

Revudeville

Revudeville: Poems

by

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**For Doris and Jack Tyler,
my Mum and Dad**

Publisher's Note: The font, *IM Fell Great Primer*, in which this book is set, is a modern computer-generated facsimile of an original historical font and has been used in this book in keeping with the *spirit* of the book, especially those poems connected with London life. It faithfully reproduces the effects of the original hot metal typeface, *including imperfections and irregularities in spacing* (kerning). This is deliberate.

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Maximal Anthems

Manifesto

Find your Tahiti before it's too late.
Sounds trite, childish, even. Let's risk it,
spell it out. What's your Tahiti?
Where dreams travel with the house asleep
and washing put away? Before we go,
instinct insists, we should think where it is,
that place, not be content as travellers on the net.

Think of Gaugin, Lautrec, Van Gogh, singing
out their century in feathers borrowed from
whores and dandies, birds-of-paradise.

Aristo Lautrec sometimes went home to Mother,
gaudy lanterns always drew him back, preferring
hustlers who could honestly look him in the eye.

Vincent knew being sun-seared, moon-mad,
screwed, the only way, even piled with unsold-
canvases his cafés fizz welcoming light.

Tahitian women chorused Gaugin
(and, though rough on Mrs G., he had to
dance with them before time called).

Literally, his Tahiti, if you take my point,
yours may be a puddled beach, grey eyes,
flecked titanium-white. Something found, lost,
always, never gained.

Listen above traffic,
fax, mobile, pager. Supermarket-flowers
can't out-glare flashing, longed-for plumage.

Lost, discovered, always, never,
there ... Find your Tahiti.
Have I found mine? Maybe
I'm writing it.

Better Than Silence (Self Portrait, Salvatore Rosa, c.1645)

He'd hate this poem, detest e-mails, texts,
loathe *Big Brother*, *Wii*,
'*You Tube*, reality TV,
programmes where presenters invade
houses seeking sickly pets, antiques,
or sometimes spill news of lost relatives.

Closed book, his face
suggests its own tight place
in a private library he knows will burn one day.

Hard to like, harder, though, to love,
given to quiet loud as tantrums.
He'd not remember fish and chips on the way home

from what job? Courier? Pick Pocket? Tax Inspector?
See him in a car? No, he'd bus it,
and never, ever bring you flowers.

Soundtrack? Secret raw flamenco,
monks chanting, even punk *Gogol Bordello*,
but he wouldn't dance,
one of those angry blokes, stiffening walls at parties,
watching girlfriends Salsa with strangers.

Wouldn't dance, set lips snarl:
'Sooner spend Saturdays at a theme park!'
Wouldn't dance, though
no matter how they're cloaked,
slim limbs suggest he might be excellent, and his eyes'
coals imply something ignitable, a passion –

Man, warring with born elegance, fashioned
head to foot, for dirty dancing.

Mr Hogarth is Unwell (For Jack Yates)

I'm painter's pug. From sash-windows,
he and I look down on a loud-lamenting crowd.
They mourn a silken countess who (two days ago)
wits much reviled,

now hacks embrace her shroud
as they'd caress a favoured child.

I growlingly consider crowds fair game,
as does my master.

Although, I've heard him say, his forte lies with epics,
rising hackles pulse with mine, for this jostling,
posturing throng who how ... Howl so long.

Not to sketch
them would be wrong ... wrong ...

Rakes, Insipids, Toasts and Cits, Oglers,
Critics, Prigs, and Beaux,
throw a favour, toss a rose,
grindingly grief's traffic flows.

Howl!
Galleon skirted models sail past beggars.

Yaps ask where the buggers think they are?
Master quiets me. Amazing his slack jowls
resemble mine. Pug eyes sicken
to paint ancient scenes. This man's unwell,
snub fingers paw crowds for gods and emperors –

Bawdy muse already reaching groundwards.

Addressed To Hard Hearts

(For Sam Gilliland and Henry Mair)

I: NIGHT

Thomas Coram, *Foundling Hospital* founder,
worries his city, even in sleep.
Undercurrents murked as *The Fleet*
disturb dreams. Urchins, Mud-larks,
Pot Boys, Rent Boys, ragamuffin girls,
mercurial swirls,
sluggish river.

