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,
fly[ing 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 re BADGE. 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)

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)*

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 Wolloomooloo.

(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—and 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)

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 roadsingn
to Auschwitz
as we left the lake

Andrew Taylor (12 October 2006)