

Anthology of Ryan Robson-Bluer

Presented by

My poetic side 

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leaving home

to be lost and asunder,
covered like a crime,
flitting in and out of existence;
the road before so distant
that i'm checking my pulse
again and again.

a playground to ripen in,
a pathless stretch to wander;
to roll the eyes back and watch,
and to love wrongly,
childlike - a wonderful creation
which will not last
but feels like breathing
and tastes like growth.

summer

Now summer shuts its fist and sleeps again,
And different birds and waking, different songs
Sung; the ashes of this golden hour heap
But embers prickle, like stars not known dead.

This ocean of a season, this firm tide,
Rushing and then breaking in white fractures
Against the rocks of autumn with a sigh
Of triumph, or of wistfulness dawning.

And the bubbling swash of sleepless nights
Rides on the morning, folding like linen.
The final burning sun sinks. As you stay
To while away the remnants, reminisce:

Those ever-tumbling waves on spotless sands -
A blessing, a gift, unsung as eyesight -
And summer slips like honey down the throat,
Tasting sweeter and fonder in hindsight.

pier jumping

light lying low
in a cod-liver sky,
settling through trawlers;

wavelets flicker
steady like second hands
and boats nod in sleep.

boys line the wall
like neoprene bollards,
salt-skinned sentinels

of the sea stand
as water licks the side;
pier bricks of wet green.

potholes, numb feet ?
round and pink like salmon ?
slap across the bricks,

heads dripping down
over water-grazed cheeks,
earfuls of ocean,

now cast head-first
over bruised hemp rope,
hurling themselves

into greenish spume,
flipping to the very last
wink of the sun.

a sunrise over santander

skies fold,
pinched like a bedsheet
in the softest of greys -

a morning sickness
that's weightless;
how the day lifts

and the sheets come away,
shedding like plaster
for light that's early, peach.

downpour

last night it rained -
it rained and it rained.
i don't think i'll see
such wet tarmac again.

Skinny Dipping in a Lightning Storm

I

pale bodies chalking the water,
their gum-pink shoulders rolling
in the dark like celestial objects;
our nakedness, and the earth's

lightning snaps like a blown bulb ?
furious sky-god ?
so those with their backs to the horizon,
are suddenly crowned: blazing aureoles,
wrists crossed on their tailbones
as if waiting for judgement,
handcuffed in awe.

half-crystallised, sharply inhaling, alarmed
that beauty isn't peaceful, but shocking,
that we've crossed a line:
and we'd suddenly rather be on the shore,
where a fire burns on the sand
and nobody dreams
quite this big.

II

the curtain tore open
and showered rags around
our hoary moon-shadows,
and we stood, for the first time,
like matchsticks in the infinite
black water.

and the earth made clear
its groaning, its sickness,
its fury ? impossibly close.
we're cemented to our chest
in amniotic fluid
as the earth reveals itself:
rolling over, laid bare.
and we, the firstfruits,
stumble, dazed, to the shoreline,
groping for the light,
bearing the weight of ourselves,
of our opening.

untitled

i forgot that roses have thorns, and so
i went and cut my finger
just a little:
blood mixed with the water
and it was so pretty i started over

eclipse

let our love be / an eclipse /
let people look away / when it gets too intense /
let me cross over / cover you /
in beauty / unrepeatably /

yes / let it be unique / unique as the cosmic swirls /
on our fingertips /
let us be / an energetic / unapologetic /
phenomenon / that dazzles the eyes / of the world /
even for this brief moment / we do have.

Farmyard

I'm no farmer's son, I know.
I have neither spine nor spirit to rule
The farmyard, to work the machinery,
To cross the coddung-matted grass
And knot electric fences. I cannot stand

The sheds of mewling kittens, shoddy, thin ?
You could lift them, sorry things,
By the handle of their tummies
And toss them to their mother's teat
Behind some burnt-out tractor wheel.

The haybarns, like museum atriums:
Hay trampled black into the floor,
Tired machinery stood about like fossils.
There's a dead badger I found,
In one corner, behind a rusting baler,
Its milky eyes and swollen tongue
Just dreadful.

Then, in the bright parlour, the farmer's son,
Rubbing sleep from his eyes,
Paces the jungle of ropes and suckers,
Where overalls hang in shifts,
And spiders the size of kittens
Scatter about in the milky slush.

