

## The Harbour Beyond the Movie

LUKE KENNARD is an award-winning poet, critic, dramatist and research student at the University of Exeter. His first collection of prose poems *The Solex Brothers* was published by Stride Books. He has worked as regional editor for *Succour*, a bi-annual journal of poetry and short fiction and as an associated reader for *The Kenyon Review*. He won an Eric Gregory Award in 2005.

Also by Luke Kennard

*The Solex Brothers* (Stride Press, 2005)

# The Harbour Beyond the Movie

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*For Zoë*



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## I. Other News



## Film Noir

Broken shadows through Venetian blinds.  
'This has the soft note of improvisation.'  
I said, 'our dialogue.' She missed her cue.

The bell-boy signalled with his fez,  
Hissing unhelpful *non-sequiturs* down his sleeve.  
She shrugged, eyes wide—which sufficed.

'This has the sickening note of a play seen drunk,'  
I said, 'forgotten laughter and obliterated space.'  
'And what do I have to do for a cigarette?' she said.

The director was busy with his Freudian tarot cards;  
Sometimes metal dice would fall out of his pocket:  
'Hey mister, you dropped some change . . . oh.'

I'm scuppered: the way the silhouettes play on her dress;  
The metre of her footsteps in the hall;  
The nervous flowers drawn on the backs of her hands.



After hours I go walking with the shooting script,  
Ignoring whispers from freshly dug alley-ways,  
'Hey, buddy, want to come check out the darkness

I just excavated?' My wisecracks don't add up  
In bare interiors—they are shattered by a stammer—  
So I smile in a parody of genuine warmth

Which, time and again, is misconstrued  
As genuine warmth—by myself as much as others.  
Nobody takes their tears more seriously

Than a man who never cries. Another monogrammed  
Handkerchief: of course, when you *follow*,  
You end up exactly where they want you.



I do not recognise the handwriting of my putative friend;  
Have I been telling jokes in my sleep again?  
'Bad ones,' she confirms, nodding.



The director is bed-ridden by the thought of bad reviews;  
Plenty of his enemies are free-lance writers.  
I wait, smoking in the cavities of the set.

'I tapped a stranger's shoulder; I was looking for you,'  
I explain to the shadow of a vase behind a pillar.  
Later I go calling her name around the docks

Until a window opens in a tall building  
And I cover my ears, running for home.  
This is more, you understand, than a professional concern.



Leaving the industry party I saw a smile  
Which turned out to be my reflection  
In the lustre of the balustrade.

That night I hear she vanished in a yellow cab  
To the wild applause of the rain—  
I was making toast at the time of the call.

When we finally broke down her door we found  
A white curtain flapping in the open window—  
As if waving goodbye.

## Halátnost

**Halátnost** [Russian] noun.—literally, ‘dressing-gownness’ (Halát meaning dressing-gown), a state of detachment, inertia, procrastination, day-dreaming . . .

He sleeps! He sleeps! A whisper passes round;  
His orchestra are tiptoeing away  
From the four-poster bed in which he lies  
When someone knocks a cello through a bank  
Of clarinets; wearily the players  
Return to their sheet-music; this will be  
Another long night in his company.  
It could be dawn before they stumble through  
The wild gardens of this ancient house  
Where he, behind a leafy window sets  
Upon his education—like a cat  
Preserved in amber in an attitude  
Of fury. *To be seen to learn's enough,*  
He told his henchman in a rare display  
Of trust (betrayed—the henchman told the cook).  
Tomorrow he will reference his paper  
On characters crushed by falling pianos  
In tragedy or comedy—but now  
He cannot sleep; he is sick with worry:  
For what if he *is* evil, after all?  
What if this insubstantial kindness is  
Another weapon? His brow creases up.  
A piano hitched to the ceiling creaks;  
The strands of twine will snap in perfect fifths  
Before it falls—*Oh, let it fall on me.*

A dead aunt from a war-torn city sends  
Three children—who arrive next morning, with a note  
Of introduction; two boys and a girl.

Something in their expressions is askew—  
Like people in Nineteenth Century scenes  
Who did not imagine their faces would  
Affect the outcome of the photograph:  
We have different eyes now, eyes casting round  
For the nearest reflective surface.  
There are horrible opinions everywhere:  
Like oil slicks. They must be kept indoors,  
These children—he prepares for each of them  
A pair of slippers and a dressing gown.

## Plethoric Air

We all laughed at the decomposing clown,  
But later shame sunk upon us  
And we got smashed on the balcony.

I had lost my left shoe in the blood.  
The doyenne and her ten attachés  
Scattered blossom on the divans.

We were charmed by a famous puppy,  
A dozen gold pins in her forehead;  
A tendency to speak ill of the dead.

'The dead are so stupid,' she said.  
An attaché took me by the temples and ordered,  
'Look: that advertisement on the crevasse;

Notice the inverted commas around "*crazy adventures*"  
Grow bigger than the words themselves,  
Framing the very hills and the valleys.

