

Simon Jenner

About Bloody Time



# **About Bloody Time**

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*My Pelican Nieces*

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# 19 Keere Street

My father terrified a poltergeist.  
Balancing round the stairwell in 1953  
to the crash of phantom bone china  
at the spirit level of the bedroom window,  
as the blanched bedsheets shot off my uncle,  
to the Apocalypse cry of visitors:  
'Fuck off!' - my father flung his tin limb  
a wrenched off phantom duralmin  
(bearing perished Durex, smuggled  
through to Dublin's ban of them  
for all the medics of the Meath,  
my months off, broke off, gossamer conceiving)  
pewter to neuter and back again  
came silence, the laid out terror.  
Poor ghost, imagining things to come  
descendants dismembering their future?  
And now he's dead, appears to my cousin,  
and both my legs plant a solid standing,  
spawned from his phantom cancelled limb -  
Fuck off to a future tense of ghosts  
to frighten our cupboards out of skeletons,  
to know the mineral cry of ghosts  
can only empty or fill a room.  
Bonnie and Rhett in London  
It requires a run through softly Thames  
chimes dubbed across a Jezebel water  
and a moon bent on alienation.  
Home is so monogrammed in corners  
where love's the distance of greasepaint  
where the entr'acte's all pride and horsemen.

Time rocks fragile between them  
gurgling; doted on; all the wife has  
is the tradesman's entrance to his soul -  
as home means galloping disaster;  
the model, bolt upright caterpaulted daughter  
shattering the living doll.  
Tomorrow's another scene-change  
the make-up of distance too caked  
to breathe in with give-a-damn skins  
the fire rose glow Atlanta lends -  
facades of history swallowed in real flames  
stair-swept from their incendiary living  
their celluloid of yellowed fate  
that dreams so rooted for can't sigh  
that even feet of clay need pores  
and myth's breathless as a slammed door  
a red dress swayed in storm light  
dancing with all America.5  
Innocence only lives in extremes  
has never begotten a surviving child  
or acquired the torn-down perspectives -  
Bonnie, nightmared under Big Ben won't wake,  
when London's fired off-stage.  
Only Technicolour moves them on.

# The Cottingley Hoaxes, 1917

It's the false absences flare to life  
like a tele-salesman posturing all you've missed  
or a forgotten poem phantom-nerved  
with a lost limb's shudder where no limb was.  
Work ethics on bank holidays, glisten sharp ahead  
of imaginary selves to fill the hollow.  
Or the Cottingley fairies, who so nearly nose-led fashi\\  
on;  
flappers of '17. That year's thirst for afterlives  
forked lightning rods of the Somme dead,  
in pixy, card-pasty faces. Like the sold\_ \_  
out tours of politicians and angels - tell us what  
we need, and how it will destroy us.  
Alexander Blok's Apocalypse  
Blok, paling for the impossible -  
the moon's lustration  
over his black earth, breaking  
him to a rhythm of the possible  
century - found it fell transglazed,  
local, whole whitening cities keening  
like blanched peasants; the visionary  
a terror on street corners, the ordinary  
something glimpsed in long-exiled poems;  
language, the last hallucination  
when names are unnamed backwards  
ravelling up creation, a singularity  
thrusting back the new  
damnation long before the Fall  
where no god need explain.  
Mallory's Morte d'Everest

The magnetic north of might-have-been  
half-frozen to the true north of is  
flutters the angle of dead to their myth  
in this the Harris tweed preserved  
reserved as ever in the warped vales of its unmaking.  
First up, amateur, or not, he was the fierce measure  
of how myth got there first; how fact tugs after,  
finds itself oblique to what it wanted fast  
that if you could only calibrate ideal to real, you'd  
not stumble over yourself frozen on the way down.

Little Lord of the Morning

William Kirkpatrick 1801-28

My Moslem name, I think, when whole:  
before the boiling copper cancelled  
my limbs, too, and the cold Christian  
one douched before struck  
those words through for the English  
ones my father sloughed,  
when circumcised all for love  
for Hydrabad's princess, already  
line-dark heavy with me.

