

A
BODY
OF
WORK
66/00

TREVOR
JOYCE

WITH
THE
FIRST
DREAM
OF
FIRE
THEY
HUNT
THE
COLD

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Table of Contents

The Poems of Sweeny, Peregrine

Narrative	10
Verse	
I God has given me life	17
II The blackthorn drinks my blood again	18
III Is it the cold that wakes me	19
IV My lids still slack	20
V This clearing is too open	21
VI I am too weak for wars	22
VII Madness shrieks beneath my feet	23
VIII When the livid sky is swollen with thunder	24
IX In summertime the blue-grey herons stand	25
X Frost stands in the air	26
XI You whose thorned orbs fix me	28
XII Life is loud in the glen	29
XIII Mountains are rivered slopes	31
XIV Dense wood is my security	32
XV My sleep is sad	34
XVI Four winds fetch many miles	35
XVII I occupy in alien woods	36
XVIII Enmity is sorrow	37
XIX My madness finds congruity	39
XX I am miserable	41
XXI Cliff of Farannan	42
XXII I once thought that the quiet speech	43

Pentahedron & others

The Moon as Other than a Green Cheese	46
River Tolka and Botanical Gardens	47
The Importance of the Bells	48
Dead Man's House	50
An Execution Remembered	51
Construction	52
Gulls on the River Liffey	54
Surd Blab	55
Diagram + Sun	60
Schedule of Monuments	62
Chronicle	63
Death is Conventional	64
Christchurch. Helix. 9th Month.	68
The Fall	69

Twin Relative Deposition	70
Dynamic	71
The Roads, People, the River & Town	73
Parallax	74
Time Piece. Clocks Err Through Anger of the Watcher	75
Pentahedron	77
Elegy of the Shut Mirror	82
Fulgurite	84
Passages	86
One	87
Mirror: Of Glazier Velazquez	88

stone floods

The Opening	92
Fast Rivers	93
The Turlough	95
Strands	97
Verses with a Refrain from a Solicitor's Letter	99
Cold Snap	102
Lines in Fall	103
Parting Words	105
Cold Course	106
Coumeenole	107
Tocharian Music	108
Cry Help	109
Chimaera	110
Courting Trouble	112
Aperture	114
Section	115
Tohu-bohu	116
'93/4	120
Owning	123
The Course of Nature	124
Golden Master	126
Hearsay	128
To-do	132

Syzygy

The Drift

• and then there is this sound	136
• the red fish leaping from the mouth	136
• noise of concerns sequestered	137
• bones may well	137

• when the thieving	138
• sea will fit full of fish of many orders	138
• in three quarters now you lie	139
• jugs standing sealed and safe exhale	139
• millions are too vast	140
• the tune of several mysteries	140
• exposure to the extreme	141
• we suffer an old vertigo	141
The Net	142
 Hopeful Monsters	
Phases of the eye agitated through wings	146
Damaged, we bleed time	149
Scene preserved with light crazing	152
 Shorter Poems	
A Father of the Useful Arts	156
The Fishers Fished	157
Approach of Bodies Falling in Time of Plague	159
Proceeds of a Black Swap	161
Data Shadows	163
behaviour self!	169
Incidents at Cloghroe, Co. Cork	171
Watch	172
Concentration	173
Joinery	175
Let Happen	178
DARK SENSES PARALLEL STREETS	180
Without Asylum	182
 Trem Neul	 185
<hr/>	
Some Notes	
To the Poems	233
To the Illustrations	241

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for Angela

stone floods

(1995)

*these are for Nora
my durable dam*



Dragons and fish see water as a palace, and it's just like human beings seeing a palace. They don't know it flows. If someone says "this palace you see is running water," the dragons and fish will be astonished, the way we are when we hear that "mountains flow". Still, there may be some dragons and fish who understand that the columns and pillars of palaces and pavilions are flowing water.

Dogen, Mountains and Waters Sutra

Rocks turn to rivers, rivers turn to men.

Robert Herrick

The Opening

for P.C.

