

DAVID PRATER

Dead Poem Office



DAVID PRATER

DEAD POEM
OFFICE

B-SIDES COMPILED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Poems in this collection have previously appeared in the following publication venues: *FourW*, *Meanjin*, *Island*, *Famous Reporter*, *Going Down Swinging*, *The Age*, *Overland*, *Future Welcome: the Moosehead Anthology X* (Canada), *PFS Post* (USA), *Snorkel*, *The Otoliths*, *Textbase*, *Eyewear* (UK), *Luzmag* (Spain), *Cordite Poetry Review*, *nthposition* (UK), *JAAM* (NZ), *Gutcult* (USA), ABC Radio National, *Vibewire*, *Gangway* (Austria), *Slope* (USA), The Red Room Project, *Divan* and *Voiceworks*.
An abridged version of this collection was released in 2007.

Cover image: David Prater, 'Dudley Street 1' (2000)

© 2007 | 2012 David Prater
<<http://daveydreamnation.com>>

STIPPEN PRESS
<<http://press.stippen.org>>

GREAT BIG STAR
NIEUW HOLLAND
YER MORNINGNESS
NEW SPACE SEASONS
THE DAY BRITNEY DIED I
MORE SUN THAN CLOUDS/
SPRINKLES EARLY
CHMOD R-X-W
B.A.S.E.
SHE'S AN AUTARKY
A821.4
SNOWY
INSURGENCY
THE BOYS WHO
EIGHT MILES HIGH
WHY DO YOU CRY RUN LOLA RUN
DEAD POEM OFFICE
THE NIGHT I MET BECK
PALADIN
CODE PERVIN'
LAST NIGHT BETTY
THE SPRAWL
KATE'S PHOTOGRAPH
XANANA'S DOG
MOTHER RUSSIA

for P.

GREAT BIG STAR

I'm David Niven but I can't say who you are.
You're the mystery light shining from a great big star.

I'm a top gun actor but I've gone and lost my lines.
You're the only scriptwriter I'd entrust with my life story.

You're looking cool in Errol Flynn's swimming pool.
I'm dabbling in moustaches, drowning in pink gin.

I've got a yacht.
You've got a lot more than that.

You speak a language I'm just beginning to realise is poetry.
I'm toying with the idea of learning Esperanto.

I got a cramp last night, in my right leg.
You skip and you can dance on your hands.

You're lava.
I'm up and I'm down then I'm somewhere in the middle.

I'm about to say something silly.
You're listening.

You're about to say something lovely.
I'm listening.

I'm right here.
You ride your bike through springtime streets.

You could burn CDs with your smile.
I listen to the radio.

I'm compiling a mix tape for our dizzy reunion.
You stole feelings from the moon.

You laugh.
I wish I owned a telescope.

I'm seriously delirious.
You do not own a tiara.

You recall, of course, the night we heard Frank Sinatra
singing to the sea and to the moon.
I dust off my wrinkled dinner jacket.

I remember it well.
You drank champagne as if it was star juice.

You said something about holding onto everything.
I ate an entire champagne glass, stem and all.

I translated that as meaning me.
You may have meant something else.

You saved the evening from drowning.
I like whirlwind romances.

My middle name is pink gin.
Your name rhymes with many words, including love.

We're the mystery light shining from a great big star.

NIEUW HOLLAND

Fields of megafauna,

legends in our eyes.
Beneath a confectioned dune,
I spilled water

from a glass jar &
watched it
disappear into yesterday.
We pitched our tent

on a beach,
listened to the dingo's
howls & prayed for rescue.
The locals didn't seem to mind,
though we were invisible to them,

of their past.
The animals' eyes
glowed softly in amber,
rare mosquitoes

frozen in space.
Time washed our shorelines away,
& we never knew
what it was like before

we arrived;
nor they, after we
had gone.

YER MORNINGNESS

We were in a secret band called Circadia:
kind of like some tantric *Fantasia* music's
B-generation. Oh, how I monitored that crush,
crossed sine waves with whiplash kisses!

The next morning you got up early, walked
yr dog, sipped the hair of one, showered
or dressed (then slipped back into our bed of
searchlight-nude cameo appearances ...)

