

PICTURES OF MY FATHER  
Peter Day



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As I descended into impassable rivers  
I no longer felt guided by the ferryman  
from Le Bateau Ivre by Arthur Rimbaud



That day when I entered the house of my Father, 27  
Devon Way, Bailiff Bridge, Brighouse, Yorkshire,  
29th July 2009, eight months after his death,  
I wasn't really sure what I was looking for or  
expecting to find: evidence maybe of a life lived,  
- our Book of Lives - somewhere in the now-empty  
house, a house now cleared from decades of clutter  
and functionality. Evidence then, or truths -  
photography after all deals with truths - and since  
I had spent the biggest part of my life so far,  
inhabiting and living in these rooms and that is  
true, something comprehensible and real. These were  
truths then or evidence of the truth, something  
authentic and tangible not the imaginary realities  
we invented and told.



What I found was space like it had never been before: empty and excessive. A vast emptiness, open in the totality and tonality of its knowledge, infinite in form, ambiguity and some memory (often vague and just then recalled) of what was there in the nothing that was still there.

I understood that the vast space of our family life is actually small. All that is meaningful is in the past. Looking from here to the future I can imagine myself disappearing and re-appearing further down the line but always framed by this time, this small vast oppressive space. Here where time seems eternally present, space is a great deadener, it imposes itself and confirms everything that is absent.



I am here and the house, its objects, their meaning and remembrance, are not like this but full. I remember full. Rooms full, before space closed in, of furniture, tokens and mementoes - but here and now even a plug socket seems precious, now it is devoid of the familiar geography of then, the past defined by the same objects that were familiar and comforting. Then, is a place to which we all return less often as we grow older, as time passes and the memories soften.

Space is desirable and has meaning, is definable. It is appropriated as metaphor where absence is not appropriated, as here in this place where not even a thought or desire is left. The absence here of all our traces and meanderings means that life simply renders us the custodians of that which is invisible, so that we are constantly becoming and not-being. The not being erases all meaning. There is nothing left, nothing left of that which was entrusted to my earliest consciousness and curated there for us, the survivors.



Quite literally in the house, my father's house, there was nothing. Nothing tangible of the events, no records, just nothing and no more - no more personal stories being created. Its emptiness was everything that once held the memories in its indefinite space. Here there is nothing left but space, an abstraction, this emptiness that has not been scooped up and disposed of but that somehow remains. And yet this is so real. Not one thing remains except the aberrations - the marks, the dust, and the dirt. The by-products of life that have no real value are created by this attrition of life itself. A quintessence of dust is described in the somewhere that there was; and that had been a man.













Here there is a story. It is the story's end and another beginning - that only reveals itself through this new story, each new discovery and change. Its transient narrative is composed in dust; whose light and dark neighbours map its days, this dust or the slow burr of a mark - why did the carpets remain? They are both unmoved and unflustered an audience to each slow decay. I thought we asked for the house to be cleared. In the old wiring and sockets lurks a kind of danger, the kind that comes with age, of being redundant and scrapped, which they will be, being outdated and outmoded - old age seems to leave fashion behind as the end nears - even though their usefulness has not really passed.



It's empty, but my peace is not assuaged. My anger and bittersweet emotions have only partially been analysed. I want the space to give me love; my life here has not had its portion. Entirely abandoned apart from the light, scratching at the dust. Ask the dust and dust replies in transient gratifications. Signs of 'our dad', all too briefly - over there, momentarily dancing across tired and worn out surfaces, a picture that allows me to remember, to think for a while before the thoughts disappear. Here the doors we did not take, the rooms we no longer inhabit lead us away to where we ourselves become invisible between what is and what might have been.

My Father's Menu.

Soup of the Day - the perfect way to  
start your meal.

The cheerful motto instructs as well as informs.

There are signs here....

I am sitting with my father, sister, wife, brother-  
in-law, and niece.

A family tableaux, a snapshot of geniality not our  
acrimonious ages

Last night.

I phoned and said I love you.

'Forgive me,' I said.

I have never said this before and I am nearly 45.



A frozen moment within which we were captured and fossilised. Destiny is set, where time before will never be like time ever after. Here we can feel time, touch it as it rushes by, non-stop, it whooshes - quick quickly quicker into the distance future. It is our time. It is our history and I knew that, even as I said it 'I love you', time was disappearing chronologically, rushing headlong into the distance passed, hostage to some reckless joyrider, from where we saw the taillights of now, with which we had such familiarity and after which we paused to reflect, in the slow stewed mid-afternoon air at the bar and grill.





