

All the Time in the World

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Also by Dennis Haskell

Samuel Johnson in Marrickville: Selected Poems (2001)

The Ghost Names Sing (1997)

Abracadabra (1993)

Listening at Night (1984)

All the Time in the World

DENNIS HASKELL



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To Rhonda

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“Only spiritual things are of value, but only physical things have a verifiable existence.”

SIMONE WEIL

“... victims, and sensational brutality and misery, are easy to imagine and identify with. What is harder to think our way into is ordinariness.”

DAVID MALOUF

“... the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.”

DEREK WALCOTT

A Thin Piece of Light

Ars Poetica

The quick brown fox fucks the lazy metaphor
stressed that anything from the keyboard is absurd.
Even the keys are depressed. Hoarse and vexed
from thinking "*Il n'y a pas de hors texte*",
how can we cope with the world of words
without voting for its hopeless incompleteness?

Inveigled, intrigued, liminal, disguised,
lost deep down in words' seductions of sound
we spin on their axis apart and grow wise:
the song they sing is *not* the world going round;
but those who think this ignore the senses' *allegria*
and the link to the world, in words' onomatopoeia.

Like a burglar interrupted, writing is incomplete
and in its broken glass meaning arrives,
in just that whereof we cannot speak:
the hologram torch of language, shining on our lives.

In Refutation of a Former Aesthetic

The tree
is handed up
from the earth,
waving in the wind
its fragile fingers,

and what could be
more precious than that?

Whatever Happened

for Nigel on his 60th birthday

No I'm sorry I can't
give you a scrap about
what happened, can't say
I saw a thing, only how
it felt later, and hell's teeth,
feels now—I must have
been jumped from behind
—a big bastard, big
and mean he must have been,
and silent as the hour. I was
just ambling along, minding
no-one's business, not
hurting anyone, at least
not more than things demand,
young, fresh, energetic
when . . . ! Well, there it is . . .
I came out stumbling, slumped
a little, surrounded by
flab, aching-boned, some
hair gone and what clumps
were left cigarette ash-grey,
heavy with breath, trying to clutch
the last shreds of dignity,
and not a witness in sight.

Though it's past and my memory's
receding lately it's happened
to others I know. And
so fast! The flatfoot
in charge said flatly
that chasing the bastard

would be like chasing
our own tales.
Now I wonder what
he meant by that?

Encomium to an Inebriate

Even your excellencies proving inadequate,
you voted for inelegance
and the chance to prove ineptitude
an alternative form of grace.
The dignity of disgrace your part,
“A” was for “Alcohol”, as for “Art”.
Ungratefulness for life’s absurdities
can lead to lousy choices:

let others exhort themselves
to build success upon success, taking
step by step, dollar by miserable dollar,
a steady, quantifiable rise into
management, financial viability, house,
car, to prove who they are

to others if not to themselves.
Even success can run
like wine, rich as blood,
as clear as vodka
passed down a waiting throat.
While others blankly work
choices between guns and butter
you prefer the berserk
gregariousness of the gutter

and before their throat-red normality confess
a flair for failure, determined, individual
arabesques of artlessness.

Lines *pour les Symbolistes*

Rimbaud was one beau
and Flaubert a better—

when drunk as a boat
though not half as slow

his heroine could go
hard with a French letter.

Apollinaire gave himself airs
like a pseudonym—but who cares?

And if Gautier was gauche
well, he had a right to be;

Verlaine might make you feel
that it still *pleuts* down on the ville

and what could anyone say
of the intense sterility of Mallarmé?

Though Stephane thought simplicity no go
no simplicity was too simple for Hugo.

The Germans once thought they were *übermenschen*.
The Irish beat up their mystery.

The English were once so pertinacious.
The Swiss just wish they had a history.

But, ah, the French:
every one a vulture
for culture, culture, culture!