

The President of Earth: New and Selected Poems

David Kennedy was born in 1959. He co-edited *The New Poetry* and is the author of *New Relations: The Refashioning of British Poetry 1980–1994*. He edits the magazine of innovative poetry and poetics *The Paper*. His publications include *The Dice Cup*, translations of Max Jacob's prose poems with Christopher Pilling; and *Cornell: A Circuition Around His Circumambulation*. He lives in Sheffield and works as a freelance writer.

Also by David Kennedy:

The New Poetry with Michael Hulse and David Morley (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993)

New Relations: The Refashioning of British Poetry 1980-1994 (Bridgend: Seren, 1996)

The Elephant's Typewriter (Stockton-on-Tees: Scratch, 1996)

Men's Talk (Sheffield: Tom Roder Memorial Prize, 1998)

Cities (Sheffield: The Cherry On The Top Press, 1998)

Smoking, Eating and Speaking with the Dead (Sheffield: The Cherry On The Top Press, 1999)

Four True Prophecies of the New State (Sheffield: The Cherry On The Top Press, 1999)

The Fiery Chariot (Sheffield: The Cherry On The Top Press, 2000)

Max Jacob: The Dice Cup Part I with Christopher Pilling (London: Atlas Press, 2000)

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The President of Earth

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

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To Christine

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Part I: Histories

The President of Earth

The sea's polythene
under the sky's neon
which is where I am
travelling at 675 kph.
My tray table's in position,
it's a wonderful day to consume
and I'm up for it. *Champagne*, please. Thank you.
This is the future I read about in school:
no wars or hunger or disease,
just one clean world, united
in its taste for fine wines,
national cuisines with a Pacific Rim twist,
guest soaps, travel sets and Hollywood.
I bet if I peeped into First Class
I'd see the President of Earth
and his First Lady and their beautiful daughters.
He wouldn't mind the intrusion one bit
– we'd just vaporise on the shimmering surfaces
of each others' smiles, happy actors
in the world's dream.

SEOUL TO HONG KONG, AUGUST 1998

The Lime Blossom Tree

And in the village, a giant lime blossom tree
is the centre of an outdoor ballroom.

The girls wear their most beautiful dresses
but no boots.

The ribbons in their long hair flick the boys' faces;
their skirts fly up, showing brown bodies naked
below the waist.

And when dusk muffles the countryside, it quiets
the violins also
and the dancers walk in pairs to the orchards
or the deepest corn.

And the roots of the lime tree go down very deep,
through generations of sleeping kings
and their soldiers;
through labyrinths, bunkers built by the Nazis
(one room, legend says, carved entirely of amber
they stole from the Russians) until they come up again
in an invisible clarinet playing in a square;
in the old lady who thanks you, pressing your hand,
because she has not spoken French since the war.

One For The Book Of Love

after Laforgue

I could die tomorrow and I've never been in love.
My lips have never touched a woman's lips;

no-one's downloaded me their soul in a single glance
or let me their heart at a peppercorn rent.

And why not? I seem to have been wired for suffering
on a global scale: my nerves are living proof

of chaos theory; someone cuts a flower in Tokyo
and I bleed. How can I love feeling like that?

So I've filled the garden of love with old bikes
and cancelled my subscriptions – to life!

Alone in a world strung out on the sexual fix
I've chosen cold turkey with a B-movie cackle.

Everywhere I go – supermarket, health club, flicks -
I see men with a cold-filtered take on life

chasing women whose eyes flutter
like chaste peepshows and it gets me thinking

is that really all there is? And I start hearing
the raucous rutting of a wildlife film. My head clears

but I see the same thing over again – by Busby Berkeley!
Gents: be correct! Girls: by the right: simpler!

Sundays

after Laforgue

It's Sunday again and it's raining
again and you at the piano
stumbling through 'The Entertainer'

– well, it's not entertaining me!
I'm as weary as a year that ends ninety-nine;
I'm as bored as man with two brains

or two pricks. You know what? I wish I smoked:
giving it up would be something to do.
If I could just get out for half an hour

I'd be as carefree as a new library without any books;
or the wine writer who abandoned superplonk
to search for the Absolute Chardonnay.

One glass of that and I'd float above everything.
The sight of me over the rooftops in the blue
of the evening? The whole town would chill out.

Da-da-da-da Da-da Da-da – please, not again!
What's that? Life's just the space between meals?
I guess there're worse ways of filling it up.

Under The Trees

Sprawled out in the garden, under the trees,
we don't know what to think about our heads;
whether they're jars of letters
or huge words grazing the air.

An insect hovers over yours
like a diacritic mark in Polish,
the one that says if *auto czesc*
means 'automatic hello' or 'car part'.

Somehow this seems decisive
until we remember the trees:
are they performing themselves or the wind
or something entirely other?

I think this, too, is a question
we might reasonably ask of ourselves.

Juliette Greco Walks The Streets

for Tony Kemplen

The city, wistful and insistent,
the yearning of traffic after business
on the inner and outer rings.
And then, reformed by the light
of large planets the city sleeps
and Juliette Greco walks the streets.

Ah Juliette Greco I know I've heard you
– if only I could remember your voice!
Tony has found a record of yours
but we haven't got a record player
so he's running it through
the printing press,
again and again,
breaking it into
smaller and
smaller
pieces.