You never knew I was sleepwalking, even
though I found traces of glass in my feet,
asphalt from your faraway suburb's avenues.
I fell into a daytime answer to a question:

that was yes. *That was a yes*, just in case you
guessed the subtext in this imaginary mess.
The streetlights rhyme, the drizzle happens. &
rainbows yr morningness never suspected.

NEW SPACE SEASONS

(1) High

Season before anyone gets there. Clean airports. Season for new roads and sidewalks. Haircuts to die for. Fancy dress outfitters. Convenience stores. Spare parts for rocket ships. Strong coffee.

(2) Slack

Season of our eventual reunion. In a sunny room where it's always possible to forecast the weather. Bicycle riding. Small kittens and dictionaries. Rocks thrown at windows. Expensive bath mats. Blindfolds.

(3) Wet

Season of immigration towers and state peace. Aladdin released. Addresses blocked. Visas refused. Unfinished books. Boredom. Looping playlists. Correspondences. Hot telephones. Text. Scarves. Puddles.

(4) Slow

Season of skyline highs. Arranging escapes. Throwing out old clothes. Empty flats. One bowl of milk per day. Subtitles and dark sunglasses. Blurry stars. Postcards. Batteries. Champagne.

THE DAY BRITNEY DIED

I was standing in the bathroom shaving my head when the news came through & I just, you know, choked up: you know, had some kind of *emotional malfunction* whereby I kept scratching my face, like it was a stranger. Drowned by the shrill levity that followed, all the drive-time scrambling for moronic puns. As far as I could tell no one really cared about Britney at all. It was as if she hadn't actually died, only gone crazy, maybe shaved her head for cancer research. As I looked at the tufts of my hair on the tiles I started crying but I didn't know why. Did they somehow remind me of the French collaborators during the war? The women paraded in village squares & their shaved heads? The self-righteous stares & the grim satisfaction: as if you could eradicate someone's shame with a pair of clippers & therefore exonerate society (or just yourself? I swept up my dwindling clumps & thought, *it's no use selling this on Ebay, is it?* When it just grows back (unlike a severed head. I switched off the radio & Britney was still dead.

MORE SUN THAN CLOUDS / SPRINKLES EARLY

we said let's buy tulips because you were homesick
twenty four hour florists late night emergencies

the tulips sat inside a cool store freezer still wet
& trembling fragile as a whispered wish (we said

let's buy some tulips today there's more sun than
cloud their powers are quite expensive but what

does money matter (when there's more sun than
clouds scanning the supermarket aisles for some

sprinkles early in the morning (we said let's buy
some sprinkles when you were thinking of home

i was thinking of the sun we took photographs of
tulips they were orange as bushfire suns (& wet

as clouds & our faces looking up to see sprinkles
saw twinkles in the blank sky (homesick & here

CHMOD R-X-W

read

she changed mode from mod to journo!
Helsinki bound
on a sleigh west of NO!
bottle-blond furies
stalking the XY stage
shaken three-piece tour posters
all a-blur

write

lyrics in crayon lying dead in a field
frozen shut her eyebrow raised
& when
she plays
my ipod
says NO WA(VE)Y!
like, sue me Helsinki!
(art school's OK

execute

showcase
tiny amounts of WWII flak—
trigger spirals morph blow waves NY!
like why WAY! when you can say
GO!

that's what they call it LOVE
of diagrams

B.A.S.E.

building

our atoms move deeper
into the nuclear cycle
building machines
to dispense between cracks
radioactive like northern
soul or summer milk
leap from a guard rail
with leg rope
attached

antennae

mike oldfield in orbit
around some ragged sun
i read rilke as we fell
towards the waiting vans
people are fucking to our album

hunting the frozen kaleidoscope

span

inside the chaos of that frantic gig
we plucked up courage
we spread our shivering arms
extending our antennae

as we hit the air stage

earth

eclipsed by roars of album traffic Morse code
what could it possibly mean
forever repeated
looking for the same elastics

kindling in ashes

SHE'S AN AUTARKY

she's a why ----- in time

soundtracks erase the shutter -----

myths & breakage -- gossip --

far-fetched

'n charming ----- 'n speeding -----

on cooler

breathless ----- 'n devoid

of specialist moments

waitin' -- for sunset

in a dusted carpark

rustle the mongoose ----- dinner & show

----- autarky -----

shadowland ----- flushes --

in vain ----- the TV age

behind us

she ----- 's an -----

automobile in traffic

autumn showers ----- summer drain

a highway

drenched in lightnin' ----- 'n' bugs

A821.4

that place where we all someday hope to die
or rot at least (our skins like autumn leaves

in solidarity with those whose fame exceeds
our own (no matter now this system lets us

obscure the vain & support the humbled the
catalogue that protects that gives each of us

some space in which to rest canonised alone
awaiting some three miracles a beatification

in that heavenly curriculum (of ars poetica
each brailled punch card returned by hand to

its vacuum-sealed drawer (the airs condition
interpret you (guard against that lonely dew