And then ? *then* there's the slurry pit,
That black, slugging well
Where "*once, a cow fell down.*"
Fat bluebottles line the edge, untroubled
By the thick, prickling film of fumes ?
I keep six feet away

And leave my welly boots by the door.
The kitchen's warm and smoky,
The oven, lit. The farmer sits,
Warm, unpasteurised milk dripping,
Filling up his beard.

Tongue

Pithy, pink hunk
of muscle and spit;
sphinx to my throat,
to my lover.

[*lengua*, n.

1. tongue *or*

2. language

so to speak two languages, I suppose,
is like having two tongues
so to speak.]

And I'm a mummy's boy;
I'm cradled by my mother
tongue. Only now I'm trying
to force my way into another
and find myself
bashing against the teeth.

Father,

I stumble in my walk.

(Call me *tongue-tied*.)

For example,
does my mother know
I'm tongue-kissing boys now?
That "sorry" hangs always on the tip of
my tongue ?
(can you taste it?)

Later,
gnashing at prayer,
apologies sweat off my tongue ?

an interdental repentance ?
where my lips part
and syllables spill through.

You see that's why
(what I'm trying to say)
I didn't *mean* to say
"I love you".
Sometimes I think
I think with
my tongue.

Kilbegnet Beach

Spilt out, like a parchment unrolled,
A paler forearm, a walkway.
Flounced sea-froth so softly
Lain, like a bridal train;
We act as pageboys, ambling
Dazed, towards the altar.

The sun, retiring, falls like snow:
Weightless but with sure intention.
Watch it drag down the horizon
In its sweeping, sipping, pulling.
We are lulled to pursue its fall,
As if affected by the tug.

And again at night, you walk
Until the moon feels at home,
Until the painted sand,
Which so boldly reimagines
The colours of the sky,
Becomes all you're looking for.

The Barrel

for Grandad

The barrel in the back yard brims
with rainwater all year round,

crowned with a thin film
of dead flies which you slice

with the flat of your palm,
splashing your feet and mine.

Dipping into the water
with your potato-muck hands,

you rinse your face
with winter rain

and stand and glean the dirt
from under each nail

with your dulled pocket knife.
You motion, *it's my turn,*

and I laugh because I long
to do what you do,

to share in this, your ritual.
But I hear the kitchen sink

hissing out freshness,
and I leave you

to the rhythm of it,

to your little order of things.

Seeing to Wounds

I watch you
nursing bruises
under a peeling birch
your skin purple, blotted,

and note how
something beautiful rises
from seeing vulnerability
lain out like
this.

I kick off my name
to kneel at your side,
try to scrape some meaning
from the words,
from your skin ?

it's a feeling which arrests me;
arrested me then,
still holds me now.

11th of July

I

Through the slats of the garden fence I watch
the little gunmen run by, the thrill of power
glittering their eyes, their shorts half-falling down
around their scuffed calves. It's war and then it's
teatime and then it's out to watch the bonfires,
pellet-guns stuffed into their waistbands.

The pallets have been piling up for weeks; a lanky boy
scales the rotten planks, skelfing his palms
to reach the top, shading his face from the sun
as he plants a swaggering tricolour. Tonight
the air reeks of booze; cans tossed through the air,
beer-foam chemtrails in the night sky. It's lit
and heat roars from the tower, illuminates the red-faced
crowd: green, white, and gold flickering across their eyes.

II

The golden pillar rises, licking up everything:
the old sofas, the extra flags thrown on at the last
minute, the bedsheets spread and spray painted:
a circle with a bullseye, *All Taigs Are Targets*,
picket signs wilting, faces blackening, all of it
devoured by the frenzy of the blistering spire.

Through the slats of my bedroom blinds I watch
the bonfire burn. Only this time it's not a bonfire.
They've burnt a bus. I go past the next day,
take it all in: the charred seats, plastic dripping
from the traffic lights ? silent watchmen whose colours

still change from green to red to green ?
charcoal petals twisting upwards from blown-out
windows, and ashes that glitter in lumps on the tarmac.

III

They're getting younger every year. The bonfire's
getting taller. To think I didn't know that *bonfire*
was once *bone* fire. They've always been raised
like this, on violence. That patch of the field is permanently
damaged, the grass no longer grows green but grey.
There's a long, black stain, like a shadow, on the road
where the bus stopped and didn't leave again: the past
cast into the present. It's bonfire night again,
but I sleep through it like a bad dream, the traffic light
switching, ghostly, in my mind as I fall asleep
from red to green to red to green. Someone fell off
the bonfire last night. They're getting too tall,
the kids. Too tall to play with toy guns.