Faces outlined by Hogarth's brush
flood dark canvas, tidal rush
makes Coram shift. Centuries push past,
Is t his his own, next, or last?

Punters inhabit café tables, mobiles
chime, *Tower Hamlets to Seven Dials*,
(no one talking face to face,
no one star-gazing lover's eyes
for haven). *Penny Street-Cries*
burst on spire and gable.

Glass reflects Cut-purses,
shudders at curses.
Cunning Men,
Balladeers, and Bawds,
paws clasped, exchanging words
with passers-by.

Wine-bar-gangstas rap into mobiles
Tower Hamlets to Seven Dials,
tipping on *Switch*.
Playboy girls arrive and air kiss,
depart and air kiss.

Under tables, children crawl,
city birds, frail-boned, small,
in Coram's dream night-hawks
don't notice them at all.

II:MORNING

Manolos trip over derelict blankets,
packing in coffee crowds
tables buzz with schedules, loud
voices pulling sickies.
Electronic sweeper slushes
news with yellow brushes.
Can this be Coram's dream?

Few steps back. Hogarth's chalk
defining fingers, eyes, hair
light webbed. What century, where
workers en-route envy lost tourists?
Feet pad past jet-doored clubs,
alleys spored with centuries' dust.
Children sweeping roads,
throwing slops,
no one but sleep-bound Coram stops
to ask where they've come from,
intend to go?

Bending to hear, dream-time whispers low:
'A few steps back. See Coffee House
Libertines restored'. Time's slippage rouses
laughter from a long-gone Pewterers, as
Hogarth's brushstroke travels slick,
(how like Will, ignoring aristos to pick
this scene. Coram thinks: 'Good. Stick
to your message, Man, show how quick
corrupted girls live, turning tricks,

t their city, experience on tick'.
Images change, new pictures lick
dream's edges:
Woman dressed as if she's seventeen
ambles church-wards at *Covent Garden*,
starveling Page follows, his stark features harden.

Tom King's Coffee House - Riotous scene -
Two Fops tumbling (screen
of flames suggests both hell bent with no pardon).
Procuress, let's call her Mother Bardon,
comes wrangling for fees – her Client's mean.

Far off, laptops chime, pagers stir,
t he century's unsure, pigeons wheel
over London's sweep-faced chimney stacks.

Handel or Eminem? Context blurs –
Rakehells' ring-tones sing, drunkards reel,
Harlots roar: 'Life's better on your back'.

III: NOON

Coram murmurs, what can be achieved
within his little space?
Dream accelerates, time's slippage true,
centuries slithering through.

He encounters *Camden Passage*,
paste encrusted bon-bon,
high class jewellers' windows sing
Vauxhall Glass swan-songs.

Cut stones for Camden's rough diamonds.
Shop boy's hand subverts
window's limpid lobster-tank.

Hand-plucked brooch diverts
Courtesans' attention from velvet
half-moons in patch boxes,
Thief-takers' silver-knobbed canes,
scarabs bought by Doxies.

Blush rose, ceramic-teeth,
gracing pink, fixed faces,
denied life's electricity,
denied pulses that race.

Coram quits *Camden Passage*
angry. Paste valued better than his
Foundlings, snorting: 'Human wastage!'

IV: AFTERNOON

Beetling down streets, asleep or waking,
Coram's late for his sitting,
pushed, mithered, ever fund-raising,
waylaid en-route to Hogarth's, eyes facing

Urchins, Pot-boys, Charity Kids, Apprentices
wey-faced Street Girls, they, quiet,
sidle to him, potential client
who brushes them away.

Post-boys, toddlers with scabby faces,
Rent-boys, Mud-larks ... Places
wandered recall that first
child found dying on a dust heap,
heart's reminder he must keep
fundraising.

Vision grazing
London's children, Coram's late

for his sitting. Hasn't time to waste
yet minutes recoil, waist
deep he flounders in a city on the slide,
for every infant saved, another's lost,
Tom works from private knowledge of the cost.

Consider fond museum -
Garnered on admission, scant possessions.
Trustees call it 'Captain's obsession' -
parents' faded-hairs in rusted locketts,
ribbons, blotted cards
his mind paces wards
of subdued children.