SNOWY

Steve was the only one who ever called me Snowy, rode a motorbike to work & white socks with his black work boots I guess he was the kind of guy ladies like his Italian good looks pigmented skin & voice calm as a macchiato in a barista's steady hand. Steve called me Snowy for no real reason everyone else preferring instead to ignore me until it was time to do more work hey boy come over here & help me with these bags of flour that's the way back in a sec see this list of orders you just need to grab one of each give us a yell I'd wheel a trolley round the warehouse collecting stuff. Steve had his own little white truck he did all the northern suburbs deliveries & it never looked like hard work sometimes when i got there at 6am the Batemans Bay truck was there too, crammed with so much stuff you wondered how they ever got it all out. "G'day, Snowy," Steve'd say as he parked his bike inside the warehouse gates. On some days I got to read out the orders while the other guys threw boxes into the back of this truck or that i came to understand it was because i could read & also because i was weaker than the others does every factory floor & every store have its snowy the kid that some people treat kindly while others abhor i realise also snowy was tintin's dog & number one pal & so i try not to think of steve giving me a ride home on his bike & complimenting my steel-capped boots when i left i was what you'd call a partly qualified storeman (bigger & stronger but still naive as a snowfield awaiting the footprints of the first fox

INSURGENCY

drained without shame under
lights in a clearing yr skin so
oh provoke me white drifters
slide a canvas wax wing over
the unforgiving cold conduit
called rations pipeline by a
soft sand footprint threaten
strikes upon infrastructures
western worlds never noticed
what smouldered in the lusty
icons our yesteryears alpine
lakes polluted by hot sperm
swimmers upstream & cryptic
destinations hand sheathing
beehive hairdos bleach peel
coming into cans & over fat
sizzling in pans on bracken
eucalyptus highs in moments
of fire right inside a zone
unaware of their binoculars
trained upon my abs a laser
tracing the sky or my pants
shifted nervously from feet
to a crotch reassured by wet
stains i'll stand above you
then we'll switch a shallow
dummy bid for freedom trick
the snipers bleak radiation
lover oh xx by northwest xx

THE BOYS WHO

The boy who wanted to be a film director.
The boy who vomited at his tenth birthday party.
The boy who smiles at dead rainbows.
The boy who cries.
The boy whose mother won't kiss him goodnight.
The boy who wouldn't grow up.
The boy who disappeared.
The boy who got shot at.
The boy who never left.
The boy who said the boy who looks after all his sisters is a girl.
The boy who had no sisters.
The boy who kissed his best friend's sister.
The boy who missed out on kisses.
The boy who runs.
The boy who drew spirals on his wrist.
The boys who swam across the river.
The boy who followed them never made it back.
The boy who travelled there.
The boy who dreams.
The boy who was a girl.
The boy who bellows.
The boy who finds god.
The boy who suddenly thought he was god.
The boy who draws pictures of god that look like nuts.
The boy who was a nut.
The boy who invented peanut butter.
The boy who ate crocodiles.
The boy who lied in his sleep.
The boy who'd sell his own aunt for a peanut.
The boy who understood French movies.
The boy who thought he was a French movie
 & later turned out to be right.
The boy who tried to fly to the moon in a French movie.
The boy who he met when he got there.
The boy who met boys out the front of the movies offering peanuts.
The boy who'd seen it all was mistaken because
 he hadn't yet seen the boy who sees boys
 who say they've seen it all.
The boy who insists on wearing white shoes.
The boy who likes to steal white shoes.

The boy whose shoes were once white.
The boy who tried to eat peanuts but didn't know
 he was allergic to peanuts.
The boy who offered them to him was very sorry.
The boy who died never knew he was sorry.
The boy who did it never did it again.
The boy who wanted to be the film director
 never did grow up to find out who did become
 the boy who wants to be the boy who after all.

