

Simon Jenner

About Bloody Time



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My Pelican Nieces

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I

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 Hyderabad'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-fating 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 thumbled 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-effi-
cient
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 ro\
tten.
I've trodden very lightly when I've tripped on the cond\
emned,
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 '\
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.²⁶
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 downs have their downs have their downs -
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 amphitheatres 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.