

DAVID PRATER

ABENDLAND II



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TWENTY-ONE POEMS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BRIDGES ICE BEFORE HIGHWAYS

FOIL

PILLION

YIELD

THOMAS PYNCHON & AMERICA

AN AIR

EIRE SUPPLY!

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CRAPTASTICA™

UNTER DEM RADAR

TINTIN & THE DEATH STAR

for Keiji

BRIDGES ICE BEFORE HIGHWAYS

Love thaws before freezing over,
setting twice as thick across
this film of a wearied stare.
Following the bridges back:

a rusted green lantern points
into the air, grasped by hands
like the dollar bills that don't
exist—not since the amnesty.

Cease-fire tension's stress
creates a frozen last option:
the flat-bed journey of day
seeps away instead, into

another water table, where
only yesterday things seemed
fine, though overcast. Storms
hinted at did not appear.

Bridges ice before highways here.

FOIL

I'll slide off your face like
an egg, slip inside a database,
an ice cream off your north
base jumped, the perfect foil.

One side like a heat wave, a
marathon runner's pulse, the
slave to sunlight hiding drugs,
or coiled around the pit.

This far side's cool as crisp
fridge lettuce. Breaking into
conversations like some blip
on the catastrophe as radar,

thin as paper, wedged near
perfection into domes: alone
among the shadowed stars,
helpless, tarnished chrome.

PILLION

Pale-faced, never in control:
remember to cry; it's a buzz.
We live, for then we die—or
did I hear that in some song?

Pillion, side-saddle, tempt
the verge. A highway's inside
sources repeat the same old
symbols: leather, road, light.

Death is short: only life
lingers. Maps of Pueblo design
evoke grander gestures, sigh
like oaks. She-oaks, Indians

crossing from our reversed
dispersal. Who's that diving
in the river? Shadow him,
follow him closely.

Shenandoah.

YIELD

The flow, the scarper, past
rivers red with bombast. My
eradication plans did yield
smaller grains: a compromise

bursts forth with sibilance!
Scattered ray guns portray
the Jetsons at LAX, fields of
traffic yielding to the dollar.

Scones with Pearl Jam or
Cream. Clapton plays the
sorority blues. Grim, dual
under-carriage wayfarers.

Underfoot, buried seeds,
bionic brains set to please.
From the get-go go slow,
like a gentle maple leaf:

yield.

THOMAS PYNCHON & AMERICA

You remain the least of their
paranoid worries, smouldering
up the Hudson like flowing grey
hair. They paid for tips once;

now change is loose, vengeance.
Cold uniformed stares outside
exits and gas stations. Over
platforms: red numbers, an eye

for a letter. Destinations yelp
songs for the settled. Obvious
melodies, time warps, plotlines
distinguished by our humour.

Ascend gently into a dim light,
hands stretching out to catch
glowing halos in the redwood,
like giant laser beams of truth.

AN AIR

Yours, the hidden skeleton key
to the unmarked bar or stave.
Blue sky is your *modus operandi*,
words your new indentured slave.

Rusted car parts bark a melody
whittled down. The wood behaves.
Noxious weeds crowd out their
stadiums. Anthem as architrave.

Solemn night rides blow whistles.
Dusted angels attending the rave,
elephantine eyes like goggles.
Teenage flesh, the ancient crave.

Side by side, the lyrics goose-step,
hinting at the right, depraved.
Honesty's the fearsome shingle.
Airs come rushing from the grave.

EIRE SUPPLY!

A steady supply of singers,
songwriters, buskers and dancers
(a shortage of accompaniment,
readers, small change and steps).

A melodious air of sorrows,
entropy, usefulness and delight
(a shortage of handkerchiefs,
space horizons and encounters).

This entire knowledge of smiles
suggests tragedy, broken glass
(betrays midnight's solitude, or
the very last Aran wicker basket).

Weavers! The busker's very first
coin dangled like bait in the hat
(burnin' cross th' Atlantic breeze,
air-twang th' invisible harp string).

RECREATIONAL RIOTING

Here, the incessant sounds of
trucks reversing, safety switches,
valves, clips, iron foundries. Kids.
Nothing but the shields against a

frightened, forewarned oblivion.
Blast bombs: spherical, footfalls
or death stars. Just as vulnerable
to teenage kicks or malfunction.