1

2

3

4

5

6

1. a poem never written or sent
2. by the bay
3. lackadaisical
4. meaning unknown
5. too smart for its own good (trans.)
6. remember

EIGHT MILES HIGH

bob mould screaming eight miles high
can you feel his sheets of pain inside yr

headphones boy take notes & duplicate
on yer long walks home through those

graveyards in yer long coat there's that
crow he's eating all yer dead mix-tapes

feature angry men & the odd soft-rock
stooge eg john cougar's song scarecrow

that's the sound of yer stadium funeral
furious bic lighters melt in unison only

stinking out the stands forcing another
evacuation pathetic really listen to yer

idol bob mould screaming eight miles
high he's not coming down (off speed

apparently that was his problem not to
mention homophobia eight (gay miles

high & he's not going back! inside that
electric closet now it's our fathers who

take the pills that were meant for the
likes of bob dressed in his incendiary

black you'll come around to this way
of thinking some day come hell's high

water mark eight miles high the flood
of fuel for bob's maniacal fire screams

eight miles high fucked if I'm coming!
fuck you sixty eight miles fucking high

& it's too late to come down now we're
in outer space bob we're still alive how

i scream six hundred & sixty six miles
higher than I've ever been higher than

rainy crow grey streets of down town
known for that sad sound never touch

down bob taking me six thousand six
hundred & sixty six point eight miles

beyond darkness at the edges of town
& nowhere is yer warmth to be found

in a stadium's steel glare fans remain
there laughing at yer shapeless forms

fucking hair metal sidewalk scenes &
headjobs in black limousines we're all

living bob & we're all standing alone
higher than the sun or even the byrds!

WHY DO YOU CRY (RUN LOLA RUN)

why do you cry run lola run
does pain cause it (lola runs
are your eyes leaking & lola
why do you run lola runner
in a hallway run crying lola
after me crying run in pain
caused by lola running lola
ran away from pain & cried
why does pain cause it lola
runs away run lola run run
as fast as you can cry lola's
running away from me her
tears running down cheeks
(lola why are you running
is it me lola run who causes
it who caused it lola run on
run lola why do you cry as
you run & why am i crying
lola keeps on running as a
movie camera tracked her
tears running on & on lola
why lola why do you cry &
does pain cause it lola runs
why she runs i cry run lola
run lola run causes me pain
lola never again lola never
run lola run to me lola run
as fast as you can lola runs
back to me backwards lola
why do you run lola away
lola run away are you that
runaway on the radio lola
the model aeroplane on the
runway lola taking off lola
run lola run why do we cry
lola does pain cause it run
into my arms run lola run
lola run don't run lola walk!

DEAD POEM OFFICE

I read the last rites over your submission today
& since our procedures have been streamlined

I'm delighted & at the same time proud to say
that we've found a place for your poetry here.

Give us your poems & in several years' time
we'll give you an idea of death's landscapes.

Redundant rhymes, image, metaphor sublime:
your four line stanzas, our grim burial plots.

Taking a rejection personally is well-advised.
That's why we never say no to anything sent.

Our acceptance procedures have been revised:
please note in case of future correspondence.

Simultaneous submissions remain unwelcome
as we pride ourselves on our unique position

within the mortuary canon. Flattery seldom
impresses as much as genuine humility does.

On behalf of our hard-working gravediggers,
congratulations once again on your success.

In future issues, as our catalogue gets bigger,
may we each transcend our eventual deaths.

