

Collected Poems

Born in rural Cheshire in 1944 David Chaloner spent his early years dreaming of escape. As the closest city, Manchester provided a cultural and social context for his early writing, when jazz was available in clubs created from empty cotton warehouses and Granada Television struggled with the idea of a new arts programme that included poetry. Apart from 'Little Press' publication, the first published work appeared in the Tandem paperback *Generation X*, a true sociological record of the times, and the Penguin anthology, *Children of Albion*. In the late sixties he founded *ONE*, a magazine for new writing, that existed through the transitional years of a move to London in the early seventies. A continuing sense of enquiry and curiosity informs his work and helps in pushing the possibilities of language, music and image in varying and divers ways.

Collected Poems

DAVID CHALONER



CAMBRIDGE

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For those I love

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There are so many writers, poets and friends who have lived with me through this life that I suspect another volume would not do justice to them and their contribution. Needless to say they are always in my mind.

Where are we now? On the brink of the future. Never giving up. Always going on.

Uncollected Early Poems

Wish You Were Here

I've always considered that phrase
Lacks sincerity and as a generalisation
Of true feelings falls short of any mark
However I must write now
Accept its proposition
As expressing my immediate desire
A two and a half hour transatlantic conversation
Can never equate to my being
There, or you here, or both of us elsewhere,
But together
I do wish you and I were together,
Here or there.
Which is neither here nor there
Because the wish is not sufficient

LONDON / NEW YORK

1979

Tonight the glass is filled frequently
With enough alcohol to determine the immediate
Future events. Avoiding the clumsy hands
Reaching for another, drink.
Presently exposed to uncompromising doubts.
Regaining balance as the chair topples
Under me. Good morning out there.
My vision is distorted but essentially pure.
My head falls forward into stupor.
Hello sunrise, your birds are calling.
Their song is chorused by the silence
But makes little sense, finally.
Where is home this week?
I cannot see the way out of here.
The place is . . .
In the future of memory
In the recall of the coming days

circa OCTOBER 1979

white flakes peel from the wall
the apple tree grows against

sinuous limbs splay across the gutter
in a tangle of unravelled ideas

like dust in the underworld
gripping the slate pitch avidly

holding last year's wind-falls
on the slope

bright spheres outlasting the season
yellowed and pungent in their

inevitable decay
brimming with a concealed possibility

of growth as days disperse and broadcast
autumn's frequent rain

the dreamlight of embracing loss
wasp cavities collapsing to the fibrous core

dark seed withering
beneath a skin of mulch a flesh of sterile pulp

3 JANUARY 1970

Vesalii Icones
(Andreas Vesalius: De Humani Corporis Fabrica)

for Peter Maxwell Davies

a doorbell rings
at the end of the nineteenth century
whispers of a dying era
in a darkened hallway
we are listening
and the folds of brocade
redolent with tobacco smoke
fray at the touch of a hand
condemned to service
in rooms of dreams
and distorted perspective
gaslights splutter like asthmatics
the twisting flames
dance without argument
the doorbell rings
like a scream fraying



hysterical syncopations dance in your blood
dreaming Nijinsky sane, his arena of success
a fabulous ballet, depraved librettist at best
a true philosopher, otherwise a rodent dictator



not close enough to imagine
the energy
the music consumes

in a hotel lobby in Zurich
or was it Prague
palms flanking the doors of mahogany
where the performance affects
the lives of an audience
of strangers,
tremble and fret
in the dry mid-summer air
the fronds shadow-box
on walls of faux marble
outside limousines collect
fur and jewellery
in debauched disarray

this hysterical scene,
in which each participant
manages a role
of considerable proportion
slips into mayhem and panic,
the faces dissolve
the year drifts into an index
of months weeks days
first lines acknowledgements
and reference