The Tiler

I hadn't known what it was
To wake 'with a start'
Til that frost-bitten morning
When the tiler came.
His ladder clattered
Against the wall
With such a hearty clunk
That any dream I may have
Been dreaming was torn
Open, and light poured in.
His body, bug-eyed
By the wintry glass
Between us,
Lurched up the rungs
Like a sleepwalker,
Hammer nodding on his hip,
The scrape of tiles
Dragging me from my bed
To sit at the desk
And stare at the ice
On his boots, of which
There is so much to say.

Calving

Out the scullery window
comes the gloved wave
that means to say
a calf is coming.

Lying there, half
dead-looking,
a bundle of
spittle-slick fur
sticking every shape,
a pinkish, piss-
yellow puddle
swaddles her,
her eyes like
lychees, tongue out,
swooned to stillness
by her mother's
proudest moans.

slieve

It's that breathless, bruiseless sky,
pinned up like a fine starched sheet,
that descends, as if untied -
now enfettered by each peak;

It's that sliver of a lough
soaked in fingers sleek of sun,
spattered light like bleach-stained rock,
dragged along and quenched and spun

And that dizzy, drastic height,
tearing through the purpling sky,
like a mirror slices light,
like a finger through an eye.

The awareness comes like fog,
thick and heavy, over all:
that we're suddenly far too small.

Grace

*Nor Priam nor his sons obtain'd their grace;
Proud Troy they hated, and her guilty race.*

From the hillock of the lead mines, the cragged
Thumb of land under which the townscape nests,
The night sky glows with the starry campfires
Of the Trojan host. Long flares and streamers
Of light reach out across the ink-dark tide
And stars burn with envy of the land, where
The waywardness of woodfires calls to mind
Old remnants of war, and fear, and triumph.

The sky, doubled, gladdens the shepherd's heart,
And he beams, lamb tucked in his arm, his face
Streaked with firelight. Across his pasture dance
The shadows of men ? then up start the chants:
Full-bodied plainsongs swelling out like smoke,
Marauding dreams of burning ships, wailing
Down the walls of the Achaian camp's tents.

The stars bleed empty, but the men stay on
And the hours soon make ashes of their cries.
The muddy night carries on the dull roll
Of sounds having lost their shape, lost their way ?
And the shepherd, losing faith, turns away.

Even, now

The boys on the street ran with pellet guns
cul-de-sacs mirrored in their wild eyes wet
noses sycamore seeds lodged in their hair
gravelly knees forefingers tucked tight around
triggers like they'd been taught to hold
weapons they'd shoot you if you were playing
or not two shots to the knee a hot red colon
and wet hot tears under the living-room light.

In the blue-black wash of teatime, I watch them still
run rampant in the street, as guns turn to sticks,
turn to tin cans, turn to stones, 'til they turn and
run home, beating at the back gate: burning,
full. I clack on my pen and begin my resurgence,
stretching out words, counting my bullets.

Asturian Aubade

The bus rolls out between the fields, the muddy corrals that huddle round Candás, the windows slick with a film of morning breath. A stooping farmhand plants his hoe by the foot of his *hórreo*, dwells on a silent prayer to welcome in the morning. Buildings stretch: sunlight seeks out space, like rivers through the streets, the hour turns syrupy, as tea soaks into water, and the lift of shutters grows like applause to the lug and swell of the encroaching sea. The smell of bakeries opening: *palmeras*, *casadielles*, *marañuelas* goldening in knots, windowsills where black pudding purples in its own broth. White husks of seeds spatter washed pavements like manna, and the day's first song rises from the fluty whistle of the *afilador*, the chatter of cutlery drawers catching his ears, his eyes adjusting from the dark, his fingers yet unscathed.

Marañuelas

When the fishermen anchor down
and finish up their meal, their boat
snagging on each wave, they drown

the nets and watch them bloat
in the tug of the sea. Fingers cleave
to long-cold mugs and, having no

food left, the sailors retrieve,
as an afterthought, the prized tin
of marañuelas. Each man receives

the shape baked for him,
twisted neat. Warm with pride
he totters the boat's rim,

each loving sway of the tide,
carrying his golden home-knot,
a fingerprint baked into the side.

