

The Devil's Bookshop

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Also by David Kennedy

Poetry

The Roads (Salt, 2004)

Eight Excursions collaboration with Rupert Loydell (The Cherry
On The Top Press, 2003)

The President of Earth: New and Selected Poems (Salt, 2002)

Cornell: A Circuition Around His Circumambulation (West House
Books, 2001)

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

The Elephant's Typewriter (Scratch, 1996)

Books about Poetry

Elegy (Routledge, 2007)

Douglas Dunn (Northcote House/Writers and Their Work, 2007)

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

As Editor

Necessary Steps: Essays on Poetry, Elegy, Walking, Spirit (Shearsman,
2007)

*Additional Apparitions: Poetry, Performance & Site Specificity with
Keith Tuma* (The Cherry On The Top Press, 2002)

The New Poetry with Michael Hulse and David Morley (Bloodaxe
Books, 1993)

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To Christine, who makes everything possible

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The Metamorphosis of Gaëtan Dugas

Gaëtan Dugas (20.02.53–30.03.84), erroneously identified as 'Patient Zero' and wrongly held responsible for spreading AIDS in America.

The words of the world keep buzzing, swarming,
painting black any sun that warmed you.
No wonder it feels so late and it is
but not so dark your blond hair and green eyes
can't be made out quite clearly as a man's
not a beast's feasting on its monstrous lust;
your Beach Boy Jesus beauty as beauty,
unqualified, purely its own reason.

And I must start with your body,
site of all the bother,
otherwise I'm copying a ghost
made by others. Your afterlife's
a half-life: your printed voice
showers death, makes desire a wand
forever striking forth shapes transformed
and bodies strange; you're spread from site

to site to site like, yes, a virus.
So I must remember your body,
your good body and wonderful skin.
Then I must call you 'brother'
because naming you zero makes you
a hole, a dirty sink, a poisoned outlet,
more and less than yourself, an origin
and nothing, the lowest and the first,

a vanishing point risen above the horizon.
You've been a tale from Ovid long enough,
a one-way system of loss and rupture.
Beautiful metamorph, come back to yourself
from the demon lover, folkloric black hat

of a biotic drama. Show us again
the fivefold form of your feet and hands,
your ridgeless forehead, your smooth temples.

You won't know Vancouver's city fathers said 'yes'
then quickly 'no' to a cherry tree for you
in Stanley Park. Your pink petals
might lead to others, crash the ecosystem.
They grudged your friends some shore, a wedge
between the park and a hotel. Even in death
you're only allowed to be a space,
a disuse the four winds can chafe.

Last I read the tree's pulled through, untended.
It stands, exchanging earth and the heavens
that spangle the Strait of Georgia's watery floor.
Perhaps a Pisces *should* be called to mind by water
but you're owed much larger recompense
than this unnoticed, trembling marker.
My song alone can't bring you in
from the raw weather of exception,

and the words swarming, and back inside the walls.
All these lines have in their gift
is arguing for an archaeology
with which we tag the words your tongue made
and you become again the author of your acts.
Life goes on where the streets begin:
through them runs the profit of the dead
—not what they leave but how we spend their loss.

The Bombs, July 2005

Trying to join words
to four bombs,

words that are not,
words that are not,

words that are not,
that are not,

are not
like carnage,

atrocities, screens
around the bombs.

Or trying to join words
to four men,

words that are not,
like jihad, cell,

screens
around the men.

Or trying to start
from the same point:

how much
they hated

us: our fierce,
pointless individualisms.

Trying to join words
to four bombs,

to four men,
words that are not,

trying I stood up
in a room

nine days later,
before a reading,

and said something
about a line

with 'harm' at one end
and, at the other,

'care' where
poetry is

showing us care.
I stood up

trying to join words
that would stand.

Standing,
I tried to word joins.

Balanced
on the tip

of trying,
I tried to join words,

words that won't
make the living

or the dead cringe
and crawl away

and turn their faces
to the wall.

Calendar

after Spenser's The Shepheardes Calendar (1579)

Jan and Feb are idylls,
but plaintive, winterbeaten.
The mails clogged with poems
yearning for publishers.
With distant shepherds competing with each other.
 And where are the dead?
 Not resting, not gone.
 Not withered in the cold earth.
Our heads are hotels
where we teach the dead how to live.
How to watch the days go by.
When to appear.
Which dreams to inhabit.
What, if anything, to say in them.