THE NIGHT I MET BECK

at home nightclub they searched my cigarettes for drugs lucky they didn't check my brain coz i was high on life man on the inside we climbed these stairs to the chill-out lounge & i was sitting with my sister at this coke-stained table when what do you know but along comes beck looking sheepish in a wolf-whistling kind of way do yah mind if ah join ye he says in this british accent you're beck i said no ah'm not ah'm from leeds says beck ah that explains it i say humouring him you're undercover tonight yeah i get it no worries man no need to explain your secret's safe with us no really ah am from leeds beck says okay then i say have you heard of the wedding present? they're a great band from leeds nowt sure he says maybe a little before your time eh beck? now listen beck says you guys are really great & excellent to talk to but nought's enough ah'm going back to join mah mates also from leeds eh beck i taunted him that's obvious see you later then i had to laugh he must have been on the disco biscuits coz he was back in a flash hi beck i said fancy a red bull thanks eh you guys are really great beck says hey no problems i say i really love your early work that version of rock me amadeus couldn't have come from leeds you know mtv made me want to smoke crack too beck until i saw you tonight & realised that due to this establishment's strict drugs policy you've probably taken yours already okay beck says finally you're right i am beck & this has all been an elaborate joke for the benefit of my friends no don't look they still think it's a joke you know i said you almost convinced me with that leeds accent but now you've admitted who you really are i thank you for your honesty to tell you the truth he says i'm so smashed i thought you were sting so i belted him one no ah'm not ah'm from leeds i said & mah name's david oh right sure sting says beck & ah'm the fooking police!

PALADIN

she will devour them
one by one
at the gas pump
browsing hardware

more than patient
her list divine
first the innocent
next the patriot

plaster flags
ironic cover
on the front lawn
in the stadium

too many bullets
not enough guns
swift emissary
nation as embassy

CODE PERVIN'

rocked up to the address entered the
site i popped the hood & just started
pervin' on your code (it's clean & oh
so elegantly compliant) tags all in a

row <! – only you & I see this bit – >
just as well my employer put a block
on search strings & downloads code's
much less demanding & full of secret

holes we place our java there pop-up
desire parsed through notepad's space
control. i spotted neater hacks where
fools did previously bumble (graffiti

hose) & look forward to hearing this
browser's virtual hum dwindling like
dial-up i know accessibility's an ever-
disappointing hurdle still i'll jump

your orphaned session has been killed
code pervin' on down the long dawn
fanfare? hardly! i've seen the source
clocking your curves (html of course)

LAST NIGHT BETTY

last night betty went down to the river & never came back
she put on her old black leather boots put her shit in a bag

left a note saying once you start living there's no running
back left the radio on left the dishes to dry in a rack

last night betty went down to the cane fields & never came back
stuck her thumb in the general direction of love on a map

left a note saying don't believe bruce i'm not giving him jack
left a sign in her window & thereby invited attacks

last night betty went down to the railroad & never came back
put her demons on notice i'm taking my memories back

said goodbye to the river her lover her tiny red shack
left a note saying now i believe that my organs are black

last night betty went down to the highway & never came back
took a walk past the pits & the black tire marks on the track

whistling as she covered my grave with a heel & some trash
took her shoes off & trudged through the glass out the back

last night betty went down to the phone booth & never came back
left the note in her pocket & promised to call me right back

last seen dropping a coin in the slot & then turning her back
turn away from the circling birds & the modern world cracks

THE SPRAWL

To bring it back to rock 'n roll influences, when I was writing *Neuromancer*, I'm pretty sure I was listening to Springsteen's *Nebraska* & thinking 'OK, it's not hotrods, it's computers'.

WILLIAM GIBSON

i grew up in a shotgun row / sliding down the hill /
out front were the big machines / steel & rusty now i guess

KIM GORDON

springsteen i'm on fire cutting slack down the line down the wire from
atlantic city where the girls are so pretty they wear makeup & pretty red
shoes let's call them all betty lost in a sprawl of their own perfecting
threads of knotted hair & that wow! expression

betty's waiting but bruce doesn't show up though he left a note that read
put your jacket on because the long sprawl nights are getting cold she's
beside a railway track disused since the whole world went cable wobbly
old lines rusted no caboos for who knows how many years bruce

bruce where are you man she needs you badly now the sprawl's got into
the water supply there & folks are talking about fluoride again bruce get
your arse in here take that tape out of your back pocket time to play it
man don't be sly

there's a girl waiting outside in the cold for you let's call her betty she's
standing next to the cypherpunk graffiti having just finished her shift at
the diner & she's wondering whether you'd be up for a drive down by the
old wooden bridge remember the place you used to go when she was
your high school sweetheart

she's still got the ring and your last payslip you left it in the envelope
when you bolted with the money that was going to be for her college
education you had it all figured out she'd continue working her shifts &
you'd keep sending her little payslips to let her know you were saving up
for that mansion on the hill