PSYCHOMETRY

I

The oxtter,
she called it,
that space

between
her chest
and bicep,

nooked-out
for me. Her
elbow rocked,

her fingers
tight at the
working yarn,

my body
cradled like a
glass milk bottle;

for whole
afternoons,
never warmer.

II

The lough
rushes up
into the oxtter

of land where
my grandma
doubled her trousers

to her knees,
stooped
and fingered

into the bubbling
sand to pluck
out cockles

like ligaments
of beach-
muscle, wet

and veined ?
grains clicking
in her teeth.

They burrow
down deeper
than me,

the tide
washing away
my attempts.

III

There's this word
on the tip of
my pen,

sloshing about

in the bedding
of my ear;

it's burrowing,
nustling into
the wet sand,

like the warm
vowel-heavy
churr of a

wood pigeon
calling invisibly
from the branchwork.

ghost ships

as the last of the evening light crinkles
across the lough and the stars squint
at their double: the constellation of headlights

circling below, tractor beams like comets
over purred rows of cabbages, dark and fat
in their fenced off fields, the water pulls in

to the roadside, filling in potholes
with driftwood and dulse, plumping up
the sloughy bed of the wetland, so that

when the flare of an ambulance light comes
tearing through the ink-dark tide, they'll arrive
only to witness the end of the birth of a star,

splintering out bright across the lough,
where ghost ships ride the water
out past Strangford and into the open sea.

On Watching My Mother Knit

Oxter she called it, that space
between her chest and bicep, nooked-
out for me. Her elbow rocked, her fingers
tight at the working yarn as a pink ball
bumped its way across the floor, stirred
by its undoing.

As it leaves the ground,
rebuilding itself in her fingers,
caught like a fledgling from the air,
her hands come together in worship,
neatening me into a scarf.

Homestretch

Half-dead ?
dew-slick feathers
smack in the middle of the lawn,

I kneel &
follow its watery eye
-line to a nest it left too early,

the *pink pink*
of a mother blackbird
sticking out now from the rabble.

Tucking two
gloved hands under
its tummy, its legs kicking like a toddler,

I offer it up
like an oblation
to the sky, a cry of repentance

for my own
deviation, as if
I had fallen & not flown.

Whale Spotting

The last two orcas circle the lough
like a pair of upturned dinghies:

pumped-out, dorsal fins like rudders,
steering empty through the water.

walls

come spring, the bed is tangled
with the shoots of herbs and flowers,
covering spaces in the dirt. before,
the earth buzzed with a motherly fever,
the pulse of something new ? you, a butterfly
in a jar, the underside of a tapestry,
bright tails hanging out. you wait,
feeling only the weight of yourself ?
a heaviness she knew, and carried well.

kicking at the space, blooming outwards,
held between the very walls that wanted
so desperately to free you ? she taps
at the glass to see you flicker. you were
a bulb pressed into winter soil; come spring
you haven't broken the surface, but found
your own season, somewhere softer, quieter.

White Lilies (after Lorca)

after Lorca

Woe, woe, woe;
fallen star of heaven.
The streets fill with silence
and towels catching the wind.

In the open morning
you reach the corners of the sky ?
torch-bright apple flesh,
dust bloodying your bells.

Daylight lingers in your throats,
choking each unfolding face.
Snow-beaten hydra: another tongue,
a bleeding anther.

If Christ died for sinners,
are the honest free or damned?
I shall come clean ? deadhead me,
dig my roots in promised land.

Woe, woe, woe;
fallen star of heaven.
The streets fill with silence,
towels catching the wind.

NO TWO WAYS

There's no two ways about it:
the man you thought you knew
is dead, speared in the back
by an old friend who just paused
to watch his own reflection spoil
the lake. You were a golden koi,
carrying the weight of the sunlight
on your back, cutting the water
like a dream, unaware of the face
that hung like a blank moon over you,
worrying the spawn and the gunk
of the pond with a forked twig.
Now your boots sink into the mud
and the water clouds, heavy with
the fullness of the sky, the winter.
The frozen glass, dusted white, leaves
a well the size of a breakfast bowl
which you fill with your face and sit
a while; the twig becomes a spear,
and the man you thought you knew
lies washed-out, belly-up on the bank.
Too late to throw him back now;
there's no two ways about it.