Another language, mother skin and jewels  
were the clouds I trailed before books.

These attentions I bring to my god  
Wordsworth; to Khan Coleridge,  
my Sahib Allum. Only they, wrinkling, can  
read my maimed childhood back to me;  
return me in their inverse wish to mine  
east of their innocence, and walking  
out of their imagination.

# Übersetze

For Gerald Fiebig

If cortisone's thin-skinned us both  
was it the osmosis for your translations? Truth?  
You've breathed between my lines  
I've jumped with you the Augsburg trams -  
a fine skew line, drawn to where you live,  
lost between sex shop and ice rink, weaves  
your parameters, millimetre ice, skin day-glo rubber  
skate-ice face and jokey moulder  
furious iconoclast to a bland misreading...  
It's your mar-faced mud-geyser gazing  
reflects my Mars-faced flakiness  
strikes drying wit from the second dermis.  
Or survives my gold-eating skin  
corroding my glasses' auric frame  
green to the cheap nickel they're plated on  
flesh acid with a smear of cortisone.  
I'd say only your gold survives me  
but solid ingot seeing's too heavy,  
asks too much for wearer and seer  
leadening me to pure lyrik leaves me unclear.  
Your miraculous amalgm and compound glass  
makes a game pretence it shouldn't last.  
But your words hand mine a clearer grace;  
see in their reflection, new lines on my face.

# **'...- 273, for all practicable purposes...'**

For Sherrol

There's no inspiration; only control.  
Poetry's a precise magic out of loss.  
Like love, it stills itself from fear,  
the startling butterflies of ice;  
the infinitesimal shiver out there, sparked  
between the Celsius-fiating scientist  
and the absolute zero we journey to.

# Apologia for Laureates

There's no language for disasters -  
how can you flesh the O's scream  
with lips you can ask nothing of.

Obscenity's immediate. Carnage hollows  
vowels and asks for vacuum words -  
whoever first fills them is damned  
fitting the fast-advertised memorial.

Like this one, tugging at how half-memorable  
clenched fists fade from a screen of years.

How such verses quaint and crab themselves  
to footnotes. But how centuries on  
their heart cavities frame all there is;  
like mould-injected plasters of Pompeii  
struck and minted in their rough-clenched grief,  
their cast infinite, just missing a human face.

The Hölderlin Revival, 1942

Your mother thumbed him in the Augsburg blitz -  
a white National Edition of 1942;  
my father, teaching sutures to the SAS  
in the translated blast victims of London,  
via Gascoyne's Hölderlin's Madness,  
draughting Fairey planes, Fireflies with rockets.

Inscription's the last variant  
we make on the dead, brief candle of readers  
when versions fan to this surreal intent -  
Gascoyne's Englishing for my father's kultur,  
your mother's reading it between the clouds  
of Patriot Poet, bombers' drone voices.  
Some European moment - forced to diverge  
beyond language, volume, reader, the poem

breathes only incandescent lassitude.  
Our parents read him along degrees  
of latitude and hatred, along  
the lumbering healing of the Berlin  
Airlift. But their browsing was all fire,  
Hölderlin the only flight to after.  
That the poem's angle of attack for vision  
might refract each book-steeped interpreter  
back a cleaner pain; its vectors less fragile than  
its written-down weathervanes on Hölderlin's spires.  
The originals were firebombed in tiny guide propellers;  
smaller than the test-flights my father limned,  
more sized like V1s, V2s missing him  
by the same yards that spared your mother fire  
and the chance diaspora of love and culture.  
This copy's foxed all Farenheidt and propaganda.  
But nothing deflects its escape velocity  
to the way each ur-text gains a flight path, a co-effic\ient  
altitude to living only; but an arc to the dying  
or survivors, English, German, in dawn steeped rain  
this slantwise gift from the night flares of the dead  
to readers touched by the surprise of their deaths  
The Great Elegy for Brighton  
This summer's a dead heat for nostalgia.  
But the place I made a quarter century in  
had its teeth cut in Regency, hollowed and gone  
lushing its cropped spite till it yellowed gently.  
House gaps stared, dentistry was metal houghing at the \  
years  
like plaque, and finding them dead as nerves set alight\  
.  
Reeking its porcelain enlightenment, sparkling  
a town of shells saltscoured like nightlife  
so puffy in the aftertaste of coffee dawns,