We wondered in shock and awe at the fusillades of recent positive emotion, almost family, and wondered how deep we had buried, at the back of the cupboard, atrophied and rotting the ingredients of our emotions. So tasteless that the-here-now pre-packed menu offered something even if little in sustenance, that was blessed and merciful - the chimera of the pleasant menu for pleasant families at the Wyke Lion, Bradford. Summer 2008.

My Father's Menu with homemade breads: he constantly read it out, aloud sermon-like, again and again, driven to fill a hungry space to convince the agnostics amongst us of the careful veracity of the locally sourced ingredients as a fantastic range of dishes each lovingly and individually prepared, and you looked towards each of us, individually and lovingly prepared - what great care and time this must have taken as if we didn't know what to say at this convenience of dishes. This covenant of cutlery and plates, this set. This day we were meant to be together. I can feel it. I want to spend my life here.



Why is it that when life is constantly kicking you in the bollocks your brain turns to goo, or was it incipient dementia, or even convenience? You read it again - a fantastic range of dishes and looked around.

You had always been odd, brought into the world by a mother young enough to be your sister, disowned or disowning without family, crashing your car in a just-missing two-people accident whilst waving pleasantly at them - waving and warning not waving and hello-ing, you knew them and they you, and they knew to get out of the way, walking into closed French windows, scaffolding, head-butting window-sills with trousers stuck round your ankles. It was odd, that odd upbringing, all topsy and turvy and tumbling out like a great upside-down slapstick life.

When we got to the Wyke Lion I had noticed that you moved more slowly and as we walked from the car, when I turned round to speak to you, you were no longer there but still in the distance. You were behind us, but such a long way back in the car park, small, fragile and frail against the vastness and enormity of this regulated space. Its geometry measured you out, as its distance siphoned off your energy. Was your mind the same or was it disappearing into the distance too? Was it measuring in your head, face tallowed to the end of its waxy taper, like some great imploding planet of light that distance travelled to our distance travelled to right here the last time I saw you?



The menu came in an unrepentant sleeve, its encapsulated and more importantly its wipe-clean surface does not repent its surfboard flatness waving in the air. Here in our grasp is a wafted vortex written, deleted and typed in Helvetica; unreserved joy delivered with unrepentant meaning.

Sausage and mash made from outdoor reared Hampshire Pork.....is great tasting and has ample space for afters

I coughed; you read the menu and looked at the slow cooked cathedral-sized uselessness of it all: and why make pleasantries? When there are all the trimmings and the specials board - says that this menu has meaning, idiosyncrasy and individuality, is packed with all the goodness from a pre-packaged and pre-prepared existence. The ingredients are there and we will look after all your requirements.

'I love you,' he said - look left, look up, look down. 'I like the look of the intense chocolate pudding.'



'Is it raining where you are?'

These words, this sentence is what he said when I told him that my life had hit another bend in the river; another part of me had come unstuck and unravelled. He became all meteorological and we talked weather like the experts we suddenly became to all things atmospheric and outside. Outside, the not us and other, but clouds behind the sun, soon it's the passing of days.

Let them go. Let it go! Let it go!





I slid into the cold black river of tenderness and was held. And I wished for one moment that I could believe it and let go of the side. That the love veneer could, garnished and possibly toasted, remove that which stained our lives rather than coated it, the blemishes beneath, that pre packed chatter. We never strove for happiness but existence, the menu tells you what you will have is what you will have, is what you will have.

THE menu seems to offer, existence and sustenance, and the things we need.

Love was the fantasy that was created in all formats widescreen, Love comes in packages, is packaged in formats, visceral and joyous entertainments fudge sauce and whipped cream that come to pass to 'the end' a commodity. This chocolate sauce, this menu transcends our reality and it heals us.

Love, I tried hard to imagine as the living stitches of us pulled apart. Our director cuts to a more meaningless discussion at a family meal and you reading out the menu, Shepherds Pie slow cooked minced lamb with onions and rosemary, topped with black pepper mash.... Practically the last words you spoke to me.

No need for reservations. Food served hot and cold all day. No need for reservations....

(Food Menu, Wyke Lion June 2009 web entry all menu items correct at the time of web search, no longer available however and rest assured that all tips are (still) retained by our team members)

Images taken by my father, March 03 1997, at 27 Devon Way, Bailiff Bridge, Brighouse. W Yorkshire



Margin Notes: Near the ending and beginning of an indeterminate light there is day and there is night. Here the transitory is balanced in the dust laden air where we no longer trust our senses. We often stand at this intersection, a world without beginning or end where all meaning is cleanly and irrevocably suspended.



