

The Derbyshire Poems

Also by Peter Riley:

Poetry

Love-Strife Machine
The Canterbury Experimental Weekend
The Linear Journal
The Musicians, The Instruments
Preparations
Lines on the Liver
Tracks and Mineshafts
Ospita
Noon Province
Sea Watches
Reader
Lecture
Sea Watch Elegies
Royal Signals
Distant Points
Alstonefield
Between Harbours
Noon Province et autres poèmes
Snow has settled ... bury me here
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Passing Measures: A Collection of Poems
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Excavations
A Map of Faring
The Llŷn Writings
Greek Passages

Prose

Two Essays
Company Week
The Dance at Mociu

The Derbyshire Poems

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Acknowledgements

The texts presented in this volume originally appeared in
Following the Vein (Albion Village Press, 1975),
Lines on the Liver (Ferry Press, London, 1981),
Tracks and Mineshafts (Grossteteste Press, Matlock, 1983) and
Two Essays (Grossteteste Press, Matlock, 1983).

Fourteen pages from *Tracks and Mineshafts* subsequently appeared
in revised form in Peter Riley's *Passing Measures* (Carcenet Press,
Manchester, 2000). We are grateful to Carcanet Press for their
permission to include those poems in their original guise
in this new edition.

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The Derbyshire Poems

Preface

These two books were first published in the reverse order of their conception and most of their writing: *Tracks and Mineshafts* by Grosseteste Press in 1983, *Lines on the Liver* by Ferry Press in 1981.

Tracks and Mineshafts was constructed from a lot of text written between 1978 and 1981, originally thought of as a work in the open-field mode concerning lead mining in the carboniferous limestone zone of Derbyshire and North Staffordshire. As a result of a conflict among different modes of documentation this was abandoned and what was rescued from it into the book was only what was clearly poetry, or a kindred kind of prose.

I see *Lines on the Liver* as a continuation, which begins by working its way quite laboriously through prose of hard thought, much of it still related to the “mining” scenarios of *Tracks*. I sometimes think I could have rendered these chunks of declaration and inquiry more attractive by attributing them to a collection of fictitious imams and rabbis, or a debate of Orthodox monks in some monastery hanging on the side of a cliff like cubist swallows’ nests—“And the Archdeacon Vesuvius said...” etc. Anyway, the first-person singular hammering its way towards daylight through this section is finally released into short diurnal poems, a process which is continued in *Ospita* (1987) and the poems of *Snow has Settled...* (1997) in pursuit of more structured verse.

When 14 pages from *Tracks and Mineshafts* were included in the selection *Passing Measures*, published by Carcanet in 2000, they were all given titles and varying amounts of revision took place. The purpose of this was that they should stand alone out of their original context, as poems. In the present volume these texts have mostly reverted to their original states. No decision was ever made in the writing of the second part of this book as to whether the text on any one page was necessarily one poem, as against two or more small poems, or part of a poem, or no poems at all.

The changes that have been made to both books for this edition are mainly for the sake of verbal improvement, which amounts conceptually to little more than the correction of spelling mistakes.

The three poems of *Following the Vein*, published in an earlier version by Albion Village Press in 1975, clearly belong with the other material printed here. They were the first to be written and were completed much later, in a mode of symbolising the human form which I couldn't have extended into the larger works.

The *Two Essays* were published by Grosseteste Press as an appendage to *Tracks and Mineshafts* "to elucidate some of the imagery of the poems" in material and immaterial terms respectively, but they obviously ran beyond this purpose.

If anyone were to suggest that my use, in any of these works, of imagery of underground mining or of natural underground process in a discourse of the human spirit invoked "the unconscious" I would have to disagree. As far as I am concerned the process engaged is that of work, including the labour of coping with the subcutaneous mechanisms of the human body which empower exteroception.

Peter Riley,
Cambridge, April 2010

TRACKS AND MINESHAFTS

Material Soul

GIVEN TO death and life, no choice,
fallen into these terms, borne as the
tide bears the wave to its strike,
cut to bedrock, crest, charge the shore.
Given to this, life carving itself out
of its knowledge and the earth
is a cup to which the lip fits,
and the senses' final construct moves
relentlessly through substance to the houses
of light, mutual devotion

joined to death; danger
specifies its fear, the message forms
its own access or nerve and behind
the point of contact perception opens
onto a cleared space, a settlement, holding
people of all ages together,
the whole of life, is this shift
back, this rearing

and arrival, which leaves a mark,
a birth documentation or yell echoing
down the unlivable corridors and arcades
of transitional time. Flesh scores lines
in the calcium slag of earth and the spirit
wakes, the needle enters the groove,
polar tension shakes the circuit, which
responds, gapes, tremors, issues
forth into the acts of day, for good.
Peace is nothing without this resistance,
engaging distance beyond any possible
repair to the end, the inhabited city.

And this is what we see, and live, all
round us the world arrives at its end.
Welcome it, plunge into the stone,
never to be seen again.