but then something happened bruce the little payslips stopped coming
the bed got cold she got sad she began to forget the feeling of your stubble
against her shoulder shunted off to another yard now even the ring

slipped off her finger because her hands were too cold in that cold single bed in her uncle's cold house

she's never been on an aeroplane bruce but she's telling everyone she meets that you're coming back for her when the light burns bright in august no she hasn't started walking down that road yet she's still waiting for the chiming guitars to kick in and that bloodcurdling scream to issue from your mouth bruce

the radio relay towers send the love buzz down through the aerial & out the tiny speaker now the sound gushes into her pelvic region broadcasting its own signals uncannily 80s & the fog rolls in bringing rumours of the closure of the very last automobile factory steel mill timber yard & nomination for presidency

bruce why did you let them do that why didn't you give the republicans a murder song instead too late now for the forty one shots they've already been fired the smoke's cleared leaving a bleak industrial landscape coloured metallic blue complete with one or two dogs & a telegraph pole tilted at forty five degrees

here comes betty again with that make-up on & hair real pretty & bruce is singing maybe every thing that dies some day comes back but she's lost in the sprawl of smoke your cigarette sends pluming into the atmosphere as the car blasts straight towards -

KATE'S PHOTOGRAPH

This photograph is of Kate running away
from the camera (from me?) as I hold
the camera to my eye, chasing
a collage of colliding bright flames
fading into the lake as backdrop
frozen still—

the shutter shuttered, I shudder
in the cold morning, running away
from the camera, running like a
riptide (running, so I could never—
so I took it just to catch her

for an instant:

one leg caught in floating mid-air ...)

running ... in the ice-cold morning I saw
her face in the mirror reflected
and the railroad tracks at the bayside

cl ack ing by in st ut ter ed neg a tiv es

XANANA'S DOG

You can call me Xanana's dog but
You can't run from my lapping tongue; please
Say a prayer for Xanana's dog but
Don't you dare tell them where I am.

They can't find Xanana Gusmao, though
They search the church for him, crying:
"Where did he go, where is Xanana?" So
They arrested me, because I'm Xanana's little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,
In the day remember that I am Xanana's dog.

Free Xanana!

They chain me up, but I'm Xanana's little dog;
They set me on fire, but I'm Xanana's little dog;
They call me names, but I'm Xanana's little dog;

They beat me and try to make me speak but I am only a little dog.

Set me free! Asleep at night forget,
In the day remember.

Trouble comes for Xanana's little dog;
Java comes for Xanana's little dog;
East Timor says goodbye to Xanana's little dog—
"Goodbye, Xanana's little dog!"

Xanana, Xanana, Xanana Gusmao!
Please help me, I am only a little dog!

MOTHER RUSSIA

from siberia: the fisherman's cooling room
is a cave chinked out of a cliff of ice - there
the fish lie swollen while the nomads chop wood
in the snow & while my foreign tongue gags
on the names of lost cities & apartment
buildings hazily appearing now through
the window of my helicopter - as we circle
the lights of nurry urengoy - hastily built
sitting atop a field of natural gas - lots of it
frozen within a red bottle by a stubbornly icy cork

(thus read my - hmmm
suspiciously poetic briefing crumpled grimly
in my gravel-encrusted mitten)

"so you see
chuck" he breathed along the thousand mile
cable connected to my alaskan telephone
"this is the place where only the gallant
survive - where there is no turning back
so if the going gets rough - "

gahhrrr!

"moonlight and vodka takes me away"
croons the one-time concert performer
to an incomprehending audience of short
time miners & oil riggers thawing in the bar
what else is there to do the alcohol slides like
penguins from glaciers down throats &
karloff's tears flow in buckets while the men
sway from side to side now and then grunting
as they discover the faces behind the frozen beards
they worked with on that damned oil pipeline

the dream of a balalaika: slowly crushed
beneath a timber truck o god i want to go
home this place this place of deja vu it's
riddled with shanty towns & factories &
refineries & summer fun & dirt bikes &

ballet & grizzly bears & snowy ideal resort
frozen lakes & oil derricks & aeroplanes
& national geographic photographers
& helicopters & heads full of maps &
jigsaw names & red faces & hangovers

& a terrified memory of a young boy
crucified on a bare flat table wrapped
in chunks of ice so his body will cool &
his pulse

slow

enabling the surgeon to get at his heart

