

Buried Music

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Poetry

Overdrawn Account
Anaglyptya
This Other Life
More About the Weather
Entertaining Fates
Leaf-Viewing
Lost and Found
About Time Too
Selected Poems
Ghost Characters
There are Avenues
The Look of Goodbye
English Nettles
The Returning Sky
Like the Living End

Prose

Untitled Deeds
Spirits of the Stair: Selected Aphorisms
Foreigners, Drunks and Babies: Eleven Stories

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Poems by Antonia Pozzi

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Criticism

In the Circumstances: About Poems and Poets
Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen
Twentieth Century Poetry: Selves and Situations
Poetry & Translation: The Art of the Impossible

Peter Robinson

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Music*

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In memory of
Thomas Fisher Robinson
1920-2011

One

Dirty World

'On n'écrit pas pour emmerder le monde'
Raymond Queneau

Like characters in daytime comedy shows
glanced at through a mosquito screen
with its mesh unifying the scene,
our neighbours appear at French windows.

Against a scorching white wall, those people's
laundry droops on balconies.
Their block's new-planted sentinel trees
shriveled in noon stillness. Lombardy poplars

point towards cloudless, cerulean blue
above a shortcut to the shops.
Pallid grass, pallets and packaging collapse
like an overheated worldview

as its moral hazard, or lone mosquito voice,
hums past the speech-mark of our angle-poise.

For the Years

'...the remorseless passing
of the years.'

Mark Ford

'You get through the years,' is what he said
beside night's un-let office space—
meaning mortgage payments to be made
or weather-threats up ahead.

But then they steal us from ourselves
and, no, I'm not myself today,
a memory of the living will, apology
for a past on bookshelves.

'You get through the years,' and what he meant
is debts would be paid—
us having a care, then, having our cares,
it being time we spent.

Another Dawning

starts a parody of indigestion
in the heat-pipes' creaks, ticks, knocks
as central heating switches on.
At last, the darkness cracks.
And now you know each return of the sun
is a miracle to insomniacs.

It's like we've been reprieved once more,
given this daily chance
to reach barely tangible rewards,
find some purpose or other
meaning as sunlight begins to gather
in blind slats at a window
thanks to the gift of a few words.

On the Edge of Illness

1. About the Sky

Beyond the pale of trees
and littered undergrowth,
there it is again, our moon;
full between bare branches,
it scuds near rooftop level
above a semi's chimney pots.
Full, or faintly on the wane,
seen suddenly, it takes a mind
off the day's absurdities ...
Although we know about it now,
have been there, done that, still
intact it throws some light
on this road back home
disturbing dulled, automaton
limits with its milky glow
so un-bereft of mysteries
for no, not gone, they're there
at the edges of attention.

2. Duck Skaters

Dazzlingly cloudless day,
grassed spaces all a whiteness
as this ghosting ground-mist
mystifies the frosted lake,
duck skaters on their element
sense ice weaken, crack,
letting them take to it again
when they get the water back.

3. A Scored Day

Meanwhile, sun had gone on trying
as cloud-shapes made their way
across the slatted window panes
like melted music on a stave
past sheds, rust-eaten at their edges,
died-back plantings, other signs
of stubbornly rampant ivy hedges
crisscrossed by washing lines—
until a moon, egg-sliced by blinds,
rises in sky's deeper blue,
reminds you, smudged by further cloud,
of a broken night's sleep now;
and though there's no end of the world,
given all that's said or done
beyond your illness horizon,
it was as if nothing had happened.

In the Drift

Convalescent, by the Kennet side,
I see two raucous geese glide
down to a synchronized landing
through scattered waterfowl.
Cygnet nests built under wharves,
the pendant willows in a row
hold tints for the late spring's
promises of leaves
in branches' blurs, a greenish yellow.
A Fire and Rescue launch goes by
and, look, that ukiyo-e print
has a swan stood on the current
absorbed in waves of its headlong flow.

Feeling fragile, a memory of health,
it's my old self rehearsed
in piecemeal efforts at improvement,
finding unreal expectations
blight even what we do.
Stripped beds, the ring-fenced saplings
of a vanished factory's park
derive sense from resistless drift—
that incorrigible makeshift
devaluing, then revaluing things,
now the body politic
has to get its health back too.

All Change

Then next thing you know
from a partial leaf-fall
come re-emergent distances,
new chill factors, time
shifting more quickly, and loss is
sensed as that bit more precise
now raindrops lit by streetlamps
are speckling the panes
and thunderheads, a shorting day,
its crepitations over us,
again, they cover such a range
of start-lines at each terminus
making our last hopes first past the post,
as when a train manager cuts in to say:
'All change, please. All change.'

Rubbish Theory

'By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered into pieces without this fiction of an occupation.'

Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*

1

Now they're carting away the dust-heaps
on an earthmover and truck—
the pulverized halls impacted with work,
ink, tears and perspiration.
Hurrying through a quintessence of dust
blown into eyes and face,
we ghost past disturbance in the trees,
a flustered rustling at winter's end.
The dust-heaps catch what light there is
on a day rain-bearing wind
gusts remnant leaves about the place
and taking the register, ticking all boxes,
mind, I'll pay my way
with this fiction of an occupation ...
Year on year,
I'll be guessing who those characters are
or dropping into poetry
despite each sudden blast, each blight;
now dust-heaps disappear.

2

The streets are paved with takeaway
wrappers, strewn sheets, cans
and posters for elections ...
Attenuated traipsing figures
have their shadows stalking them,

each with a private memory
migrant to this point.
Sun sets on brick and greenery.
More distant figures come—
those struggling to get here,
others who'd not made it
and you that have, uncertain eyes
at checkout till or queue.

3

From blue-grey rain-fronts cut with sun
one slant, mitigating ray
back-lights the whole equivocal scene.
A bus runs through old factory
dockland this late afternoon—
its slums of possibility,
olfactory traces quite gone in thin air.
The dusk glows over familial faces
and matter out of place is
glinting with a change of weather,
mind or heart, if chance would have it
and, no, we'll never, never, never ...
Love, we'll pay our way.

Coincidences

for Tim and Jo Dooley

Uncanny that we should be journeying home
in the one compartment underground,
but somewhere between King's Cross and Baker Street
over the Hammersmith & City Line's roar
I was sure that the words were 'poetry review'
and then a swallowed chuckle or a laugh,
your signature style, and it was you—
Orpheus on his route back from a reading ...
Me too; and it was uncanny enough
in the vast metropolis, our subterranean coincidence;
uncanny, but apt we should meet this way
only a moment before you got off,
the train door sliding shut between us ...
still more left to say.

Uncanny, but then again meeting that way
fitted well with your calling, this serious game.
Fellow travellers, underground,
and after inspiration, Eurydice, a loved one
or reaching toward new readers,
we'd waited for cadences slowly to form;
had conjured from nowhere the ghost interlocutors,
characters, their lives coinciding
a moment to gather discrete turns of phrase
for the traded confidences
snatched between Tube stations.
How they tune in above circumambient noise,
are lost from sight in your conurbation's
little streets hurled against the great—
its darkness, solitude, silences ...