

The Look of Goodbye

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By the Same Author

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PETER ROBINSON

THE LOOK OF GOODBYE

Poems 2001-2006

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for Ornella, Matilde & Giulia

One

The Red Dusk

for Paul Lally

I'm starting from the teddy-choirboy
who taught us what painting the town red meant
in a city where you simply had to know
who'd done what on any given Saturday
at Anfield or away —
where lives would be one long might-have-been
if the referee was blind or a linesman biased;
and even though you'll never walk alone
I could almost taste it in a smoky sky
welling up like burst blood-vessels round the gates,
full time blown, as down we went
with the rivers of red between brick terrace houses.

You remember: a sunset was blazing on the Mersey
where the battleship *Potemkin* — let's say — lay
at anchor through the policemen's strike . . .
Uplifted, carried forward by a dimmed red tide,
red-nosed, red-faced, we were each being sent
off into the late light of a vast inflamed eye.

Brief Visitation

You again, and even here
back-lit against the window pane,
it's as if you bring me
word of a possible way to be,
of things I could only say with you listening,
things that don't have sense without you —
like a gleam coming in through the window,
its light reflected off piled snow.

Yes, and I'm astonished by
you again, you in this room here with me
(perhaps you're shrugging, shaking your head
at every least thing I've said)
or else I'm listening, lost for words,
and eyes un-focus on a pattern-less carpet,
you saying, 'Don't fret, don't forget . . .'
out of the blue bright sky.

You again, and even here
the pine trees' stiffened waves of ice
look pleased to be noticed by one more stranger.
Defunct firms, bars, non-places impinge or
defer for a moment to this bitter afternoon
when, sooner or later, go you must —
and you're leaving very, very soon,
you again, if only just.

Alien Registration

'Dr. Robinson, you need to renew
your alienation card . . .'

Daybreak and even the clouds flake
away at their edges like fish scales,
like rust, like blood on your lenses.
For a moment, I'm really not sure
where this particular darkness visible
might be, and you know how it is, an obscure
remorse or worse, something worse
sticks round the memories of words;
and I squirm as between clock and bed,
porous with daylight, darker shapes
fill out the outline in a vanity mirror
speckled at its edges; and sure enough,
glancing at the photograph,
you notice a face they no longer recognize.

So you know, you don't need to be told
how the frustrations will gather
at a stuck traffic signal or stop-sign,
when queues in official places
leave us all at another loose end . . .
There'll be little else for it but to take
that gap between sky and unfenced concrete
as storm clouds come sloping above me
to shed their droplets on the finest grey
dust you might ever hate to see —
being humbled by that disintegrating day
when any slight change in the weather
was enough to be wondering what in the world
could possibly put it back together?

As Like as Not

'Is the Pacific Sea my home?

John Donne

Comes an ambivalent sky towards evening,
dark dropping fast as we climb
up through the higgledy-piggledy houses
with dusk-flares in overgrown
blind corner mirrors, precarious
contracts, un-renewable futures
reflected as street-fronts and shop-fronts aglow
back here in the back of beyond
where it's like our real life were over:
we're living a posthumous existence,
a paradise or purgatory, whatever,
picked out like the ant platoons
at work on a hillside of caves,
their cunning passages in the glooms
under hortensia leaves.

And this is what's become of us.
Endangered, we have lived
playing noughts and crosses with the days
squared out on a calendar;
we've coped with the solitude,
the postal disappointments or delays,
chewing seaward cloud
and other enigmatic food.

Past rows of gingko or zelkova, elm,
we've tried to seem at home,
though now and again I'm overwhelmed
by neon in late afternoon, an alien
gazing at an alien horizon.

Then yet once more, in this far-off sunset,
I'll start on a theme to reconcile
ourselves with precipitous mountains
and the benefits of exile.

Transit Lounge

1

Now as that story's stopped meaning a thing
and the next one not barely begun,
when neither here nor there we're over
the Gulf of Finland or Baltic, it might be
you find yourself over-susceptibly
sustained by no more than a song,
moved by implausibly lucky plot twists
bringing tears with no sense to the eye.
It might be, as like, you discover
hopes and regrets I thought we were over
catching up in the cloudless sky;
then subside, exhausted, barely exist
in that thin red arc across a map
somewhere on the edge of sleep —
till awoken for our continental breakfast.

2

Then it might be this place we've arrived at
so as to leave it shows promise
of futures not ours in the distance,
a distance with church spires, with fir trees
and no choices, nothing else for it
but the fire crews' practice wrecks
parked like *memento mori* on an apron —
us sitting, waiting, watching the spray
from long-haul carriers as they touch down.

3

Nothing else for it since we don't want
soft toys, souvenirs, or the duty free,
don't want to thin attenuated
senses of selfhood, despise others' children

at their games of hide-and-seek
circling around us with shrill cries —
but squirm from them as all I've hated
finds me out here in my weakness,
here in the limbo of now.

4

Though now I've my feet on the ground,
the ground slightly rises and falls
with an undulant motion, it seems.
Then we wrap ourselves up in the tiredness,
ineluctable circumstance, and slow time
of a day going on far too long.

5

Long drawn out by this three-hour loose end,
we even get used to the transit lounge —
being nowhere in particular
with time to kill or spare,
and specially when the sky
starts to prepare for its night-flight schedules,
when thoughts of being or getting there
are beaten to airy thinness by
streams of blood in the layered cloud cover —
we even get used to this being for now
among thousands of the other stranded souls.

For the Birds

for Ralph and Hester

Certainly, rare birds converged on your lawn
one summer's day as from the east,
north, round the corner they had flown

in for a chat, yes, and what a commotion
that parakeet on upper branches caused —
and what quiet once they're gone.