

Peter Sirr

**SELECTED  
POEMS**

1982-2004



Gallery Books

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## *Colour Scheme*

*Red Bridges Cut Jump Risk*

— Newspaper headline

How could it not have occurred to them?  
Could they not have seen  
the colours were wrong? If they were here now  
which of them would find it in his heart  
to lie down before the lavender train  
carrying its light load out of Oslo;  
who could fail to smile at himself  
watching the waves dance in the yellow estuary,  
the hand grip in all seriousness  
the dyed revolver? Released to look  
again, what desolation could resist  
the pulse quickening  
over the gay street, the heart leaping  
on the brightest bridge in Norway?

## *Some Things*

I need to believe I am hugging you  
but the room leaps over your shoulder  
hard and clear, as if you weren't enough  
and faith kept coming back to this,  
smoke veining thinly from your ashtray,  
bare boards and chrysanthemums.

Look,

I hold you close, but draw in too  
the table's clutter, the Matisse poster,  
the billion hairs on your Shetland sweater  
I'd almost count.

I am hopelessly involved  
with the fly on your wall, the pouty blooms  
revolving on your line. Two  
storeys of a factory  
are leaking through your window, half a stack  
with its rag of sky . . . You  
might be stealing through me, blind  
to the world's intrusion, blind even  
to my mind's idiot  
hungering for consummation —  
or you are locked in your own clear-eyed prison,  
seeing your flat, as for the first time, and fighting back  
its insomniac bric-à-brac.

## *The Names of the Houses*

The village licks its fingers, belches, sighs, invites the yarn,  
the childhood folly dragged up again and again  
and as funny as ever. You know the pie has succeeded  
in *Rustic Delight*, while over in *Well-Satisfied*  
the prospective son-in-law has them eating out of his hand.  
Architecture of content, profit all year round,  
and the houses full of mirrors. And all looked down upon  
by the bloated in heaven, the sated  
belt-loosening forebears telling it like it was,  
joy without end, flagrant happiness  
with, maybe, in the off-limits backstreet, the smelling-to-  
high-heaven  
shithole hovel of the village weirdo —  
look at him now, the witless fool, slopping out  
in *The Place of Violence*, *The Maiden's Ruin*, *The Life as  
Normal*.

## from *Here and There: A Notebook*

*Here* is a tight terrace  
through whose thin walls  
lives leak continually,  
laughter and rows,  
howl of petulant dogs,  
my neighbour's piano  
spilling daily into my head.  
The street is narrow, the houses  
so close, to glance out the window  
is always to be met by eyes  
glancing back. Humane horizons . . .  
A Turkish family  
lives opposite, the men serious  
and dark-suited, the women in their  
flowered dresses and headscarves.  
How many generations?  
How many children are there?  
What is she thinking about,  
the woman whose eye I catch,  
smoking a cigarette by the window,  
her elbow resting on the sill?  
The men sit in bars so bare, so ugly  
the natives hurry past, wondering at  
that plantless brightness,  
kitchen chairs on a wooden floor, a din  
of maleness — strange islands  
in a sea  
of *gezelligheid*.  
What do I know?  
I've lived here a year  
hermetically sealed  
from the life of the street,  
worrying about connections.  
Yesterday, a week to Christmas,  
a man I've never seen before

called with branches of catkin,  
told me to put them in water,  
then disappeared.  
Last year, on New Year's Eve, at midnight  
I stepped outside to watch  
the fireworks. A door opened  
across the street, the house  
whose curtains are always drawn,  
and a man came out, unshaven,  
wearing an old string vest.  
In his hand he held a revolver  
which he fired twice into the air,  
then he came and shook my hand  
and went back in, smoke trailing  
from the gun barrel.  
His son keeps his Alfa Romeo  
outside my window, sleek and black,  
on the bonnet a huge transfer  
of a wolf snarling. The man himself's  
tattooed, forearms aglow  
with sex and power.  
I prick my skin  
to let the pigment in  
but little holds.  
Again and again  
the eye migrates, complains,  
wherever it goes  
is a city like this  
undiscoverable,  
in the dim suburbs of perception  
a surfeit of detail.

## *The One Dim Thing*

See how he has turned to her, to that one spot  
where her neck takes the light and whitens  
to perfection; see how his finger strives to enter  
that light and how, again, it is the same room, the same

heartbreaking light, the light of argument and desire,  
the one illumination here: obsession's heaven,  
the one dim thing relentlessly reached for,  
the single gesture failing infinitely to accomplish itself.

He gives it up and settles back, he looks out the window  
at the grey town: spires and rooftops, his own life creeping  
like a burglar there. They lie absolutely still, the end of love  
seeps through them like a drug, and because they are  
different

it works differently in each. She is drowsy now, almost  
asleep,  
but his sceptical hands start out again, on their  
ancient journey. They are not his hands now, they stray from  
him  
like innocents, pilgrims who left the very hour

the faith shifted. Soon he will leave, or she will,  
and his hands will come back to him, days later, or weeks,  
in the final scene. Much has yet to be decided:  
whose room, what town, what exact degree of passion, pain.

In the end nothing of this may remain,  
neither the room nor them, not a limb, not a single hair —  
though the light I capture is the light they've left  
and every shot is bereft . . .