When That the Sun

When that the sun has come up against the great unlit and the teeth cleaning has become smiling and the school has become its hum again and men have entered sheds to hear the stories again and the women have spoken to bees then what we know about battle and becoming and how to milk and lay a hedge and the best way to approach miracle has settled in the land and in the mind and in the meaning.

Then comes the bird song and what we do with hands and the very old growing younger all the time and if the trees are to fit in the living room where will the piano go for there must be space for everything and the single shoe will never do and the letters arrive from people we have never met smelling of money and terror and the whatever makes the world go and how would we like to live in a world without such nettles?

Then afternoon with its cradle voice and the quietness of birds and always a man in the top field returning from a dead war and the sun in the bucket like a big fish as the children come home with dates and names and stories and the secret of the meanings and we watch them in the trees and skipping talk and telling us of people who can do jokes and visions and did we know that every second of our lives was already dead?

Then comes the night with its closing verses and what we are to do with dreams and the passages of prayers and those who are to be bullied die all over again and those with bust loves and there are always people who have been here before who know why some animals will never return and that somewhere there is a man writing the History Of Grass and when we are sleeping they let the Rain Children in and listen to such quiets.
The Windows

We don’t do trees anymore. We don’t see angels skipping. Jokes remain in their boxes and when somebody asks what we are waiting for we say the silence of bells and the poetry of ancient rivers. The cat put itself out years ago and even the postman wears white as he delivers other people’s noises. We don’t do fields and when Mrs Webster comes to sing to us we pull a sickie or pretend to sleep and Archie actually died as he pretended to. Next month we are all moving to smaller rooms. There will be rocking chairs of course and we will talk to our mothers and fathers and lost uncles and remember the smell of the children’s bedroom and the roar of their dreams. We will walk down to the sea and into empty classrooms and see the cedar tree and the remains of the chain to the swing and remember where we buried the dead goldfish and the hedge with the dead tramp inside. We don’t do art and television and long walks. What we do is rock a bit and recall interventions and attempt to keep certain dreams at bay about betrayals and loss and poets and remember birthday party laughter and the deaths of friends. We don’t do trees anymore; they have to get along without us. Owls and red kites I expect and those white butterflies flitting and the way light climbs down them until it reaches grass and earth and robin soft. We do gates though. We like the look of gates to take you off and gather you up and when the next field appears there may be people who will greet you with generous comments and plates of sandwiches and jokes about what the living will do without you, poor things. Days stacked up like deckchairs. We won’t need days. Next month we will all be doing future. One day soon I would like to talk to you about selling all of the windows. Sometimes an idea is a pretty thing until we put it on.
And therefore my friend you will never be allowed
to live in a submarine.
You can sit on an old tractor at midnight beneath the cracking
of stars with a silent friend.
You may hurl yourself into a wind and feel the whites of its mind.
You can visit the old peoples home when they throw a party when
another inmate escapes.
You may attempt to interpret what goes on in the minds of midnight
gardeners at the allotments.
You might observe the way that snow disguises the remains of the sniper’s
secrets.
You will in due course learn that we all have silent songs
but, my friend, you will never be permitted to live in a submarine.
It is matter beyond wisdom and politics and what the world might mean.
It is a matter older than grass and mountains and oceans.
You are a wonder, a brilliance, a zazzle;
but, my friend, you will always be an owl.
**How to Make a Horse**

You will need moon and grass and the stench of nettles and the voices of farmers and even their children who have seen births and deaths and the way men with ropes and small children seek to witness the arrival and what blood is about and the manner of winds and ancient rain and the assisting grace of those who have seen all this before and their deliberate and cautious actions as if their hands might at any moment catch fire.

**How to Make a Tree**

Once there were dances and places where the sun fell on the land as if planting a secret and those who witnessed knew that a tree was about future and nests and fruits and the way sun might sing.

**How to Make a God**

A mountain can make you want to do this or days when rain gets inside your sleep and relentless wind and somewhere always there is a gate that should have been locked.
The Spaces Between the Heads of Horses

for Clare and Emily

There were horses here once;
they owned the top field and when
they came down to the yard at evening
each one was heavy with light and grass.

