

University of Cape Town

PQR Anderson

Three poems

Biographical note:

PQR Anderson is the author of two volumes of poetry, *Litany Bird* and *Foundling's Island*, and editor of the anthology *In the Country of the Heart* (South African love poetry). Most recently, he was the runner-up in the 2016 University of Canberra's Vice-Chancellor's International Poetry Prize. He lectures in English Literature at the University of Cape Town.

On Arrival

1

And as into life fall from the CO.TRA.L bus
into the storm. Water shreds the forests.

Every darkness is swollen, a black pulp
pushing through prepositions – *under, between* –

as a kingdom come. Climb to the light
by the wuthering of a TV in another room, random

as wrong wiring, wet as electricity, follow
shoes in tea, the hairpins, out of the cloud.

2

What is hail more like: barley or polystyrene?
Kick it into corners among the oleander;

it will keep its own company. Tread on purpose
on the lethal tiles, towel, put your pith feet

in the window to air. The martins come down
from the cliffs of S. Nicolo di Bari, a thousand

socks in the wake of the weather. And plastic
tables are drawn like a jet across the cobbles to dry.

3

Wipe your chair with a waiter's clout and wait,
who is also served. Across the cobbles watch

water through watered air. And an embarrassed sun.
A dark you can no longer see bows you down

at the fosses where your brain is loam, sheds
water out of sight. All's well at those wells, you

feel, your face untangling storm air and sunlight.
Torn hills and phosphates, coffee, dark stuff.

4

Here in its emergence the unseen is almost seen:
water off a crow's back, the sigh of entire hills.

A yeast of beetles riddles the surface, and buzzards
are sucked after the storm in their hope of leavings,

like your notebook, dragged in the swept
damp, speechless in an evacuated *now*. West towards

Rome the light blossoms in the cinema of itself,
staggering in barns of clouds, mixing metaphors.

5

Put it this way, since you, too, flourish
under the mask of oxygen put to you: in that

brighter half-hour, undrenched, has not
the crow flown to your shoulder, the finch

unthrottled on the cemetery millstone? Surely
the ditch-borne bark of a boar has travelled

every marrow in the valley, and are you not
fallen, and for it? Light's the colour of your coin.

Roccagiovine, 2014

Goldfinches

Remind us: the welder's hose of damp fire,
the sleeve of sparks worn where a chisel's ground.

They chase themselves through some far other day
high over the recycling bins, the tar

panhandle where the one bus burns an hour,
to decorate the tall fir at the shrine

of San Pio painted bronze, whose plastic flowers
fail like the real. Scarred with a sergeant's gold

they fold in the dark needles. Flakes of light,
then gone. *Spores of mistletoe. Suds of ash.*

Who grinds out their accidental spark,
laying what chisel to what wheel? What torch

cuts their share of its blue daylight, welds us
to the pavement that they escape? You tread

the planet round and then you write them down
in faithless ink and find yourself in hope

of striking sparks. You find that you are watched
at that same window on which you both depend:

now eavesdropped there, it discovers you gold
—*Apollo's tiny eagle landed.*

Coda

And of that red regard? Only the probable
origin of all signs, all signature—
the trauma of platonic ink, so potent
it needs no alphabet to state what once
written is still read: *being's emergency.*

Roccagiovine, 2008

Out of the Wind

1. Black South-Easter

The common street, drubbed nightlong by our particular
wind reared on a pointless south Atlantic, whose birds
office its rigging, as here the brawling gulls, juggled in light,

where shopping goes and Summer comes, surprised
at its own arrival, flung out of the first of sleepless nights
in a rain no more than a clawed cloud, to hang its wing

on the Black River's sump slung under freeways, flamingos
siphoning a swart silt in lagoons contrived by the wadered
Council among hectares of water hyacinth, its green candles

receiving like a lung, where tins blink, speech gutters
in gutters where grit's winnowed and oil drawn, here you
forget again what it was you meant to, and why it seemed so.

2. In the Trances of the Blast

October, lying
out on the roof, nights,
I heard the caterpillars

take down a tree.
When the wind held off.
The stars stopped

in their great mess
for me and dwelt away,
actually there and so

far as not to be.
The scratching worms,
the blistered sky.

3. Eight Days of Continuous Wind

Now is the nothing world, shorn by air, scoured
by ego-less light till the coins in our eyes carry no face.
Should we be glad of this resumption in glare, careless

of hope in a hopeless morning, hammered to the wind,
the light billowing and collapsing in it, rubbed out?
Time shinnies like a car going to things, battened

to now, where nothing is happening but the only
inevitable succession of itself, like a body, and the next
forgets its begetting. A packet resurrects

a moment, wanting so say something about being,
falls to a wheel and is dragged there for as long as we
mark time by it, goes wide in the width of the gale.