Like that man by the fountain who changed his name to #:  
But ask him *why* and he'll say,  
"You've got to stand out from the crowd, right?"

And other redundant platitudes.  
Disappointment kicks you like an ostrich:  
Bloody, sandy and hard.

In other news, we grow weary and suspicious—  
And we'll ask you to defend yourself  
Using words we already hold to be meaningless.'

I lay back, bumping my head on the war.  
Every solid object has been declared part of the war.  
I saw the puppy flex her golden needles.

'You should talk to this guy,' I said, 'he's funny.'  
'Talk to him?' she spat.  
'I wouldn't even eat his brain.'

## I Am No Longer Your Pilot

A pig fell out of the sky.  
It landed poorly, but was not wounded.  
'Tell me,' said the pig, 'of cruelty;  
Tell me of the sweet, stale smoke on your fingertips;  
Tell me of your tinnitus and your unsightly body hairs.'

I heard a note that carried my will away  
So instead I told the pig of obloquy and calumny,  
And the pig was satisfied—which is no great stroke.  
He slept a while, but presently awoke and squawked,  
'Teach me of satire and upper-body strength.'

I was born under the space between two stars,  
So instead I beat a military tattoo with maracas  
And sang about national identity and gender.  
But this time the pig was not satisfied.  
'That is not what I asked for at all,' he complained.

'You have reneged on your promise.  
You are no gentleman and have learned nothing  
About yourself you did not already know.'  
Now the pig was becoming transparent,  
His form but condensation and mist.

I turned my back on the city.  
I moved to a log cabin in Finland.  
Where I never read magazines, just looked at the snow  
And the silver light on the urns, and the pig-shaped absence.  
I never shook off that pig-shaped absence.

## Daughters of the Lonesome Isle

*for Annabelle*

When I reach the station, Marcus is asleep.  
Someone has thrown his hat into the bin.  
He won't wake, so I board the train alone.

The window tastes like a river on my tongue.  
'Annabelle?' I ask the opposite woman.  
'No,' she says. 'Sorry, honey.'

Stupid Marcus, falling asleep like that.  
But in the city it is snowing,  
And I love snow more than anything.

Little stalls flank the cobbles:  
*£20—Your past redefined*  
*As manifest destiny. All symbolism*

*Subtle! Unsentimental! Hard-won!*  
But I don't like the look of the gypsy's  
Typewriter. By the doughnut wagon:

*All Your Secret Desires Engraved on the Head of a Pin!*  
Tradition dictates that you then shove the pin  
Into someone you love for good luck.

A crow lands on the doughnut wagon.  
'A crow in the snow!' cries a little girl.  
The crow regards her with disdain.

'Crows are great, aren't they?' I say.  
'Do you like crows too?'  
It really is kind of you to listen to me.'

A man plays piano with his tongue.  
A harlequin paints a cream pie in watercolour  
By the quay. I guess . . . Oh, I don't know.

I sit down by the darkened alleyway.  
A charcoal overcoat flashes past me.  
'Annabelle?' I say. 'Annabelle?'

## The Journalist's Prayer

Oh, that I could harness thought plantations;  
Perfect villages of memory,  
The tree, ponderous with ravens;  
The plastic bread in a plastic oven—  
A gentleman proclaiming it delicious,  
Winking, offstage, that he might be debunked;  
And I, with my thunderous notebook,  
Emerging from the vault, yesterday.  
I know where to kick a shark, I know  
The graceful bull, the loathsome dove;  
That their apparent tranquillity  
Is rather silent, impotent terror.  
May criticising me become forever redundant  
That I might wake with a shriek of happiness.  
May I never have to bury another leopard.  
Let me be thought intelligent, even the kindest;  
And when I am without sin,  
Let me cast the first stone;  
And when I am without pride,  
Let them build a statue in my honour.

## Autumn Collection

There was dancing but no music.  
The liquidambar scattered its leaves;  
I played jacks with the Inuit girl.

The clown's morality tale was too prescriptive,  
But we didn't like the murderer's song  
Either—he was cruel and, worse yet,

Thought he was better than everyone else—  
Which he was (a handsome, well-read  
Man with an excellent singing voice,

A refined, finely nuanced sense of humour,  
Sensitive to whomsoever he spoke)  
But that was hardly the point; the point was

We began to miss those daunting certainties,  
Expressing our loss through man-shaped piñata  
And festivals in which a chasm opened.

Many of us have our own versions of events  
Engraved one over the other on monuments  
Erected one on top of the other.

## Backstage at the Meta-Festival

All those songs about singing are something else.  
How is she? I mean the carnival promoter—  
Did she like the human skull necklace?  
Did she write to her daughter and say,  
Daughter, you have been invoiced for this invoice;  
Please fill in and return the attached order form  
And you will receive a stamped addressed envelope?  
(Family coat of arms depicting a bear smoking).  
Picking a fleck of rust off a humpback bridge  
I had this idea to visit Eddie and give him back his guitar;  
It was in the shape of an angel and I'd stolen it  
Last Spring backstage at the Meta-Festival.  
I'm really not comfortable in his presence now.