and wicca women, so weird that they wanted me.  
Our lusts were siliconed like years gone hard;  
and lonely was an only tenderness, apart.  
Young in a New Age, with its split ends of nostalgia  
gazing into ragged amethyst  
and materialist blown sapphires of Beetles, items  
for the sleek amphetamines of Glastonbury.  
The quartz is shaved into daylights.  
For them the stone is worn down end to end.  
Marrow is a food of anger, ebbing to  
flutes or the sucked Tibetan pipes of the dead,  
and firing out my roots with regrets  
brittles me into whistling at noon.  
This was a time of lovers into crystals  
when all around salt sweated from the sea.  
I can graunch at this shell that's Brighton in me,  
a little flesh at the edges in a delicate twist  
that says we're the sum of what our shelling wants.  
Like the West Pier, that's a tangle of branches gone rotted.  
I've trodden very lightly when I've tripped on the condemned,  
steeped - over branches in reflection - roots fluttered in blue soil.

||

# Schoenberg's System

Schoenberg filed old razors, remarked  
they'd sharpen for retrieval in the dark.  
So his clean-shaven self-portrait of '06, mute,  
as if poised at a chromatic edge. 'Tonality? I never re\  
ally

left it' - in the forties, to scrapers of his roots,  
convinced of a late ingrowth back to harmony -  
his steeliness reversed. Displaying neat drawers,  
his boyish silver no one can disinter.

Like his Second Chamber Symphony: begun '06, finished '4  
39,

asserting he most of all was inheritor, custodian,  
of the cutting edge of traditions: Keep them; retrieve  
what the airy dark of history's fashioned.

Viktor Ullmann (1898-1944)

Piano Sonata No. 7. The right is reserved  
To be played by me only in my lifetime!  
Terezin, Sept 1944.

Incongruously swallowed  
with a Chinese meal  
your Terezin sonatas  
tethered by history's sub-dominant  
stray through my ghetto blaster  
over spring rolls, modifying  
the guts of the dead  
if we possessed them  
through the assimilated living.  
Should it sound like this,  
silence screening the fact of music,  
echoes that drown your universal trump;

that our fragile abstract is the half that sings  
carrying its dense burden to,  
from its own time  
nonchalantly as tafelmusik;  
To be played only...  
Like continental sign languages,  
swallowing a native tongue to speak abroad  
one hand signalling frantically,  
the other free?

# Last Waltz, 1841

Rediscovered waltz for Georgiana Smythe

They never meant it this final; Liszt,  
blotting it down in Indian  
for the Prettiest Girl in England  
more than the slow-fading braid  
snuck as an embryo in his locket  
would outgleam his sleeve lace over ebony  
the panache of this spidered calling card  
or the discretion-cut sparkle of their tryst;  
than the art of their private lilt and breath  
was flounced for sous-entendres of their peers.  
Like Petronius, opening his veins for Nero  
to shut them, momentarily, for a froth of wit  
whose scent like the bath marbling his blood  
is lost, or nonchalantly, dazzling as stars  
who send centuries after them  
the news, brilliant and fading, of their death.

# My Requiems

François-Joseph Gossec (1734-1829)

Staggering ninety-five, my youngest  
pupils curmudgeon with honours,  
my dear Cherubini.

And the grand ligne of  
Grandes Messes des Morts you say  
I spawned and you flourished in brass  
outlasts all but my recorder piece  
and your Médée.

Fitting that my master Rameau  
spluttered: 'As much as I dared, not as  
I wished', about his stretching our ears  
with his we've not caught up with.