Spare the women & the marshals
the ignominy of water cannons.
Let your fused chroming minds
roam over deserted carriageways,

the parade grounds of historical
accidents. Purposes stolen, hates,
dim causes. Shadow-box with the
kids who didn't go to peace camp.

SOFIA DAWGZ

Like me they cannot speak
of a Slavic memory, or Soviet
tanks, so they bark all night
along the streets of Sofia.

Dawgz.

The echo is empty, like the
cobble lanes beneath the
abandoned Palaces of Culture,
Science & Agriculture. Dream

of living, speaking again. Slip,
tongue, translated into coffee
grounds. Contact with nocturnal
demolition crews. The car wash

& the dilapidated trams. Ozone
glow bleeding off the bark. Some
broken glass. Rusted monuments
in a maze of nameless parks.

OH, BULGARIA!

Oh, Bulgaria!
What has money done to you?
No one here has change.
Striptease club posters make us all less human.

Oh, Bulgaria!
Your elevators have doors
to trick foreigners!
Pretty girls in miniskirts keep our change as tips.

Oh, Bulgaria!
You serve us red beer & white beer
& green salads with flags!
Children play hackey-sac in subterranean stores.

Oh, Bulgaria!
Can I buy a bus ticket?
I mime a bus on the boulevard.
When I meet my haiku friends we are strangers to each other.

KOALA STRAWBERRIES

For Keiji (again), I compose
a few lines. It's useless. I'll
never be a haiku writer. My
destiny lies amid the Cyrillic

paperbacks, apartment blocks
& spines of books I'll never read
or pay to have published. If we
are poets then cities are Koala

Strawberries, rotting cherries in
cardboard boxes. We write poems
on them, then laugh at ourselves,
we beautiful boys & girls. As the

autumn wind blows in from some
obscure clime, between seasons,
on the floor of the disco, dance.

Sunspots on the wretched *ikebana*.

FAST FLOWING RIVERS

Symbolic of our electrical impulse,
simple swift & filled with dreams,
fast flowing rivers sweep away all
these tedious fears & expectations!

& dump them at a delta somewhere,
marry them with saltwater tears,
then disappear forever, rivers—
flood the villages, irrigate graves!

Flash like camera bulbs like in
the olden days, catch our passing
in the picture cage & trap us there
until the sepia fades away! O, dust

& high water marks on bollards &
levees—surge over the dry wastes
of our skins, our lips, our hair &
ears! Deprive us of light & bury

our dim memories under silt &
rain. Or else call it pain & pass
over like the thunderbolts inside
a storm from the island's past!

We are a part of the silence now.
We are the same, these streams
& me. Until the tide swallows up
this flotsam, which of us is free?

CITADELS & CROSSES

the parchment's overgrown now
& flies no longer buzz down by
the hydro-electric facilities—

the bus route's open for business
all along it twenty four hour
cafes spring up like pillboxes—

some people speak of screams
in the night houses on fire &
some people barely speak at all—

a fingerbone or shattered skull
whispers eloquent poems from a
time long past but still living—

along winding trails known only
to animals & their shepherds
whole miniature obelisks sleep—

the cemeteries of the present
tense & crosses send down rays
of pure conviction from the rock—

strewn hills & miraculous shrines
small wonder then that a boy on
the bus who thinks he has missed—

his stop wakes up shrieking (who
knows what kind of bad dreams
he's running from (we've seen it—

all before, they reassure him ...
we *know* why his mouth opens
just there where the bones are—

the mosque is a finger of warning
now black day dawns darker than
the previous night (in visegard—

LE TAN

In Vietnam, of course, we'd all
be considered peasants: up to our
necks in sweat & sun cancers,
our tans cooked in a coconut
sauce the cannibal implications
of which I don't care to explore.
But here, where a thousand & one
Dalmatians sizzle on stones with
all the intelligence of their
namesakes (those spotted dogs)
to a soundtrack of Oasis, Tom
Jones, Elton & George Michael
singing *Don't let the sun go down
on me* (I should be so lucky),
that radiant far-off fireball sends
its death rays across space to
slowly fry us on the pebbled
beach. Our sunbeds, like flaming
yakitori grills, an outdoor steak
house where we liberally apply
our SPF 0.5 marinades & then
cheerfully head home to the oven.
O, our airless apartments, where we
gasp the incendiary nights away!
Of course, as an Australian I'm in
no position to sneer or feel
superior. Our melanoma-riddled
culture taught the world everything
it knows about 'the beach', or so
we suppose, having failed to grasp
the fact of Rome, of Adriatic villas.
Our children continue to crawl east,
towards their cancerous graves. O
old enemy, you one true rising, sun.