March and April are darts
of beautiful regard.
Wounding stick figures
out on to catwalks.
Spearing the annual tribute.
 And where are the dead?
 Not gone, not resting,
 not withered in the cold earth.
Our eyes are projectors
screening the dead.
This half minute, that ten seconds.
Slower and slower.
On wider and wider screens.
Watching each nuance assemble, decompose.

May and June are songs,
ringing clear in mazy thickets.
Between the branches,
the sun flashes
off the crystal floor of heaven.
 And where are the dead?
 Not resting, not gone.
 Not withered in the cold earth.
Our bones are scaffolding
round listed buildings.
Behind plastic's clatter and flap
we strip off usage, bring back
what we never possessed.
The paradox of fidelity.

July and August are
delectable controversies
whose dialect differs from the common.
Cathedral noons; at night, the same domes
crossed by comets and blazing stars.
 And where are the dead?
 Not resting, not gone.
 Not withered in the cold earth.
Our tongues are jetties,
runways, platforms, hard landings,
where the dead itch to step down
or step off; obedient to the story.
Its exemplary situations.
Our doubts about it.

September and October.
Lugubrious seasons of the bass clarinet.
Winding dapper ditties
into unnatural rages
around the cogs and escapements of weather.
 And where are the dead?
 Not resting, not gone.
 Not withered in the cold earth.
Our skin is an archive.
Shared or multiple authorings
of anonymous or particular ecstasies.
An archive producing a past.
A past being constantly changed.
The fidelity of paradox.

November and December.
Delights laid abed
and welkin curdled.
Cupid shivering in a bare thicket.
At his back, a quiver of cold iron.
 And where are the dead?
 Not resting, not gone.
 Not withered in the cold earth.
Our bodies are reservoirs
of writing, writing that dreams.
Of puncture, of coming on its own.
Without choice. Without occasion
or even a subject. Without work.
Without responsibility.

The Lost Room

There was a room, I thought,
under our kitchen.

I looked down into darkness
when we came here,

caught stone crumbs blinking
in my torch beam.

I looked down into darkness
at black dice,

spent jewels, petrified milt, dust
smoking itself,

and my heart clanged open,
clanged right open,

—the bluebells are out in the wood!—
and into itself

took one more lost note back.
I sang that room,

the dream of opening a space,
for a long time.

I sang not the knocking through
and digging out:

I sang only the room ready
to be breathed in.

I tuned and polished that dream
for a long time

until I could see my steps
work in it,

feel my voice bound in it.
And if I said

that, in the dream of the room
I sang, I saw,

I think, a possibility,
two or three frames,

of being saved—if I said
that, I'd agree

straight away it was asking
for a hammer

too, but there *was* comfort
in having work left

to do, an action I could see
the end of,

in the hope of appointing
this dream of myself

as myself—I can't say more
or better.

I thought there was a room
but it's a void.

My neighbour uncovered
his and told me,

uncovered his and showed me,
 lifting a new board

he was about to nail down.
 When I told him

about my room I heard
 the Devil

sneering, sniggering;
 taking back

into himself one more bit
 of the world

that's his business; and leaving
 me one more lost note.

I heard the Devil laughing
 as the dream

of the room flickered and shrank
 to a dot,

a dot that floated off
 and was lost

in the dust that is all
 the lost bits,

the dust of the world
 smoking itself.

Winter Windows

i.m. Steve Lacy, musician, 1934–2004

“The winter begins
to strike gray here.
I think it’s all the emptiness
that provokes the visions
(resolutions) that emerge
as the year turns,”
writes a West Coast friend,
rover of Mt. Tamalpais;
and the empty trees
crazing brittle light
do tempt one’s thoughts
to ideograms,
things simple but full,
stick figures, letters
one looks *through*.

Close by but hidden,
struck metal measures,
unsentimentally,
how the day shrinks.
Kids’ rhyme with a frost
love song left to rust,
—the only waltzes
for days of oil wanted,
of puzzle and crake,
traces in spaces.
Music with a twist
but the citric note
become the tune’s
internal exile
from its own sugars;

become the way
to find the enormous
inside the tiny;
music like Lacy's.
As in: a workshop
on Monk's 'Friday the 13th'
devoted to
the stutter
in the second measure;
how most miss it out
and so miss Monk.
Monk doesn't miss them.
As in: a soprano
blown into the strings
of an upright piano,

its blowing away
listened to
intently,
each note's past
a question from the future.
As winter strikes,
this is what might come
to us down the ache
where sky was,
the haunt
of separate birds.
This is what comes
to me from seeing
you but never meeting you;
from knowing you only with my ears.

