

## Poems

### As Country was Slow

*for Peter*

Our new motorway  
is a cross-country fort  
and we reinforcements  
speed between earthworks  
water-sumps and counterscarps,  
breaking out on wide glimpses,  
flying the overpasses –

Little paper lanterns  
march up and down dirt,  
wrapped round three chopsticks  
plastic shrub-guards grow bushes  
to screen the real bush,  
to hide the old towns  
behind sound-walls and green –

Wildlife crossings underneath  
the superglued pavement  
are jeep size; beasts must see  
nature re-start beyond.  
The roads are our nature  
shining beyond delay,  
fretting to race on –

Any check in high speed  
can bleed into gravel  
and hang pastel wreaths  
over roadside crosses.  
Have you had your scare yet? –  
It made you a driver  
not an ever-young name.

We're one Ireland, plus  
at least six Great Britains  
welded around Mars  
and cross-linked by cars. –  
Benzene, Diesel, autobahn:

they're a German creation,  
 these private world-splicers.  
 The uncle who farmed our place

was an Arab of his day  
 growing fuel for the horses  
 who hauled the roads then.  
 1914 ended that. Will I  
 see fuel crops come again?  
 I'll ride a slow vehicle

before cars are slow  
 as country was slow.

*Les Murray (2006)*

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***Anthrax Street, Lafayette TN***

"People stand back when they read the name  
 of the street on my checks," she said.  
 "They should change it to America Street  
 or Freedom Street. They think I'm a terrorist."  
 Which makes her, I guess, a terrorist suspect  
 and therefore permanently guilty  
 of having been a suspect, despite her smart clothes,  
 her hair as blond as anthrax.

To protect the immune system of the social body,  
 close the post offices, the schools, the courts.  
 Prescribe a sixty day course of Cipro –  
 or bomb Afghanistan? Prevention beats cure.  
 One street might be just spore-sized  
 against the victim spread to shining sea,  
 its mass awaiting destruction,  
 cutaneous or inhaled, but we all know...  
 They should rebadge. America spores,  
 freedom spores (and there'll be fries with that)  
 will reassure when we pay by cheque  
 that the nation has a healthy balance.

*Tim Thorne (2007)*

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*spider, man*

In London this summer the spiders are swarming  
 as Earth warms up like an Aga  
 thuggish Indian ladybirds, bigger and tougher  
 are ousting the sweet English girlies  
 They'll have to find something else  
 for the spines of kids' storybooks  
 Australian spiders continue to thrive  
 but our birds are hard-pressed, crows

tweaking fruit through hairnets on trees  
 in good times they stick to carrion  
 Obscurely worried, we walk fretful dogs  
 by moonlight, beneath jacarandas frothing  
 with the usual blueburst, passing  
 the usual huddle of cars, dragon-breath  
 quenched for the night; they rouse in us  
 as yet, only a mounting peevishness

*Catherine Keneally (2007)*

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*A Doctor Calls*

Kookaburras in the gum tree, mother and fledgling  
 Junior's cute in that standard baby way, blunt of beak,  
 chubby where the olds are lean, fluff instead of feathers  
 ma and pa are hooked, they chaperone, they watch her diet  
 Buses rumble in the next street, one of which is mine  
 but I'm waiting for this call, bathers in my lap  
 reminding me to stop for a swim on my way home  
 from work, where my schedule is loose

the thought of that ride to town, half an hour or so,  
 makes me squirm; some days I achieve absence, travel  
 in a brown study, but not today. Christmas is coming  
 our plan to ignore it dispelled by our chick's return

from her trial flight. We'll have a tree, do Farmers' Market,  
 aim for jollity, short of a Christmas truce with the bad guys

My baby, storm-pummelled, limps home from the tropics  
to hole up in her redecked nest, red and black like an

Oriental hotel, with white touches for mourning.  
A daily ale at the Avoca is a plan, while food,  
yours, mine and ours, resumes centre stage - *à propos*,  
The Doctor calls - I try for kookaburra cheer

*Catherine Keneally (2007)*

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from: *Rumori*

*Down in the windy park the leaves all turn  
over at the same time—it's the climate  
explaining the weather to the workers*

—*The Romans, John Tranter*

I shut the windows to the apartment.  
A famous painting by Boccioni, that I love—  
because I love the idea I suppose, but also

its domestic & feminized form in the picture—  
is *Street Noises Invade The Apartment*:  
a woman (mother, wife)  
leans over a balcony or window sill  
& all the activities of the street  
'penetrate'—through the walls, through her & the opening.

It was an embarrassingly large number of years (decades?)  
before it finally twigged for me  
that where it said on the slide, or reproduction,

"rumori", the word did not mean "rumours"  
(or "suggestions") but "noises". Futurism:  
so deadly—*or* loveably—clunky

in its 'execution' of ideas.