MARTELLO TOWER

July has been a month of forts ...

I write out my self-imposed exile
from Central Park to Sandy Cove,
Belgrade's citadel to old Dubrovnik
but maybe now I'll write a modern
poem, disregard historical valour ...
e.g. I like the way Joyce twisted facts,
made Buck Mulligan & the other one
appear more evil than they truly were
(although there was a kind of deceit
in that as well, some malicious intent
behind that sorrowful eye patch ...
I prefer the fort that's crumbling,
whose original enemy remains unclear;
the one that Oscar Wilde's father
had a hand in shoring up on the
Aran Islands, its stones sprawling
now over acres of tourist-stamped
ground mystical as the ancients.
Napoleon never did invade Ireland
& now the Martello tower's a museum
but Dubrovnik still remembers bombs,
not medieval chic. & where is history
hiding now? A pigeon squatting in
the shade, picking at grey stones in
the hope of a stray pistachio shell?
Likewise the cameras line up with
the tower in their trigger sights &
postcards have replaced the living
meanings & reasons as the artefact
(as the unreal, reconstructed world)

‘SUMMER IN SIPAN’

Well, it's summer in Sipan
& the town is full of models.
They're all at the restaurant
but they're only eating entrees
while the eunuchs dart around
making stressful little sounds
in the leafy hotel grounds.
We ate dinner then we ran.
Yeah, that summer in Sipan.

Well, it's summer in Sipan
& we go riding with Maria.
She's got white bleach in her hair,
she looks like Sinead O'Connor
& it's thirty eight degrees
& we can't find any trees.
By the end I'm on my knees,
holding ice cubes in my hands.
Yeah, it's summer in Sipan.

Well, it's summer in Sipan
& we're kayaking together
through a turquoise coloured sea
full of motor boats & fishes
& the boats are making waves
& the bay becomes a grave
for the kayak we can't save.
Time to make another plan.
Yeah, it's summer in Sipan.

Well, it's summer in Sipan
& we're swimming off the jetty
with the girls all deeply tanned
& the guys with giant six packs.
Next to them I feel a dork:
they're the cheese & I'm the chalk.
I can barely even talk
to my so-called fellow man
& it's summer in Sipan.

Well, it's summer in Sipan
& we're riding home in darkness
along narrow little lanes
waiting for a car to pass us,
just to shed a little light
on our path. I hope it's right:
I don't want to get a fright,
riding straight into a dam.
Still, it's summer in Sipan.

Well, it's summer in Sipan
& here comes the little ferry.
Time to head back to the town,
to our last night in Dubrovnik.
O the boat goes up & down,
drowning out the ocean sounds,
while the stars go turning round
like a big electric fan.
Yah, it's summer in Sipan.

[repeat to fade ...]

SPLIT 7"

zaboravljani hitovski
obscure releases
trophy girlfriends
apartment farewells
Warren Beatty
roulette tables
slippery marble
Sunday evenings
where are the bands?
life's all ordinary
little Venetia
another old city
slime
switching languages
waitresses in pineapple tops
diesel fume & *gelati*
dirt-cheap brandy
get us out of here
coastal horrors
sewer whiffs
vulgar postcards
satellite air-con
Daily Telegraph
beige monotones
the music stopped
split 7"
ferry oils

b/w forgotten hits
b/w cocks & tits
b/w love hotels
b/w shower scenes
b/w Madonna bombs
b/w passport songs
b/w *jadrolinja*
b/w predictable buskers
b/w where are the rebels?
b/w transplant palms
b/w terrible pizza
b/w next to the new city
b/w bikinis on extendable clotheslines
b/w bisexuality
b/w wharves
b/w melting holidays
b/w *marko polo*
b/w busting boys
b/w marble cliffs
b/w roman catacombs
b/w damp *hvala*
b/w red-wine ice cubes
b/w get me out of here
b/w misplaced arrogance
b/w the Sunday shops
b/w unknown bands (too bland)
b/w zigzags on the ocean