Save your latest charge, Luigi,  
a hair-flared Rameau incarnate  
with his outlandish Messe  
a new true son of the baroque  
orchestra. Your M'sieur Berlioz is  
what will become of us.

# Missing Cornelius

Once every decade I miss him,  
Cornelius Cardew's Paragraph 6  
of The Great Learning, mid-Festival,  
in Huddersfield's sharp aspic of the 60s -  
Maoist music for non-musicians.  
It's as if planned. That non-pros bash kits  
to prestigious laughter. And  
as it recedes to pink dawn, some  
must scratch the revolutionary silence  
leaning to just the pen's noise of the possible.<sup>26</sup>  
Constant's Blue Will and Testament  
The deaf-mute smiles at me through rain  
before running steadily headlong on; past me  
who's only half-deaf  
who sways batons to Liszt and Waldteufel  
intoning Dame Edith through a cavorting mask  
of the Late Sir William  
who's five/four  
with a walking stick  
who sways plastered, staring plastered hair  
that frames the upturned liquid of her face, listens  
a glistening second  
half-cocked  
to the sway of my limping  
authority  
at the whiskey-lit downpour  
glints and facets of a drunken building;  
who's silent with a drunken building  
till it intones its drunken name:  
Queen's Hall (gone); Albert Hall; Facades.

All the blitzy glitzy blacked out faces  
for the man with a stick and white gloves  
have their downns have their downns have their downns -  
Trois Pieces Negres Pour les Touches Blanches.  
M'sieur Lambert I'm the fucking Abbé.  
I, in plaster-grey hair have taken very kindly  
to a half-lame, half deaf three-quarters drunk  
defunct composer;  
who in his long bouts of lucidity  
refuses to conduct my son-in-law.  
Monsieur Abbé, girl with the plastered flaxen,  
know I conduct only music that smiles:  
a variation brillante that slides  
from piano chiming transcriptions  
to a death-haunted tubercular joy.

# Down by the Rio Grande

they sing no sarabande -  
Know Chabrier out-paces out-faces Wagner;  
know I am the lilt's interpreter,  
the English Diaghalev (and modest when sober).  
Waltzing between two Gemini Moons  
Margot's and mine (I was lying;  
hers is in Sagittary opposition)  
waltzing Matilda in Powell he tells me  
(that's to be my wife in his fleuve?).  
Thirteen/eight to my Warlock Concerto,  
time's jagged blue rhythms beat me to his death;  
and the bow-ties doing poker duty  
for my crumbling podium blue-plastered face;  
showing glimpses of the wedding after  
Margot will never forgive me for -  
ten years of embracing perfection  
of an ivory tower undressing  
to our blackout sell-out performances,  
and the gas-stove quietly hissing love  
in its turned-up blue footlights language  
as the stars shriek in their courses,  
my downbeat our only conversation  
mute in her eloquence  
locked in a stellar pirouette  
in a bomber's moon lambent.  
We'd only crease an imaginary moonbeam.  
The Janus of the lunar Gemini  
Tiresias you shall flounce for me.  
Can't you snake a lover who could shed his sex? -  
not this lumbering bull on your china.

An arc of shuddering patience, patience  
easing the sundry planets into sense  
she disported Horoscope from choreography  
and what I meant from them just danced away.  
Ten years all art and no brain  
and half my life half listening.  
Aren't you going in?  
Why? It's seven nineteen in the rain  
so let the sinners do the marching in  
if the devil can wield the best baton.  
Always adjust the mask Yeats said  
whistling Lili Boulanger in the dark;  
always phase the moon within.  
Wait till the baton stills the building  
till the roar's no more than deafening  
and I have an ear and a smile and a face  
to beat time in the morning.