House 1

I AM HERE  
and you are near  
in this house you are everywhere,  
indivisible and un-divided.

You are here!  
Yet invisible and nowhere  
indeterminable vestiges of us,

but here visible in the graffito  
of each days scratches and scribbles.  
You are etched

into this house where there is an  
anaglyptic covering of detritus and dust  
where the walls lean inwards to bear witness  
to the history of dust.

Each fracture and splintered-crack of plaster  
the very pressure of time bends them  
archives them into matter.

What matters? Each ounce of daylight,  
each particle of a remembered hour  
cupped nonchalantly from life's momentum.

Our memorials are each morning's push  
each evenings heave, the windows  
shuttered and overwhelmed by the pushing hour

the marching armies of each seconds tyranny  
Whilst inside each bodies ongoing,  
triumphantly another dull moment is stored







unobserved and seemingly without trace,  
yet inwardly screaming loud

I am here



Without renitence to the obstacles of time  
We both grew older  
conserving ourselves without immediate annihilation

This empty house allows us to be quiet and  
reconvened till the palaver of battle is over.  
Our histories are yelped into a chasm of chatter,



in this kingdom of YAWPs,  
the whimpers and whelps are the least defined  
I sometimes wonder if our poverty affliction

killed our noise,  
knowing our place became experimental  
and experiential

the unrecorded tracks to some weird ambient strum  
the last tarmacked track of the L.P  
top layered with silence!

## House 2

An empty house  
YOU ARE NOWHERE!

but I hear you.

Here, the echo, the monumental geometry of voices  
traverse and measure this space

Look after him. Look after him.  
We wanted to speak, you and I,

but time got between us and  
the clocks scampered fast across the almanacs.

Between each room, we paused and our lungs plumped  
mere bags and bones

knocking at the futures room but its  
chroniclers never replied  
the present held, in each walls divide

dreams ground down and configured by  
each mortared hour and nothing of magnitude,

now extended and cemented into what remains  
the calcium dust.



Year by year, and so on in this lean sarcophagus,  
a necklace into which our pasted jewels  
are designed;our potential denied?

This monument is ours,  
its our months and years and are so to be

A last post, so emotionally obtuse  
remember, remember, remember each bone  
fragment of man

his calcium crust.  
Look after Him

his math, space and history,  
too complicated to understand,

too confusing to express.  
And Here I found him

I held him and  
wouldn't let him go  
until I took him to my mothers house  
the one where I was born'  
(the song of songs, which is Solomon's bible)

House 3

AT THE VERY EDGE OF THIS HOUSE,  
at its extent  
the entrance and exit are two great doors,  
  
vast slabs of darkness,  
crushing the air and light.  
Time is amputated under the mufflers-weight  
  
of their bone breaking silence.  
It crescendos this silence, is discharged  
at high velocity  
  
towards the stars, a black hole  
near the end of indeterminable light,  
this joint twilight and dusk  
  
mutates and emanates to part day and part night.  
Here the transitory  
is balanced  
  
in the dust suspended air.  
I stand at this quiet intersection,  
and here I found him,





Nobody knew HE WAS THERE.  
A life beginning,  
begin at the beginning son

without noise  
memory or meaning.

We were just-hecklers, outsiders, spectators,  
Caterwaulers and harrumphers

Men are nothing and can be saved',  
are these great fibbers  
mumblers  
are they saviours of men?

I have found him  
amongst nothing, for here is nothing.



Here the lost utter their last great gargler:  
pile upon pile, body on body,  
slumming with the lost last souls of night

rutting into narcissistic existence  
I exists in each vapid second expired,  
by each seconds loud dull crescendo,

Hoots emitted here and there,  
squawks and shrieks form  
in this psychedelic nothing

it's a cacophonous jumble,  
which we tidied  
rather occasionally, into

the framed odds and sods  
of an hour,  
for the guest's entertainment.

We lived but not very often, not very often  
An occasional metre, life's measure and memory,  
as we had no time for looking back

onto what exactly?  
Why remember a moments passing?  
Like we have had all time (to stand still).

It is the forgetting,  
which is the longer, takes longer:  
But your smell is perspired here still,

and you are secreted here, erotically  
It haunts me; you haunt me,  
seeping into every dormant spore,

tongued and grooved  
into every crevice and joint.  
Cleaved

between the skirting board, underlay  
and tongued  
into this very conversation.