TRAVELLING TYPES

1. The boy reading *On the Road* at the railway station & the boy sneering at him, having hidden his copy of the same book in his travelling bag (both of them heading home).
2. They have just met, this couple with their hands all over each other—they mistake freedom for the right to paw & moon in public, here by the fountain, where everyone else pretends not to look (disapproving).
3. Nuclear families in ideal mode, the boy's face lighting up when he discovers he may order Fanta at the cafe; while the little girl takes her cue from her mother who, like father, looks at her watch (then the map).
4. These two highly experienced backpackers only dream of having seen it all, of never having to find the train station ever again but they know the world is still a big place and bow to the task (together).
5. The girls pretend to be lesbians in order to avoid unwanted attentions, then split up so as to double their chances later on; who can blame them? After all, it's summer (& they're both lonely).
6. He is not long for this world but he gamely trudges up the steps to a tower where, he knows, the view is exactly the same as it was in the last town (his lover holds his palsied hand).
7. I am afraid that these two may well be Americans—they seem too willing to talk to anyone & if they could only listen maybe they would understand this world's rejection (of their tireless advances).

8. Deep within the earth there is a place where she will feel at home but for now she contents herself with walking along a cobbled street (eyes downcast).
9. Arrogant, unhappy, unfulfilled & redundant male drags beaten, submissive, tired & pathological woman through the streets of her home town (bewildering them both).
10. Father & son travel on the train; as the miles pass the son becomes more & more restless until his father hits him across the face (the process begins again).
11. Do not judge us by our accents or our clothes but by the manner in which we leave (never to return).
12. The locals (the dead).

CRAPTASTICA™

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You're an important cog in our wheel o' fortunate
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You produce! & In turn will consume other crap!
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You will be sent on missions to your homelands!
We will provide all the blank chequers you need!
No dull stares now! O impermeable surfaces! On!
O impeccable whiteboards! O plan massive crap!
Advertising campaigns! One day! You'll be here!
& all of this crap—yes, all of it!—Will! Be! Yours!

UNTER DEM RADAR

Harrison Ford had it made in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, screwing th' Austrian woman in Venice—*ah, Venice* as they slipped *unter dem radar*, beneath the clanging Sunday bells of Canareggio ... meanwhile Sean Connery presumably touched himself, or his manufactured wig, knowing that once they reached the castle of the Gestapo he would enjoy the last laugh, or something. How do you say *good-bye in Austria* as opposed to the Reich? My German teacher was from Vienna. I had a mild vanilla crush on her, dreamt of discipline (all verbal, *natürlich*: the classroom put-downs, then the private humiliations in another Goethe-Institut, in a nameless & folorn Balkan capital). Oh for an umbrella to scare the seagulls into a Luftwaffe propeller or two—*ah, Venice!* Stop me before the credits roll! I'm fit to burst here with my leather-bound journal! I confused the Berlin & München Olympic stadiums, too. Who needs Hitler's autograph when it's there in the landscape, the *reiseplan*, the plastic stein? A girl holds up two jugs with the requisite irony (breasts heaving ...). This foolish foreplay does not know it has been tricked into surviving. How I yearn for an original impassioned cry from Cairo: *cover your heaaart, Indy!* It must have been all those *bad dates*.

TINTIN & THE DEATH STAR

I thought *I* smelt bad on the outside!
Now with this insufferable goon, Solo,
hacking my insides away only to reveal
this succubus, this blonde boy, Tintin,
I must revise the absolute truth of that
observation. Phew! Not a good start,
I'll say—& as for how he'll go on to blow
up the Death Star, well, that's anybody's
guess. Whistle, ye snow-soaked winds!
Hoth will now turn my jellied intestines
to marble, or glacial glass. Yum. Within
its Arctic embrace, this *taun-taun* shall
lie in stasis waiting for Jabba's blowtorch
to thaw my ice-ripened scheme. Yes, his
daring shall be the subject of works by
post-Soviet sculptors in some primeval
soup version of the earth, should its
release date ever come to the attention
of the censors. They're everywhere here,
you know—even in these snowy wastes
I call home. I'm sorry, did we mention
Milou? Inside my cave grave I am a sole
tear whose trajectory is the radiance
of my native field ... but *he* will melt
into being *inside* their mini-planetoid,
from which the evil below has been
systematically eradicated, armed only
with a snow-pistol & a drunken step.
Tintin sensationally defeats the Empire!
Pausing only to scream as he destroys
what might once have been his destiny.