✱

why do I sit here
exposed to such sententious tones

I have walked in a street
narrow as a vein
in a town possessed

whose hand manipulates
the turncoat puppet of
social deconstruction

black boots stand empty
at the door
where light falls brazen
from an addled sun
in the late occult afternoon

the slippers dance
silently in a vacant theatre

remote within my clothes
I claim the day



“it is a thoroughly modernist day”
she announces
glass light cuts
her bleached hair into narrow strands

her red lips move
and mould the words she sings
a continuum in mime
each movement a gesture of incestuous delight

he does not lack desire
but dreams only the bitter kisses
on her adored body

they wander in the rancid fields
of harvest
crippled with gestures of desire

✱

dawn soothes the empty rooms
he moves exquisitely
suede light on stained glass

his nakedness dazzles the walls
the mirror imitates his every action

hands shape gestures of desire
his skin shines
eyelids purple with fatigue

self-ravished and lustful
he is aching to hold

listless graceful
ravishing the silent image in the glass

24 JULY / 6 AUGUST 1970

I cannot move
buds throb outside the window

letters arrive
stained with adventure
the ghosts of foreign tongues
gummed under each flap

wandering words accumulate
stagger off the page
in festival bewilderment

it is not freedom
merely a form of verbal breakdown
corrupting purpose

luminous blue smoke plumes
in the ruffled air
above crippled chimneys

a scrambled alphabet
on the explicit sky

I remember northern lights
the united states of america
is struggling to conquer
the scorched star of asia

it is spring in the trees

28 APRIL 1970

disappearance is rendered more terrible for being so complete
the longing broken ornaments of regret fill the haunted rooms

whatever displacement restores past intimacy lacks the shapeliness
of the heroine's presence in this day and the manifestation
beyond the sentinel rushes on the sparkle and flash of the water's surface
the lake reaching towards you grass fringe banks of red earth
a place with which you are not familiar curse of brilliance and unforgiving
blue

ah miss jessel your ghost and dark mysterious acts
thrill and entice me an arm placed across my shoulder a hand in my hand
a mouth across my lips

the lake shore the house and formal gardens eroticism by the influence
of your movements electric desire self continuation through the elastic
strata of your sensuality lost soul in the pliable substance that surrounds us

connect to the day in moments of charged precision between the act
and the intention between your loss and this desire

5 FEBRUARY 1971

Going Out For Cigarettes

mid august ennui haunted by
mid september cool

betrayed 4 days ago
in the morning sunlight
pushing out long shadows
on fields grey with moisture

& tonight
going out for cigarettes from
the machine without my jacket
a sharp chill catches under my shirt
like a shoal of small silver fish
aerating the night tide

the luminous halo
from a bisected moon
behind shallow drifts of cloud
reflects off damp rooftops

& the small stars
complete their journey of light years
duration in the moment
my pupils locate them
and the day slides off inevitably & dark

14 AUGUST 1970

Poem for Mary

(stepping from shade):

in abrupt sunlight
she adores the faultless sky,
body of burnished gold :

her face,
charmed concern , bedecked &
flowing with darkly velvet hair:
eyes acute satin :
intense lips , a pleated cushion
sewn with flowers :

the breath the breath inspires:
drunken nobility rampage at the door,
not to be ignored :
weeds simper a brief invocation:
my body pays homage to your pristine
ministrations

circa 1970

a quick gesture attracts my attention

the meaning of you
to remind also of your presence

(& lack)

for the hand lies
empty
touching air
& the scent of you lingers

vaguely persisting

circa 1970

The Photographs

you turn and blur badly
all those people that so much has altered
and so little changed in the face of propaganda
'field' 'tree' 'sky' 'cloud' 'bird' 'hill' 'ruin'
various dates the ink fades the strangers
particularly Albert, smiling and benign, one foot
on the gate of 1931
clumsy bi-planes in sepia hangars
laughing at the new unnaturalness
pressing the shutter guessing the image
living in the ballast of blank spaces
all these occasions
and the preoccupation with postcards
backwards into the future turning the pages
seeing the lives there

6 APRIL 1971

this place

a dream
of inconstancy

sheets of billowing wind
mismanage our hair

coarse grasses yield
previously untrodden
beneath our feet

I would ask no more than such as this remain
unfettered

& grasses grow

free as emotion

& stones

lie altered

by no man

LATE 60'S

leaning over
 the mean
 pencil scribbles
 a lamp burns
behind my hand
 dispersing
 the room's clutter of
 belongings
 into a distant
darkness
 no longer
 behind my crouched figure
but further
 in a mysterious place

 strange
 devoid of personal
 feeling

surprising then from that

 this poem

1966

you do not believe in the definition of a wall

overgrown with pressed flowers
ornamental relatives
and rectangular memories

you are wary of stairs
with their brief and disconcerting levels
that dare the effortless push
towards a smouldering point
where horizontal forces converge
and hysterical distortions deflate
the armchair and the painted screen
and spongy panic that contracts

a gloved and elegant hand passing the pill
of sugar-coated illusions

20 DECEMBER 1971