Now I think I'd like
to check some titles:
troubles, trickles,
clangs and clinkers,
gleam, blinks, the window.
Now I'll sing you
something for the season
with a dogged, dry lilt;
a slow-toying, paternoster work-out.
Something that plays off
closed and open,
as if a squawk
could blossom and fruit.
Something I learnt
meeting you in my ears.

Music is a way
to live small figures
repeated as if
you don't know how to
but have to
 music
is a way to live
as if breaths are steps
rising and falling
so time accents space
accents time
 music
is an endless stair
guesses where we go
where it winds and how

as if you don't know
but have to
 music
is a way but not
not that line in Proust
that says the only
good paradises
are lost ones
 music
is a way to live
now repeated now
as if you don't know
as if you don't know
now now slow forward

Near Death

in memory of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross 1926–2004 on Holocaust Day, 27.01.05

Winds crash into January,
whipping us through the cities,
working us hard through the grief
of short days and big red suns
blowing out and going down
the minute they catch fire.
Good you went out in August,
the season dressed in travellers.
One more winter would have been
a damn procrastination,
the gate closed, the plane waiting
but not moving, the work done.

It started in Maidanek:
on the walls of the barracks
were hundreds of butterflies.
On the walls of the barracks,
walls of nothing to hope for,
children already crossed off
all the lists of the living
scratched them, carved them, then left them,
the hundreds of butterflies.
It started in Maidanek:
all the butterflies speaking
from the walls of no answers.

Fast forward one decade, two:
all over the Western world
no-one was dying, no-one.
All through the Fifties, into
the Sixties, the doctors were
adamant: 'no dying here!'
You walked through the hospitals,
crossed arctics of loneliness
found the rooms of the dying,

the rooms of no answers.
You held out your tongue to them,
let their words fill up the world.

In your last years, after strokes
and a fire, as you waited
for what you called 'transition',
in changed times critics gathered.
Your five stages were too neat,
some said; were not even yours,

one said. So changed times change truth
into fashion, styles of will.
We no longer trust your kind:
accent thick as history,
charismatic, passionate,
unsentimental, stumbling
out of Europe's darkness,
blinking in the light you saved,
channelling tales of magic
and wonder. Enough! we cry,
away with your implicit
morals, reaffirmations

of faith. We only want to
watch reality and make
nothing better. So changed times
change truth, erase the moment
you grasped and, in grasping, made.
Back in nineteen sixty-nine
America was at war
with itself over its war.
It seemed the nation spewed death
and ate it, ate it, ate it.

The nation ate so much death,
denial wore itself out.

In a room, we remember
the dead with films, poetry.
We open our mouths, hold death
on our tongues in a plain room;
watch light's work on the clean walls.
A little way up the road,
traffic control deals planes up,
stacked planes down, drowns the squeals
of starting and the low drones
of ending in each other.
Winds crash around a plain room,
shriek through cracks, into our mouths.

The Waters

for whoever thirsts

*Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears
into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?*

PSALMS 56 : 8

I

Today I would be water:
standing, unblinking,
still enough to play back
every shiver of a passing
across and through me.
Today I would be water:
sweeping all before me,
muscling through gutters,
rattling windows.
Today I would be water.

II

A house of waters.
Of weeping and again weeping
and the washing of weeping.
Of cloths and basins and alabaster jars,
jars of ointment
and jars storing tears.
Of a slow line waiting
to write a name on a white stone
and leave it with the others.
A registry of waters.

III

What the sky wants
to form we don't know
but that it throws wind, drops rain,
and we are ourselves
suddenly, found pushing
into the air. This tear,
I don't know what it forms
but undwelling;
the water vase tipped over, cracked,
suddenly nameless.

IV

I stand in the road;
I hear the drains,
their ecstasies of rain
swelling the world's body.
A voice that is stopped,
subtracted, makes my tears.
I hope to move soon
through the clean air after rain,
freshened with birds singing.
I stand in the road.

V

Terry Riley on the radio
from L.A. as the sky gets black
with the rain they say will fall
heavily slash, stroke, oblique, virgule.
He says: a standpoint of supplication.
He says: whenever you're limited by something
you look more deeply into it
to find out what's there.
And so we look into ends
to know those who made them.

VI

What tears water—a date,
a distance—pitches us
wildly from wanting to
not wanting it fresh
and customary—which is some work.
But there is more, picked up
only when worked out;
something fresh but new:
one June morning, the pond
powering up a single yellow flag.