Streets swallow Coram, late
for his portrait, heartsick over funds, can't wait,
yet does, faithful dog, eyes watered-slate.

River of children, collects, swells,
peal for them, London's dead bells.
Faces gathering on a wall,
in sleep in life, Coram calls
all Foundlings - Poor Tom's pity
falls, resented rain, over the city.

Painter lifting brush, to bore his pug,
in Coram's dream, pup-eyes foretell Trustees'll snub
Founder status, his firm dog devotion -

Child faces overcome him like an ocean.

Portrait of a Working Class Woman: Kathe Kollwitz (Austrian, 1903)

She could be either of my Great Grandmothers,
hair strict, strand licked forehead,
carmine tipped ears ring-less.

Winter sun shawling rippled shoulders,
implicit beauty in her fledgling bones.
Eyes yearning: Perhaps for a husband
lost to the pit long years before
(down the yard, her listening still,
for his homeward trill);
or memory of letting down her hair
one gaudy afternoon, rust
shot water down her back, then
tender touch of coal scarred hands.

Whatever shaped her eyes' longing,
bodily she's rooted, sending me
t thinking of Great Grandmothers
known from hand-me-down tales,
inherited features, handbags,
back-to-backs.

Breathe in. There's carbolic, red
and black lead, Donkey Stone,
bagged *Reckitt's Blue*. Knuckles
crinkle like poppies waved back and
forth through suds.

Now, I'm alert for whistling, catch only
vanquished echoes from the pit's vast gullet.

ATGET! - This is Not Surrealism!

Just look at this!

Gone streets breathe and love,
stone hearts pumping.

And *people* like ghosts,
their 'gone tomorrow'
betrayed each shutter blink

Small boy *fading* wall-wards,
man, dummy waxy,
become his own display.

Statues are solid, likewise, door handles.

Women? Mist *drifted* over parks ...
private gardens ... through keyholes ...

Canes, umbrellas, signs, and
shaving-brushes
bristle permanence, he meant
to record streets *before* they went

alleys fixed as statues outstare
shop-girls *dissolving*
to faint question marks.

In galleries
bustling with corporeal cul-de-sacs
viewers grow glass transparent

looking
fading
outwitted by captured *brick*
each turn, lens giving us up,

on fixed paths
we seem transparencies

Just
people fading
drifted, before dissolving
in brick –
We seem transparencies.

Toulouse-Lautrec as Club Promotions Artist

Nothing transforms in club-land. True.
Still, La Mome Fromage, Cha-U-Kao, La Goulue
(my limber Louise until the booze got at her)
wouldn't be seen deceased sporting logos,
and, dress-down nights, as we all know,
disguise roués until time-tested clichés:
'Nice legs when do they open?'
'Hello, Babe, come here often?'

Same life, trotting flyers round bars late afternoons,
promised Can-can, pouting sirens, exposed skin,
as I remarked, little transforming.
Wild Fruit, Born Bad, It Came From the Sea,
Club Chat Noir, Gypsy, 20s' Swing ...
Prosperous blokes pilfering
afternoons, wives left behind,
there for guilty pulls, or just a look.
Da-Doob-Ron-Ron, Phobia, Twist-and-Shout ...
We all want to boogie until lights out.

That's what I give them, disposable, but no less art for
that,
and some of them'll come
to stare, dance, try it on.
I'll be there as well
gyrating until it hurts too
bloody much, swigging *Absint* be from new
bottles. Borrowing some drunk girl's
boa, desirous of capturing seamy-
stockings, stack-heeled shoes,
no replacement for my lost Goulue,
this one-sketch-stand instead of muse.

'I'm Count Henri Toulouse-Lautrec', believe it,
'you look like a wicked dancer I once knew.'
(Club flyers dye the whole scene blue,
my lines unaltered). 'Would I lie to you?'

Maximal Anthems

(Poems for Duggie Fields)

I:Look

So what if the ceiling's coming down,
under weight of something fabulous?
Plundered dressing-box – pop stars,
swivel-hipped *Cocoanut Grove* chorines,
chilled mannequins, angled sirens,
smoke-blown dreams.
New Look offset by bare breast.

So what if reviews come good or bad? Let critics
struggle under weight of something fabulous,
fractured Venus and Adonis, talent
fresh from muscle beach or pink shocked
palace. Virtual gallery, virtual shop,
model hauteur, carmine pop,
so what
so what
so what comes next?

