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## Poems

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## Poems

### **Abstract**

TOWARDS 2000, YOU FIND YOU CAN LEAVE IT ALL, CLOSER LINKS WITH SUNRAYSIA, THE BULB OF THE DARLING LILY, ASPARAGUS BONES, OASIS CITY

# Les Murray

## TOWARDS 2000

As that monster the Twentieth Century  
sheds its leathers and chains, it will cry

*Automatic weapons! I shot at  
millions and they died. I kept doing it,*

*but most not ruled by uniforms ate well  
in the end. And cool replaced noble.*

Nearly every black-and-white Historic figure  
will look compromised by their haircut and cigar-

ette. And the dead will grow remoter  
among words like *pillow-sham* and *boater*.

*You'll admit, the old century will plead  
I developed ways to see and hear the dead.*

Only briefly will TV restrain Hitler  
and Napoleon from having an affair.

*I changed my mind about the retarded:  
I ended great for those not the full quid.*

*You breathers, in your rhythmic inner blush,  
you dismiss me, now I'm a busted flush,*

*but I brought cures, mass adventures – no one's fooled.  
A line called Last Century will be ruled*

across all our lives, lightly at first,  
even as unwiring bottles cough

their corks out, and posh aerosols burst  
and glasses fill and ding, and people quaff.

## YOU FIND YOU CAN LEAVE IT ALL

Like a charging man, hit  
and settling face down in the ringing,  
his cause and panic obsolete,

you find you can leave it all:  
your loved people, pain, achievement  
dwindling upstream of this raft-fall,

back with the dishes that translated  
beasts and croplands into the ongoing  
self portrait your genes had mandated.

Ribbed glass glare-panels flow  
over you down urgent corridors,  
dismissing midday outside. Slow,

they'd recall damp spade-widths in a pit;  
you've left grief behind you, for others;  
your funeral: who'll know you'd re-planned it?

God, at the end of prose,  
somehow be our poem –  
When forebrainy consciousness goes

wordless selves it barely met,  
inertias of rhythm, the life habit  
continue the battle for you.

If enough of them hold  
you may wake up in this world,  
ache-boned, tear-sponged, dripped into:

*Do you know your name? 'Yes' won't do.*  
It's Before again, with shadow. No tunnels.  
You are a trunk of prickling cells.

It's the evening of some day. But it's also  
afterlife from here on, by that consent  
you found you, to going where you went.

## CLOSER LINKS WITH SUNRAYSLIA

Hoofed beasts are year-round fires  
 devouring as high as they can reach,  
 hopeless to put out. Pink smoke  
 lifts off their terra cotta

but all fences have been torn out  
 and flocks, herds and horses banished  
 from this apricot country. Here  
 they've finished with the pastoral.

Downstream of this sprinkled terrain  
 merged desert rivers stop-go to Ocean  
 but the real Australian river,  
 the one made of hard labour and launched

with a tilt of a Chinese pole-bucket,  
 that one sets out for the human mouth  
 down a thousand asphalt beds  
 in squeaky crates and marshalled vintages.

## THE BULB OF THE DARLING LILY

Sitting round in the Grand Hotel  
 at Festival time. Another year  
 that Philip Hodgins can't be here.  
 Naming the festival after him  
 almost confirms that. But like his fine  
 drypoint poems, it lets him be somewhere.

Sitting around in the Grand  
 with the stained glass in the gaming room  
 an upwelling pattern of vivid cards  
 and the T-shaped lolly-coloured logo  
 of the TAB everywhere, the Tabaret.  
 All Victoria's become one casino.

Sitting around the Grand Hotel  
 adding antipasto to the impasto  
 of my mortal likeness, writing postcards  
 instead of going on the guided  
 Lake Mungo tour. Too reverential,  
 too sacred. No grinners out there laugh.

So, sitting around in the Grand  
 yarning with Mario, with Donna and Stefano  
 and descending to the lower kitchen  
 to meet Leopardo Leopardi, who isn't  
 posing in languor on a thorn-tree limb  
 though he has the build, but making gnocchi.

Sitting around the Grand Hotel, yarning  
 about river cod as big as seals  
 and the de-snagged inland waters  
 being re-snagged to let them breed,  
 shovel-mouthed, with the beady gape  
 and rejecting clamp of a critic.

## ASPARAGUS BONES

Thirstland talc light  
 haunted the bush horizons  
 all day. As it softened  
 into blusher we drove out  
 through gardens that are farms  
 past steeped sultana frames  
 to a red-earth dune  
 flicked all over with water  
 to keep it tightly knitted  
 in orange and avocado trees  
 black-green and silver-green  
 above trickling dust. My friend  
 fetched a box of fossil bones  
 from the unlocked half-million  
 of the coolroom there: asparagus  
 for his banquet kitchen,  
 no-one around, no dog,  
 then we drove where biceps  
 of river water swelled  
 through a culvert, and bulges  
 of turbulence hunted swirls  
 just under their moon skin,  
 and we mentioned again  
 unsecured farm doors, open  
 verandahs, separate houses,  
 emblems of a good society.

## OASIS CITY

Rose-red city in the angles of a cut-up  
 green anthology: grape stanzas, citrus strophes,  
 I like your dirt cliffs and chimney-broom palm trees,

your pipe dream under dust, in its heads of pressure.  
 I enjoy your landscape blown from the Pleistocene  
 and roofed in stick forests of tarmacadam blue.

Your river waltzed round thousands of loops to you  
 and never guessed. Now it's locked in a Grand Canal,  
 aerated with paddlewheels, feeder of kicking sprays,

its willows placid as geese outspread over young  
 or banner-streamed under flood. Hey, rose-red city  
 of the tragic fountain, of the expensive brink,

of crescent clubs, of flags basil-white-and-tomato,  
 I love how you were invented and turned on:  
 the city as equipment, unpacking its intersections.

City dreamed wrongly true in Puglia and Antakya  
 with your unemployed orange-trunks globalised out of the ground,  
 I delight in the mountains your flat scrub calls to mind

and how you'd stack up if decanted over steep relief.  
 I praise your camel-train skies and tanglefoot red-gums  
 and how you mine water, speed it to chrome lace and slow it

to culture's ingredients. How you learn your tolerance  
 on hideous pans far out, by the crystals of land sweat.  
 Along high-speed vistas, action breaks out of you,

but sweeter are its arrivals back inside  
 dust-walls of evergreen, air watered with raisins and weddings,  
 the beer of day pickers, the crash wine of night pickers.