Eight Preludes

i

Each day some further light each day some farther dark.
Carry on go here there make a note of it what for.
Climb the hill walk down get in the car and drive away.
It is nothing to do with me. Valley stream
meadow waterfall gorge. There is something else there
nothing to do with us, that makes no difference.
We can go we can stay at home and drink tea, it is
still there. Far reaches of the Upper Manifold, where
is it, what is it, green chapel if it rains it rains.
Smear of cloud in the distance, book of nothing not
inhabited, ruins of the whole thing. Light on water
quick by blue shale cliffs, thick in fern, light filling,
bearing the vocabulary of a curved lack. Mineral vein
running down the hillside up the other side and away
over the moors, worked or not. Or not worked, unknown,
what difference does that make? Light filling the valley
with not a soul to be seen, dark beams of disappointment
filling the city streets, death shadowing the grass.
What am I then as you which otherwise stays sleeping, or
if we weren't in the dark star's way would our sense
still open beyond the ground whether we knew it or not?
No, the material soul yearns by the day's annoyance for real.
So does love in silver boxes hence dispatch our joyful stake
and I turn us again, front to front to front.

ii

Night outside is the theatre of our patience
as you lie beside me in the dark loft;
distant thrust of steam locomotive in some
vast marshalling yard, cold papers blown
across the square.

Night contracts the distances of love and fortune
to a presence, angles filling the dark room
loud with inaudible instructions like an
equestrian statue in the full moon and a far away
telephone rings.

It is me trying to contact a third person
out of the past or lost in the city streets while
night's cover persists—footsteps of the heart agent
passing by ticket office and clock tower
to an abandoned station.

Then false dawn brings a nil invoice and faint lines
near the ceiling, a small child runs down the corridor
holding a toy angel, wings flapping screaming at us
not to owe—the world is wanted, and full, our full hearts
crack at it.

And famine of the earth in pictorial wars, false
tensions, monetarisation of time whereas the emptiness
is real and there is no return, no restitution
oh keep intact the underwing starts, the
cup through it.

iii (a)

A sense of urgency and the kitchen floods. Most of the time gets mislaid.

The weekdays pass to the side; called to the present we wind ourselves up and something quite remote comes out: old jazz, demolished cafés where we breakfasted in our prime, a head full of grey mornings, quick postcards, old thorns . . . What time do I have to get up tomorrow?

Most of the time belongs to most of the people but I can't hear you, I can't find you, hero of our time, toy of our governors, I can't read you, I can't hear you for the grinding of milk-teeth, bone against bone, teeth chewing teeth in the cavernous half-light of a bottling shop . . . Hero of the double white line, humanity brought to the idea of itself, dying of imputative success, chewing itself to image pulp and anyway, when will a human idea ever eat real raisins or hold my hand on the way to the station when the time comes for questions? Every time it rains I know a nation is a logarithm of love, how the present tangles itself in desires, how the mess we make of it unwinds into space.

iii (b)

Snap. There is a reason
why discomfort gains the route.
The honey drips but the fire
leaps: be held out.

iii (c)

The reasons are all eaten in secret
or baked into Easter buns.
Superfluous honey corrodes
the map. We spit out pips
and fragments of grindstone
into the fire.

iii (d)

Thin liquids! give us some
annals of the orchard,
some fire laden rob.

iv

By the worm in the sky, by instruction,
the people would enter the state due them?
Unless otherwise stated it is a phantom dispatch.

Our wires live and respond; high gritstone kerbs
energy which isn't ours: we intersect, recognise
and worry. How we worry—darkness is

Two things and one of them (ness) is light
cutting through us. No rest, no tuition,
enter the island state guided in twain.

I am constantly bugged by something I think I'm supposed to be saying: the philosophy of poetry or the joys of wisdom or the truth that snaps the world back into place. Where is it? It's easy enough to focus on nothing like a missing pilot and set absence in the text just to have it there before us, newly reflective; but you are *elsewhere* and it's very uncertain that something human is actually there at the end of this dispersed line wanting or waiting for anything on earth. Surely the fire is getting low; if we don't signal our love there will be no reason for dying. I turn to the simple sky-trapped animal, the *looke in they heart and write*, bit. Plentiful and expensive. The heart, of course, is a nonexistent book in which we read the education of the world. The adventures of Bugs Hunter. What rubbish. *I am not I, pitie the tale of me.*

Meanwhile, someone is stockpiling sugar in an abandoned theatre across the road from where we live, and the cat returns for her dinner. Give it her, naturally. We can't turn back at this stage. Open her tin, welcome her children behind the couch, find them as good homes as time and this world afford. These necessary acts compose one by one the map of grace. Everything glows with sheer presence: couch, kittens, bugs, boredom, dark, ness, it all slowly gathers to a landscape, an inhabited and structured landscape with walls and ditches and paving by which we hold on to the world like a vast hand. And that also is love, whose grip, routed into purpose, steadies us against the earth exactly here: dispersing in our heat but consolidated by fear, the tension of the wing, that opens and closes. What wing? What rubbish again. Opposite the theatre of sugar a wing of rubbish opens to our esteem.

Willing also to be remembered, lost
 in fairest love-task scholarships such
 as bring sight to its own predilection
 where the broken edges catch the light
 unfolding, a tract where sense
 and love fuse in the energy of script
 holding the world together at that point.

And immense wastage, entirely ours
 as we humanise the world and then resent it
 objectify it and wonder where it's gone
 and place such clamps on our speech that
 most of the people become figments of something
 shot past like a disintegrated pudding too late for
 winter, lost in clouds of fume.

But I also think of you as fairest before sight
 in a vocabulary which is generally considered
 nonsense out of a 13th Century context and still
 fairer dark by the light that glims beyond.
 Well, it is night at the crossroads and many years
 since a dignitary came this way. The faces
 of the houses are silent. Time suddenly rusts.

vii

Faint calls from the mines,
intrusive holes in the landscape
or star targets.

Of the heart of the earth
where the one-person is undivided
and the market serves the home.

Of the oceanic cycles
where the dream disperses into day
and we cannot rest in our value.

Of the self cast.