# Strad

Violins dipped in lime Cremona water  
crystallised their varnish to pierce all walls  
the city's strange depositories striate a singing tone \

-  
potassium purpling centuries of wood passagework.  
There's no classical Achilles' tendon strung.  
These Catholic craftsmen were dyed to their wrists  
and rendered their own calloused hands immortal.  
Even when the pine-encalcined chemistries fade  
and late Amati spins a longer decaying action  
the slow burn sycamore that raised its maker's pitch -  
like an appetite for parched song, to render Achilles  
from voice to voice with all the crumbled parchment gon\

e -

works its trace elemental homeopathy in a name.  
That it needs just this pinch of iron incising  
limewood, not stripping the centuries or cities  
to keep the uninvented languages going.

# Xenakis

Shooting Germans, then British...  
As the world flipped film noir  
with the white night flesh of Heinkels, arced  
under the cheesewire searchlights of Athens  
throbbing bass-notes lit against the stave  
then green with suborning Cromwells -  
Comrade Xenakis, architect  
with a yen for music  
fled with his face wound to Paris,  
Cyclops eye sliced as a talisman  
refusing cosmetic surgery, cradled betrayal -  
British schooling -  
the education of partisan warfare  
and the fire-stepped harmony of Beethoven.  
To Corbusier, perhaps: If architecture's frozen music  
I'll unlock them both like a Russian spring.  
Corbusier: 'Sacre de Printemps is Messiaen now.'  
Messiaen set him in the key of dreams  
and waived the slow motion shibboleth of exams.  
No Teuton's techtonics.  
No lit-note counterpoint but echoing curves.  
His own Philips Building he swept  
in volume and echo the Persepolis  
that could be played inside  
like a door banging on infinity.  
No western accretions but a myth-stripped world  
with names hacked in consonants  
before corruption  
Plaeides, Psappha, Kekrops -  
yet reads in the monochrome countries of the blind

The one-eyed man's no king of infinite space  
yet reads in the monochrome countries of the blind  
contours of algebra growling to it,  
noise of doppler, blue shift notation  
sung lines bent with light  
notes absorbed like gamma rays  
a recurring Palimpsest, whose instruments  
scribble over each other in scumbled colour.  
No sly mineral return to organic pattern  
all the retrograde motions of the skin.  
No polytopes, or  
the fascinating rhythms of new fractals  
like Ligeti, or whiff of delicate Berlioz on Boulez.  
He weathered only, like his grisaille buildings  
as his face shadowed more overhang and dark.  
Read the Odyssey, knew 'Who hurts you Cyclops?'  
'No man hurts me.'  
Being invalidated out from harmony  
melody glassed forever in a stare  
he saw music like a sharded mirror  
cut to the air's bone beyond mercury  
rung in sphere metal, never to decay  
not frail as the memory  
of his butchered brother singing  
his pianist mother dead before her notes cohered  
for the avid six year old with both eyes staring.  
And broke free of the consonance of suffering  
for Iron Curtain dissident listeners -  
Kundera - Czechs - Hungarians -  
found tuned in, turned on to solid state  
in long waved whistling at 2 am  
its unjammed unwowed  
interstellar percussion  
crashed beyond 68's ring of cracked steel  
numbly catchy martial brass as solder.

He'd trust no inner space seeing.  
Analogies just breed up like slogans.  
The mineral voice lies howling its cause  
while the organic one wails at the stars.  
The fractal microbiological  
inscape of repeating  
like Quaker Oats  
to infinite decayed regression on a packet front.  
But - like ether in the universe we used to believe  
or string theories we now believe  
like the meta emotion before the words  
that live, like marimbas, in absolute pitch -  
Plaeides, Psappha, Kekrops -  
soar like the flow chart poetics of his curves  
(music concrète renforcé?)  
that cracked Brussels open in '58  
when his World Fair Philips Building  
swelled like a Brazil nut in white chocolate  
vast with its bitter private joke. 33  
Visiting the flaked ampitheatres of home  
after his chrome denials of decades  
he still recites Ariel as if at school -  
Full fathom five  
the innocence lies.  
He lets the fine dust settle.  
It might have sounded something like this.  
With Pi for all the major intervals  
cubing the root of living  
scores in 3D hollow the brass silence  
till it follows the sound of one eye -  
frail as the memory of banished singing.