My car slapped through the puddles by the theatre.  
"KATE: It occurred to me that a wall *really is* a kind of mother."  
I read over the director's shoulder and would hereby  
Like to withdraw my funding from the project.  
Does this part really have to be played by a bee?

## Instrumental #3

Curse those *Untitleds*:  
Restaurants serving cookery books;  
The gift of wrapping paper—

Yet somehow the lamps are lit,  
And most of the blood is fake blood.  
I don't remember getting up this morning:

The fridge is full of food and charming  
Theatrical light. Brinkmanship  
Would have us remember its ends,

But history abhors a brinkman:  
'He's really more of an antihero  
Spiking his coffee in a cinema diner.'

Nevertheless, there are compensations:  
Coffee at the language schools of the marina;  
The quality of canvas sails in dusk light.

Tonight doctors prescribing Get Well Soon cards  
Glance at their watches or assistants  
Who glance at their watches and say,

'It's getting late, Doctor.  
What's another word for beautiful?  
Would you describe me as perceptive?

What is the word "is"?' Language is the butter  
You rub on a pirate. Language is the key I stick in your eye.  
I would sooner have no tongue than nothing to say.

# The Murderer

## I. THE MURDERER

I take the murderer for coffee.  
'Make sure you don't *murder* your coffee!'  
I joke. He likes my jokes.

Later I swing a plank into his face:  
This is to stop him enjoying himself—  
Which is integral to the rehabilitation process.

His mouth trickles blood like a tap quarter-turned.  
He likes my analogies. 'Hey, Murderer!'  
I yell, '*Murdered* anyone recently?'

The murderer likes to play badminton.  
When he loses, I say, 'That's what you get for being a murderer.'  
When he wins, I say,

'I guess you got yourself in pretty good shape  
Murdering all those people.'  
I'm not about to let the murderer forget he's a murderer.

When I dance with the murderer I let him lead  
Because he is the more proficient dancer—  
'Just be careful not to murder me!' I tease.

The prison sits on the horizon like a great ash-tray—  
When we travel I give him the window seat.  
'Hey, murderer, would you like a sandwich?' I say,

'Or would you rather murder someone?'  
The murderer eats his cheese and ham sandwich.  
'The forecast is for snow,' I tell him.

## II. PICNIC

The murderer has just had a haircut.  
'Your new haircut makes you look like Judas,' I say.  
That night we go to see a musical adaptation

Of the September 11th terrorist attacks.  
It doesn't go down well—in fact the show  
Is abandoned due to audience derision.

'Oh, I'm sorry,' cries the director.  
'Is five years too soon for you people?'  
The next day it is sunny, so we have a picnic

With French bread and olives and cheeses  
And a box of wine. The breeze is cold.  
'I think I will write a novel called:

*My Picnic with a Murderer,*' I say.  
We stay out until the light is low and the grass is damp.  
The murderer gets bitten by a red ant.

When we get home I dump the picnic basket  
In the kitchen with the washing up and the half-eaten  
Cans of beans. A half dead fly crawls up the window.

The murderer never cleans the house  
Due to self-esteem issues.  
He doesn't believe that he deserves a clean house:

He believes that the house should mirror his soul.  
I take the murderer shopping for a new wardrobe.  
'Let's get you spruced up,' I tell him.

I buy him a little sailor suit with *murderer* embroidered  
On the collar. My mother's been calling again;  
Somebody sold her a carpet she doesn't want.

### III. THE DISGUSTING TELEPHONE

The murderer has written a libretto.  
'It's not bad, for a murderer,' I tell him.  
'Maybe you could round up some other murderers

And they can perform it for you.'  
We do not mention the libretto again, even when  
The murderer refuses to be interviewed

For *True Crime* magazine. 'I'd have thought  
That was right up your street,' I say.  
'You know—crime, and all that.'

I have a separate telephone for talking to the murderer.  
I call it The Disgusting Telephone.  
The murderer likes to keep abreast of current affairs.

'You'll be pleased to hear there's been a natural disaster,'  
I tell him. 'Over seven hundred dead.  
I expect that's made your day, hasn't it?'

Every Tuesday we visit the Job Centre.  
'Unfortunately nobody currently requires a murderer,'  
I report. 'Still. There's always next week.'

The murderer smiles, patiently. On his birthday  
I take the murderer to the best restaurant in town.  
'Don't you know any other murderers we can invite?'

I ask. He doesn't reply, so I don't push the point.  
'Here's to you, murderer!' I raise my champagne glass.  
I'm thinking of taking up Yoga or something.

#### IV. GIRLFRIEND

I pick up the murderer's girlfriend at the station.  
'Have you travelled far?' I ask her.  
'No,' she says. 'It should have been half an hour,

But a horse died on the tracks.  
It took them three hours to remove it, poor creature.'  
'A horse is rather like an unforgivable sin, isn't it?' I say.

She is wearing a dress made of shag-pile carpet;  
She is drinking a can of orangeade.  
She has another can of orangeade in her pocket.