But they *are* like rumours—hints, ghostly

callings—the noises from the street here.  
 Shutting the windows reduces them to a rumbling, pleasant  
 background. I will open them again later. The view

reminds instantly of the densely housed rise  
 up Kings Cross from Wollomooloo.

(From somebody's  
 flat you saw that—Sal's old place? an architect's office I visited?  
 The same view

you saw more distantly from the Art Gallery.)

Or—

a Sydney city beach suburb's view. Bondi. But the Trastevere  
 area is more built up, the styles more various—

'30s' thru to now, the ornamentation more particular. What else?  
 White features less often. A huge  
 salmon pink number is dominant on the left. Otherwise

tans & yellows, some shades of orange—stepped & ranked  
 down to street level—where you peer down from our patio:  
 at *Station Pizza*, small shops, garden walls. Trees occur

at more frequent intervals than in the equivalent view in Sydney  
 & a different sort—tall dark pines, cypresses (which must  
 always *spell* 'Italy'), olives &, more surprisingly, wild,  
 exuberant-looking palm trees. Our first morning  
 I was particularly struck by the closest palm, that grows  
 near an angled junction of roads opening out

onto the main road beneath. The tree fills & overflows  
 its space. So 'twenties' it reminds me  
 of a Roy de Maistre painting—that I assume exists.

(Am I thinking of a flower piece, or a quite different view?)

I decide it will make a drawing—in  
 my mind's eye I can see it looking like  
 de Maistre, Kirchner, Matisse—& also Brett Whitely.

(Though how, if I'm going to do it?)

How will it look, when it's done?  
 The hill overall reminds me of Grace Crowley  
 Her picture called ... *The Italian Girl*? Probably not.

*Tuscan Landscape*, maybe—but a hill  
 of similarly graded cubist planes.  
 Cath comes home, has a sandwich, cup of tea

& goes to bed—to nap & read—before  
 we visit Pietro, our 'third Italian'. We have at last begun  
 to make contacts here—after days & days  
 of adventurous walking—along the Tiber  
 & into town—through ruins & monasteries & parks & villas  
 Vespas, ambulances.

"Goethe's Foreboding," the latest  
*TLS* is headed. I've scarcely read him—& should.  
 The picture one has—a cross between Mme Recamier  
 & Oscar Wilde. *Rising to the occasion of his picturing*,  
 all that is on his mind. *Not* foreboding. He  
 worried about The Poet's Place In Society. Or his  
 own? At the Protestant Cemetery, despite

the signs that promise it, we fail to find him.  
 We find Gramsci.

*Ken Bolton (2007)*

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### ***Greener***

The grass is greener  
 where rosellas  
 graze pine kernels

from last summer  
 and no breeze, no,  
 not the slightest

movement in the air  
 except a cricket's song.  
 The sky, pure duck-egg.

Wattle and wild thyme.  
 Leaves paint themselves  
 on trees.

*Andrew Peek (2007)*

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***When the rage comes***

The explosive device  
 lands on the beach:

how blue the sky is,  
 the little girl tells her father

before they're blown up.  
 Pass my hat, the mother

instructs her son  
 and is torn limb from limb

by a white flare of TNT.  
 Under trees, by a stream,

other families lay out  
 olives and scented tea,

arrange tables and chairs,  
 slide around bends in a truck

or load up a donkey  
 —no bazookas, no lobbed

shells screaming in,  
 —only such acts, only

crystalline moments like these  
 save us, when the rage comes.

*Andrew Peek (2007)*

*Dinner by the river*

And midway through the first course  
of pickled fish in the restaurant  
by the river that night  
slid a black on black  
barge  
under the brilliantly lit  
bridge

silent  
unmanned  
unlit  
*Souls*  
*destined*  
*for the underworld?*  
I ventured  
to my friend but he said  
it was only coal

That silent  
burden of blackness was not  
only coal  
it was smuggling history  
through southern Poland  
it was dragging me back  
to the nineteen forties

to when there was less light

to when my friend  
hadn't been born

to when the bridge  
was a broken arch

to when carbon  
had another meaning  
falling like soot

*Andrew Taylor (15 October 2006)*



*Driving to the airport*

Last summer  
southern Poland  
a Porsche 4 wheel drive

*the Merc couldn't be moved three months  
because of the ice  
shirtsleeves now  
Would you like to see  
the lake? She was swimming  
somewhere beyond the trees*

water rippled with her swimming  
the lake was on our way  
to the airport

the Porsche manoeuvred the jolty track  
through woods a plane  
mirrored her progress

though we couldn't see her.  
We parked and walked down  
to the lake shore

sandy but blotched with ashes  
of picnic and other fires  
her footprint captured within it.

I remember glimpsing a road sign  
to Auschwitz  
as we left the lake

*Andrew Taylor (12 October 2006)*

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