

Five Poems of Peter Nicholson

Selected by Tarun Tapas Mukherjee, Editor

A Life

No intermediary in the passing night
Brought better news than what the heart revealed,
Sending from its furthest reaches news
Of bitter blood, infatuated calm
Or a tempest of delighted skin.
Thus at midnight, with the world beyond
Your fragmentary reach at goodnesses,
Silence then was best—you were just a guest
Of something larger than this sorrowing.
No use to reason why the crest of time
Has danced on you, then left a trampled rind.
You lived and knew the best, then left your life behind.

En Route

Grey slough of skins on trains at dusk
Foretell the future we know,
Graven from the office sex,
Not getting on or getting on
At lunches where the city blurs
In alcoholic mutterings.

Through the streaming suburbs winds
Ranks of limbs in flickered fire,
Advertising hoardings bearing
All our second-rateness,
False imagery of lives not lived.

We are golden, and the trees
Shaking by the tracks are trailing
Absolute transcendences
We've distrusted,
Lacking wisdom, strength.

Birds swing round and dogs prick ears.
The ticket is collected, dark
Spreading into passageways
That curve, then lift, or dip to drives

Where roses hang, and stars
Spread out like a tapestry.
Reaching to our creaking doors
We know a greater destiny
That, somehow, still, we must believe.

Panorama

You serried ranks of critic clouds
Shadowing festivities,
Do you judge us
With the eyes of lovers,
Or is it with disdain
You cancel sunset's calm.

I reach at your immortal shapes,
Over the wings of destinies,
You boasting with your white on blue,
A phalanx Plato might have seen,
Revealing here so strangely
Enigmas we have dreamed.

We will be dead so long
Beneath your vapours trailing
And this need to know
Reduce to a blank
Or a shining:—
Roll on across our days and years
Forever as our limit nears.
Judge us kindly as we wake
To know a new birth and new age.

The Artist's Agony Aunt Replies

Brobdingnag into Lilliput doesn't go—
Work that out early if you want to keep
Your gold estate
From predations by those CEOs and phonies
Who've risen to the level of baloney.

Art is more important than their blather,
But only you and the happy few will know
Why you'll be intransigent and stroppy
When they're expecting parrot words to serve
For beauties and their furies here conferred.

Art cannot wait for being understood
When blood has, by the Muse, been dispossessed.
They'll want you to sell short your better part
For slaps on the back and lower ranks of things
Where they have dumped their burden without wings.

For all the money, politics and kudos
Others have for meaning in their lives,
When summing up a goodness that survives,
The gift of art, however hard or strange,
Is worthy of a life none with you may change.

Silhouette

Limits to living, selvedge of the soul
Whose length we furl
With algebra
Or reasoned explanations,
Rinsing borders
With redder patination
And howling divinations
For things gone wrong, a sudden kill.

What to do with the stitching
Where air meets skin, and the itching
Of years is a scab
Which we pick in the night,
Black roses at our throat,
Or a stabbing hand stopped
Near a back
Whose goodness we lack.

Sunset or ruins of autumn
Speak of an end that is certain,
And the summing up
Of this overflowing cup
Leaves a grazed tongue and thighs skinned—
Shadows lengthen the blaze
Near this mortal face,
The silhouette here of our caring.