To Elsie Rose and Pauline Menz
Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments are due to the editors of the following publications in which these poems first appeared:


There will be no turn of the river
where we are all reunited
in a wonderful party
the picnic spread
all the lost found
as in hide and seek

Thom Gunn, ‘Elegy’
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Fifteen new poems in The Catullan Rag

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Two choruses in a prelude to flu:
next door a rock band’s pagan bass
invading my flat; downstairs
a sustained ‘Yairs’ – a termagant
from Patrick White floating in to hector us.
Traffic rushes past, ignoring the madman
on the kerb, angular as kites.
All day he sobs ‘I am not, not, not,
like one I saw years ago
at the Rome Railway Station,
banging his head on the machines
(Coke, coffee, condoms –
anything commercial),
banging them so hard
blood sprayed down his chest
like spurts of martyrdom
while tutti romani rushed to their trains,
fearful, cashmered, blinkered,
avoiding this glimpse
of what their brother had become.
Sheridan Close

From all directions they come,
night’s death-dealing comets,
fl eets of them above
the mesmerised city,
delivering their injured boys,
doomed to be shaved and callipered –
terrible tubes to a nurse’s croon.

Day pinkens
but night remembers,
encyclopedic.

Along the boulevard
sleepwalkers throng the tramlines,
frantic to lay an enigma.
Echoes of the E flat in Rheingold
when they dim the lights and
someone taps you on the shoulder:
‘No exit now. Here for good.’
Vocalise in the Gated World

Clearly the song will have to wait
Until the time when everything is serious.
John Ashbery

Outside – spookily,
all that posturing,
repetition. Everything falls away
as it was encouraged to do,
traffic, orthography,
language of the unattributable dead.

Leaving us with what?
Schoolyards without a cause,
the children grown up and off
at their rackety wars. Men
crisp enough to knot a noose
burst from foreign cars –
extras of the underworld,

demanding,
but what is it they want,
whom do they importune?

Carmen is more like a man, don’t you think?
says the devilish diva in her Eifefeld apartment.
She should know,
extending her tapered fingers,
running them up her arms like spiders
that trill for her alone.
She may live to play the Don,
seduce the aristo opposite,
jilt herself in the only act set in paradise.
But no repeats, she insists. No repeats.

Distant,
an old gate creaks open, shut,
still as the mandated night.
Late sirens moon above the city.
This is Hollywood – ever
and only Hollywood.

But there is no gate,
not where we live now.
Never was.
You live in several ample places but one.
Why, it is named for you,
all that predeceased,
may even controversially follow:
rumoured auras of a self.
They are always coming in the morning, unrefreshed,
palely squabbling on the threshold,
and more of them late afternoon,
busloads, every few hours,
hesitant, half-hearted, mismatched.
They knock at your door until it opens of its own accord,
swooping them up. Squints
are exchanged, even cards.
They cannot recognise what you orchestrate
but hug the downy corners,
hug each other in their parkas.
Beginning your daily aria you assure us,
‘Everything is as it might have been,’
authentic cant to lull a pleb.
It soothes them like a pearled view of the park –
bankers writhing in the gloaming.
Excellent rates, you note:
perfect for weddings or wakes.
Silent we follow the apocryphal past.
Saturday. The usual 9 a.m. flight.
The man beside me hefts a Gladstone.
‘I haven’t seen one of those in years,’
I say, this being sociable Saturday.
I recall a drab one from my twenties
owned by someone else – always empty
it went everywhere with him,
like a statement of intent. This one
came out with my neighbour’s grandfather
sixty, no, seventy years ago,
all the way from England. We stare
in silence at the honourable pilgrim.
His young boy’s sole luggage
is a tome called *Piratology*,
embossed with rubies and emeralds
and a working compass on the cover.
It quivers throughout the flight, nervous-making.
Inside, transfixed the boy, are pop-up castles
which he plunders in his imagination,
and maps of buried treasure to be
relentlessly pursued, mother or no mother.
My case is newish, sleeker, from the people who make the Swiss Army knife. I bought it for the logo but must never tell Security. Today it holds a comb, a gift and one pressed, acceptable shirt. I’m only going for one night, Fidelio in Adelaide. Time permitting (yes, let’s break our pact) there’ll be a cocktail, then the second half: a Rob Roy, a Sidecar, an Edward VIII, one only you know how to mix.