You are reading this book
On the table are letters a mirror some flowers
from which a leaf falls down
Behind is a wall in which there is no door
but you have opened it
and gone through

You hear these words
Your shadow moves across some photographs a leaf the threshold
which is badly worn
Beneath is the floor in which there is no chasm
yet you have stumbled
and dropped through

I have shut the book
and there is silence here
Now by the window
I look to the night
which has begun to fall
which will not be long now

Fast Rivers

for Michael Smith

right at the very
instant of delivery
the messengers
begin to fail
and are already
exhausted

*when we see the moment so
instantaneously
spent
reckoning surely we regard
time not yet come
extinct
let not the fool delude himself
that which he foresees
will last
no longer than the bygone show
and all things thus
shall pass*

*our lives are fast rivers soon
delivered to the sea
of death
whereto go all dominions down
exhausted and
are quenched
there must find the slightest rill
with tributary stream
and flood
all then levelled utterly
daylabourer
and lord*

*this world is but a road to one
wherein is no abiding
grief
he needs due bearing who would not
from that true path
fall off
the setting out is at our birth
we travel as we live
dying
at last complete the course
and in that death
lie down*

The Turlough

for Celestine

It is raining elsewhere

Vertical rivers reverse
stone floods
the karst domain
each sink turns source

Rock brings forth fruit elsewhere

The action of the clock
runs down
through fissured hours
wells up lost time

All is not lost elsewhere

The emigrant returns
old loves
reach out their arms
gold leaves fly up

Time heals all wounds elsewhere

Bullet returns fire from flesh
to gun
the dried stain weeps
bone knits again

No mark gets the cold deck elsewhere

Boxed by his court of spades
Jack wakes
from his stone watch
that springs each arch

London Bridge is falling down elsewhere

Circuits and gates collapse
in sand
the face the glass
composed breaks down

Raw head finds bloody bones elsewhere

Vast hands stop at the stretch
knuckle
of blazing gas
and wrist of stars

The gods explode this turn elsewhere

Red giant and white dwarf
come in
in a blue shift
Venus meets Mars

There is thunder now elsewhere

Under an incandescent sky
flash floods
spread out this lake
is on no map

Strands

for P.C.

I have come indoors
Nothing moves outside
but the sea
in these drowned valleys
disassembling its past

If there is dark fruit forming
the roots will run deep in this rich earth
the growing timbers branch
through your night dreams

I have shut the door
The air outside is harsh
where the sea
broadcasts sharp seed
over a moon of salt

If there are metals ripening
that corn will bend to this slow storm
that new bread rise
through your unrecognized intents

I have opened this book
because elsewhere
there is only the sigh
of tall cliffs shod with sand
walking into the sea

If there are things intended
those strands will reach beyond this time
those vestiges extend
through your disquietude

Uncertain fingers now dissect
from the transformed wave
stone fish
They spin and sink
The sand receives them

Verses with a Refrain from a Solicitor's Letter

for George Hitching

*As when a faded lock of woman's hair shall cause a man to cut his throat
in a bedroom at five o'clock in the morning; or when Albany resounds with
legislation, but a little henpecked judge in a dusty office at Herkimer or
Johnstown sadly writes across the page the word 'unconstitutional' – the glory
of the Capitol has faded.*

Benj. Paul Blood

Dear Sir, I was this morning straight
after the news and forecast
hanging from an old appletree in my garden
a small Japanese bell
when I received through the post your importunate
and quite misguided threats

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

An injunction, you say. An obstruction,
you say. You've a lot of chat for someone
that's not even clear who he's talking to.
Does this help: not only have I
not erected any obstruction
in the form of a barbed wire fence or otherwise

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

but I'm attempting today to rest and recover
from the effects of an obstruction in my own passages?
I have, it pains me to have to spit it out, a strangury,
and you've got the wrong man, chief,
I've better blockages to worry about
than the one at the back of some godforsaken hotel in Midleton

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

What's more, my bell is mute.
The inscribed slip that made its tongue
chime in the wind, flew off. It's not my day.
Far from putting up barbed wire fences,
I'd prefer, right now, to see one of those bright Byzantine
Christs come striding across from the opposite hills

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

fresh from baptizing Adam, vast and very masterful,
lugging a patriarch along with each arm no doubt
from some new-harrowed hell
and scattering from his feet a fine debris
of locks, bolts, spancels, cuffs, gyves, fetters, stocks,
and other miscellaneous hindrances

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

And what would our Neighbourhood Watch do then?
Put the polis on his tail, stay home, and watch that hooligan
as he'd come, breaking contracts, flattening fences
and leaving gates and prisons open behind him.
Yes, he's the man would soon break down
the calculus that stopped my flow

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

And not like a thief in the night,
but openly I'd have him
eliminate all limitations,
peel walls and roofs away like rind
and with his knife of stars
reveal what soft exotic fruit grew ripe within

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

unchain Prometheus from his rock
to stretch and scratch at last and fire
stones at that bloody bird,
allow Eurydice ascend
to feel the strange dew fall
chill through her faded dress

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

remove the ratchet from the clock, North
from the needle, run the many down to one. (Oh no,
hold on there, God, we can't have that!
I won't be one with our friend the illicit
erector of barbed wire barricades,
or this damned notary. Cut!)

