

SEEING SIGHTS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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# SEEING SIGHTS

1968–1978

*Paul Rossiter*

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## BARE ROCK

I

Poured out in lava, or bedded down  
grain by filtering grain in prehistoric seas,

pressured, shifted sideways  
by the planet's wrinkling crust,

scratched and scraped by glaciers,  
worn smooth by water, split by frost:

time itself in the waver of its grain,  
in its rough and smooth, its hard and soft.

2

Crossing a pass in late afternoon light,  
pitching a small tent at sunset,

busy with guy ropes and sleeping bags  
among slabs, boulders and scree;

as the light fails we heat water  
over a bud of hissing blue flame,

and sit at ease, leaning our backs against  
five hundred million years of stone.

WYTHBURN VALLEY

I

moraine

blue sky

the valley is an empty trench,  
a groove of absent stone

2

pipit's whistle –

flick of a tail by a hummock of moor grass

by the tumbling beck

bird bones half-bedded in peat

we gather white branches to make our fire

3

the sky aches in its sleeve

of earth, grass and stone,

and the beck rings upon emptiness

the valley dreams a cold north wind

to salve the memory in its bones

of the absence of its maker

a chisel of ice betrayed by climate

gravel dumped off its snout in heaps  
as it melted back towards its seed,  
a single snowflake a million years before

4

we coax flame from ashes  
the next grey misty morning,  
and then move on

small travellers  
under a cloudy sky  
walking the ghost of a glacier.

HEBRIDEAN

tang of drifting peat-smoke  
rough grain of sun-warmed granite

I sit in sunlight,  
my back against the farmhouse wall,  
drinking hot sweet tea  
and looking out across the sound to Jura

a snipe  
    slowly builds  
its huge high tower of air  
in a wind like thought itself

then spreads  
vibrating tail feathers on the down-swoop

*drumming* –  
    isn't that what you call it?

the thrum of feathers in  
the wind from off the strait

a wind whose name is being here

TAKING THE DAY OFF TO VISIT THE POUND EXHIBITION

reading *Paterson* on the train to Sheffield

*the language  
the language fails them  
they may look at the torrent in their minds  
and it is foreign to them*

dark hills above  
a sunlit valley green with spring (Edale)

coming out of Totley tunnel,  
swaying silver birches,  
bluebells,  
loamy paths through long wet grass

*dangerous to leave written that which is badly written:  
a chance word, upon paper, may destroy the world*

the train slows as it passes  
red-brick terraces under a washed blue sky

in the university library  
a poem by Victor Plarr  
copied on the fly-leaf of a book owned by Pound

*oh for it would be a pity  
to o'erpraise or to flout her  
she was wild, and sweet, and witty  
let's not say dull things about her*

(with a later disavowal of interest in Plarr)

*watch carefully and erase, while  
the power is still yours, I say to myself*

first draft of Canto IV, in pencil

*and beneath it / beneath it / not a ray / not a sliver  
not a spare / coin of / sunlight  
not a jot / on the / black cold / water  
Goddess / Diana / Lucida Sidera*

Dorothy's watercolours of the Pyrenees:

angles, planes and surfaces,

a pastoral Vorticism,

off-centre yet nicely balanced –

no sign of MAXIMUM ENERGY

OF ALL EXPERIENCE RUSHING INTO THE VORTEX

but 'pleasing to the eye' certainly

first edns. of *Cathay, Lustra, A Draft of XVI Cantos*

the original Canto II with pencilled corrections

a mildewed copy

of *Cantos XVII–XXVII*

(hidden in a rubbish heap in 1944)

coffee in the Students' Union

while reading the catalogue:

lads with feet on chairs,

someone sets fire to a plastic cup on a table top

UNION SUBVERSION MEANS FEWER DISCOS – THIS AFFECTS YOU

*for all that is put down, once it escapes,  
may rot its way into a thousand minds, the corn become  
a black smut, and all libraries, of necessity, be  
burned to the ground as a consequence*

train back through the Pennines,  
blown sheets of rain  
    in the valley between Hope and Edale,  
patches, rays, spare coins of sunlight,  
a sudden double rainbow

*only one answer:  
    write carelessly  
so that nothing that is not green will survive*

*Sheffield, 12 May 1976*

THE TEMPTATION OF ST ANTHONY

*Hieronymous Bosch*

this one has a pig snout and cunning eyes  
he holds out his cup for wine  
an owl is perched on his head

this one wears a bishop's robes  
blood pours from his back  
he disputes a sacred text with a bird and a fish

this one is obsequious  
he carries a frog on a silver platter  
the frog also carries a platter

this one is serious  
he wears a tall black hat  
a blackbird's claw sticks out from under his cloak

this one has no arms  
he is up to his waist in water  
a bowl of porridge is balanced on his head

this one is naked  
he blows a trumpet  
a sausage pops out on a string

and here is a pig  
an earthen pitcher  
which pisses from its bunghole

and here is Mr Burgher  
with his missus  
riding complacently through the sky on a fish

over here is a burning town  
and these are the winged devils  
who wheel among the flames

over there is a marching army  
this here is a gibbet  
and these are human bones scattered on the ground

but who is this  
cloaked and bearded figure  
the still point at the hub of this demented mandala?

just one more figure in a sea of hallucination  
but the only one who looks us in the eye  
*mon semblable, mon frère*, he stares straight out at us

his eyes are haunted  
unexpected  
with just a trace of mockery

and even though he  
long ago finished with questions,  
his eyes ask

do you also see truly  
are you also a witness?