Poems

Les Murray

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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 SUNRAYSIA

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 steepled 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.