After atomic boobs and X-ray pecs,
maximal muses, mirror music.

Self stylish, others frame you New
English Dandy, words glossing surfaces.
Liquid fuchsia, baby blue,
spaces wait for something fabulous
to expand horizons,
brighten days, suggest there are worse things
than soon to crack ceilings
bowed under an acid rainbow's weight.

II: Imposing Colour

Open window's rectangle
frames a city's changing, trees commute
from stick to leaf and back,
sometimes, glass and wood hold a fogged nocturne.

Paint on floor-boards, tiger-stripe doors,
star-jump torsos against walls,
re-visioned chairs spotted orange,
ochre, red. Threatening to fall,
ceilings swirled in summer-dress.

Tables might be violet, cabinets indigo,
intersecting lines sharp as *Savile Row*
cutting. Sun-tanned divas could kick heels
against egg-yolk and cobalt.

At present, aqua is the room's passion.

III: Sonnet Lasting Until Ceilings Fall

The Dandy stretches fingers, elegant
from computer's coldly flickered screen,
fingers fluttering zig-zag surface, mean
rips form, zebra striped. Zap! Strangest currents,
rooms becoming new, his irreverent
canvas. Something (rippling, soft jade green)
just happened to polished-floors, and now clean
edges glow bright pink. Furniture's hell bent
on reclamation – Chair turns palette.

Forced against gold geometric patterns,
an almond voice chants bright poetic text,
sings don't give in, give up, and don't forget
to grow – Words ensuring something happens –
inviting us – 'Imagine

what
comes
next'.

London Cries

Old Rope (For Rachel Bates)

Aboard moored pleasure-cruiser
after day's downpour. White wine, laughter.
Eely rope flirts with water,
while shirt-sleeved men
chat up denim-skirt-babes in chain-link belts.
Somewhere, yesterday's sloughed skin
twirls rope through vital currents.

Expected views – *Tate Modern*, Erotic Gherkin,
sudden memory rush, words turning
white in water:

Wordsworth proclaiming on an urban bridge,
De Quincey pulsing past, feverish,
scanning London's face for lost love's eyes,
dissolves to Wilfred Owen, soon turning
shadow himself -
churning Shadwell Stairs' ghosts,
Terry ... Julie ...
Mr Dickens trawls with River Police,
gaze sparked by their blue, blue lamp.

Not all tonight's shades
conjured from tales and ballads –
Earlier, on a parapet to catch the view
walked smack into
her, lost as De Quincey's girl.
Wiry legs shivering in age-thinned jeans,
face's tide mark bruising,
watching us saunter through carrier-bags,
blankets, boxes unrecognised as furniture.

Scanning our backs,
mind's rope frayed in the past's icy wash,
she mumbled, stumbled, grumbled, lash
of her tongue, hands shaking, waiting
for us to leave her loves,
misdeeds, regrets, waiting
for us to leave her living room's
sought after river view.

London Lead

I say London kills them,
men, women, children,
my cross, quickly fashioned,
mis-shaped as fog-bound houses.

Pocked grey talks pestilence,
curved shape, hook-billed visitor
each household dreads,
I cry: 'Bring out your dead'.

Cross for one breast,
jerked on carts as a city
holds cambric to its mouth,
we crosses wait our turn, don't discriminate

between men, women, children,
I say London kills them.

**Little Song
For Lydia Dwight (Daughter of John
Dwight, Founder of the Fulham Pottery)
Died 1674, Aged Six**

Dead, Lydia Dwight, Fulham's salt daughter -
Shining in Stoneware, blitzed bells are pealing,
toll her hands' herbal, milky glaze sealing
her cosseted form. All but breezed laughter
is captured, cerements, cooling water.

Dead, Lydia Dwight, child beyond feeling,
domed Snow White, rippled light's stealing
over baby fists, dappling blooms brought her,
careful carved, hand held for posterity –

Anemones wilt, Tulips, Ox-eyes,
Rosemary, Lilies, bleached Love-lies-bleeding.
Lydia's laced-tight, calm austerity
makes stilled clappers of city bells rise:

Hymning: 'Dead! Fulham's daughter'.
Tongues pleading.