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

It's evening now. The bell's transformed.
With a laurel leaf lashed to its tongue
it cries out clear in the wind.
I'll just sit tight till the Ipral sets me up
and I no longer pass blood,
or feel weak when I attempt to stand

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

take idle note of that shrill song:
past flight and hot pursuit
terror passing cold restraint to come
then when I'm up to it again, forgetfully,
turn that stock still.
I trust this terminates our correspondence, Sir

and in this regard time shall be made of the essence

Cold Snap

Hammers of ice strike through the chiming earth.
Quartz and felspar writhe and tear. Oppressed
by frost the glistening mica weeps, while mineral
centuries shatter and sift to a quick sand.

Watch the high pines glint on a coal ground
and the windfall stonefruit wait.
Wrenbones fake iguanodon, invert the fossil
record into air. Among these simultaneous ages

houseless, desolate, dark forms slide,
(glazed the clear dew of their gaze)
observe it is a bitter season, that it cannot
last. But if there be anywhere some heat

it is remote. Through such white measures heart in mouth
we pass, fearful of landslips, tremors,
or the seismic shock would fault the brittle
light. Wordbreath ghosts these galleries.

Lines in Fall

I Bag of bones cant lie down
 to night
 timbers settling
 crack them up right
 under Orrery Hill

 head waters run bone dry
 springs stop
 fall rains fill up
 resurgent courses
 where the flood divides

 the fabric all washed up
 gives way
 to thread bare ribs
 remnant the wave un
 weaves in ropes of sand

 the loose ends ravel out
 until
 the form breaks down
 its raw material
 and nothing else survives

 this cataract cuts off
 all lines
 into the past
 the old tissue far
 too slight to stand that fall

II the face turns
 stone ground
 in the fall moon
 cold peregrine in transit
 fret to bits

 where a hard
 rain picks
 this dream to shreds
 a sharp wind in the easts grip
 combs bones straight

 that head long
 home ward
 warp from the well
 dressed frame falls as the sand sifts
 down silts up

 groundless fears
 stop then
 now that yarns spun
 out the flocks blown far afield
 from tenters

 bare ruined wires
 run way
 beyond these lines
 night weaves new cloth the moon
 her shuttle

Parting Words

If there's going to be a general resurrection
count me out

I wouldn't want that over again
not even the good bits

repetition would sour them
the rancid cud sicken me

but if in the final assembly
some indefatigable godhead twists my arm
then purged of memory

I'll take the part of water
reaching down through the lodged earth

or light exact oblique
at the delicate junctures

or a hand touching
and touching and touching

Cold Course

The jaded sun lies low in his halt galaxy,
set hard like honey in the stiff comb,
with house and planet, tree and shivering peregrine,
all subjects under him conssepulchred,
underfoot and done for, a mere smoke of stars.

The August heat, geometry of dance, full wilt
and fall: all yet survive in the slow sugars;
so, he now sits throned in dust, holds
vestiges and memoranda for his court,
whose armies dominate their night
quicksilver courses irrigate.

These he thought measures to kill time and grief.

Gorged on vermilion, his peers sweated
bright death, transfused the rockveins to their own.

The sovereign they bolted down still circulates
through this enchanted fastness of white sudden stone.

Coumeenole

for Owen

Dig! you cried

We dug out great trenches
and extended the abyss
down into an utter darkness
that stopped the heart with its cold

We fought off monstrous beasts
that nudged and butted us with their blunt heads
and from those regions of terror we brought back
massive rocks and curious shells

We threw up huge walls
and ramparts to repel
the encroaching forces
of chaos and disorder

We took all the boulders and all the sand
in the world and ranged up
mountains into the clouds
against the combing winds and the hard sea

And in the territories we had created
we established order
we set up high towers rivetted with light
and we built roads castles and cities

At evening as we left
looked back and saw whole continents dissolve
under the flood and heard
the soft collapse of walls and boundaries

you cried

Tocharian Music

for Máire Herbert

*In these mountains there is a stream which flows away drop
by drop, producing a sound as of music; once a year, at a
certain date, these sounds are collected and made into a
musical tune.*

Wu Kung

Still the jade woman circulates the cup
its empty now

Too long interbred with dragons
they grew restive
and rebelled
against the imperial mandate

Eleven thousand
died in the reprisal
and the city laid waste
the airs dispersed
only the names survive

Time slipped out of their tablature
and without stopping
fled
fugitive amongst those sands