At Easter, on the beach, they stood where the sea
became ice, stilled, hardly moving, as if they might be
searching for trees, hedges, a gate, that place where a
field becomes opening, track, passage.

Low light levels and shifting surfaces
and a boy with his red kite that must have seemed
like something on fire, jerking as if wanting
to escape, leaping to find wild.

But it did not happen; the kite was tamed,
dark sky appeared to suck away the sea;
the horses were led back to the farm
and a world of winds and water.

After; the horses were sold for slaughter,
the farm bent over, fell down, split, spilled;
I can still see the heads of those horses,
the spaces between when their names
were called.
**Taking the Dead Horse Down**

Taking the dead horse down from the field late in the afternoon took six men and two boys and bottles of cold tea and some more cake.

Most of the time we could hear bits of sky still inside it and somebody said it was rivers but I liked the idea of early morning sky.

It took ropes and chains and a cradle thing and when it began to come on rain the horse shone silver and smelt of old pear tree.

Dragging it across the yard the dogs yarled and then one of the men got in the way of the head as it swung down sudden; swearing.

The fact is its head was still full of morning.
When We Said Goodnight

When we said goodnight to the men on Ward Twelve
we sometimes wondered if they might be sane in their dreams,
the stumbling, worrying, collapsing ceasing.
Did they become earlier versions, bright and eloquent,
capable with shoelaces and door handles and crosswords
and getting the old jokes just right?
Did they get the order right, the sequences correct,
or even in dreams were they distant observers as if these dreams
belonged to other people? Were trees real?
Michael said he kept his dreams in a beautiful box
but now that he was dead there was no point in dreams.
Did I want to know?
Motorcycle

And when I was told that I was dead
I left the bed and walked out to the garden.

The owls were not there and the poppies
had completed their fire dancing.

I waited for you by the summer house
as another blue day became words

and then I went back and got on
with my death.

It was like eating rain at first and then
I met Chagall and he painted a motorcycle

which took us everywhere.

Because we were dead we could dance on
pin heads and sit inside rainbows
and enter poems before they were written.

I waited for you by the log pile
and knew each tree
that had been cut down

and then Chagall said he wanted
to play some more with the sound
of light.

Sometimes we played blue kazoos
and sat at the white piano with
Edward Elgar

who told us that when he was a piano tuner
everything in the world was possible
and that handstands were better than
bandstands.
I waited by the silver birch as it shed
some of its bark on the grass
like scrolls

and thought of what I might
write on some of them
to surprise you.
Life’s Not Fair But My Knickers Are

—Fairtrade strapline at John Lewis

It’s a good idea, like Braille rainbows and the parrot at the barbers that keeps cutting in just when there might be a silence or the Park Pretty sign at the side of the ruined hotel. Even if you don’t, we do, sometimes and often, I mean go there alone, leave messages for people we will never see, salute Ben Bloomer who is Head of Customer Services and who knows what you eye you will one day buy. What you see is what you dream etc etc. And there you go again, the eclectic tricking the mundane, the dead angel abiding, the lost frozen in the future, Jesus asleep in the park, somewhere a nowhere, ancient trees hugging the future and church bells calling us to the always. It’s a good idea, like the poem that has no end and silent songs and the snowman seated on the bench knows that there will never be a snow woman or snow children or even a small snow dog. What happens may never repeat itself, the farm in winter is about arrivals and the bank manager got the job because his name is Jolly. Then again, we keep meeting people coming back from where they never left; Elgar’s Dream Children hitting the hard stuff for all the saddest reasons and the man from Readers Digest wafting jojoba.
Shockbox, Ballyhoo and Grass Blowing

I was nevertheless writing this late in the early
when the buttons were off and trash talk began
and there was again this dispute about just what
was who and did grass matter and whoever it was
who invented rain should remain locked in the?
mark which was hovering again and I decided
to let it have its way concerning the life of pigs
and what trees see and what I might say in the
next sermon about the man not on the cross and
the trick of the tomb and what took place and then
there were boys in the field running down to the
stream to skinny dip it was so cold they must
have been ghosts of the Garland twins drowning
again at this time every year and never seen in
summer, in sunlight, in harvest time, in daylight
and sometimes you hear them say that the only
thing you remember for ever is the smell of grass.