In each silent beginning  
screams the beat of the final hours end,  
drum roll, loud ululation,

inexplicable and deafening  
the silent baffles of time

In Gods good time our atheism retreats





House 4

I am here now, and I have arrived  
restored by the dust,

I CAN SEE YOU defined over there,  
deafened by the silent padding of your shoe

and your waving arm between the weeds constellation.  
MY - HOW THEY HAVE GROWN HIGH

How angry you would be (and are) at their size.  
Shall we steal another glance

at their wild apparitions and daring bouquets  
plotting and building?

They are homicidally bending,  
thrashing wildly,

rending their tangled stems against the pane,  
against the mortar.

Petal bombs start pink firestorms,  
blurring and whirring cavalcades

Have they no shame these strumpets,  
no shame at all





All blousy pink petticoats and ready to wear emotions  
these thin figured cat-walking models,

peering and glaring neighbours.  
See - some teenage mercenaries

have already taken over.  
This showy pout of indecent sprays of dissent

are covering fires for  
their bloody politics and the war-waging militias

irregulars, with their crazy dancers,  
invaders, banished onto the war of the land:

our back garden reveals  
their fanatics and thrashing zeal,

a willingness to take over at any cost.  
IT IS WE WHO OWN THE LAND THAT WILL  
SHAPE ANYTHING YOU WILL BECOME

Militant posturing covers their ground  
hidden revolutionary breeders offer

no sanctuary and  
no trespassing allowed.

Our fight with them is over  
as they have consumed our fight and the collected struggle

those hours (forty six years) of spring, summer, and winter  
and now time is theirs,

each and every wilt, its decay was forever theirs,  
You alone will survive

this glorious and ravenous autumn  
and  
die holding this sadness.

They are the heirs.

TIME WE WENT?  
They nod.

All we want is a little peace  
Father

in your good time our atheism retreats.  
Here by the window

I pause and I am conscious,  
not for the first time,

of nothing and aware,  
alive to its weight.





Here I have found him amongst nothing,  
for here is nothing.

Men are nothing.  
I hold onto Him and

there is a weight of nothing,  
a solemn and serious nothing.

Here and there, scattered across seedtime  
these seedlings fatten only stupid and  
crazy yearlings

watered with tears,  
what were we thinking that we could ever

set ourselves free  
It is stupid to be scared of nothing

but I am scared.  
Look after him. Look after him.

I am troubled  
by the great fear

that the very tissue of our lives might tear  
and by so doing become something memorable.

A scar riven history with few graces.  
Each daily act turning out veterans of the greater war.

I came here not knowing what I came for  
to be a present again?

To be alive in the dominion? Adding another burr,  
trace and another layer, another memory.

It is the cold and the autumn makes me shiver,  
This shiver is alive and palpable to the living seasons,

The living reason is the burning up of life's  
conversations,

the blurring whirligig of forgetfulness and my  
clumsy definition

I am here and you are not.  
LOOK AFTER HIM.

The house is empty and I lock the door, quietly  
behind me

It continues, fathomless in its functional  
needs to exist

apart from the scars,  
spanning a monstrous silence,

there is nothing defined, here,  
in quiet places.

They are the heirs.

In God's good time.





House 5

There is nothing of value here  
The house is empty  
WE ARE LEFT

---

'Good as new' you said  
as you placed the misshaped  
hardly worn safari-suit jacket  
onto my shoulders and said  
Arise!

I was eight and You said  
You alone are Livingstone in Africa;  
Halifax will remember its intrepid son.

Your clothes are worn,  
torn, ill-fitting, ragamuffin hand-me downs,  
seconds, USED,  
you are not used,  
you alone are clothed and swaddled by a band of  
outcasts  
Arise.

And so began the daily ritual  
of redeeming that which is torn,  
backstitching our frayed unmendable portion  
We had never quite given up hope.

But we gave up hope.  
It seemed that as we reclaimed ourselves  
Through the discarded lives of others we were

Living almost,  
even laughter, could be repossessed  
regretted the no time to be romantic  
in a just living life.

We did not touch history  
there was too much pain  
to bother remembering so we forgot

Aside: I walked to the pawnshop with my mother and  
her engagement ring. It was all we had to sell apart  
from ourselves. We traded metal for food.  
No exodus.  
No redemption, No salvation

---

Decision made - We never had any time, or time for  
time.  
step outside and walk away  
the house is empty and I lock the door, to turn once  
more

it is better that there is no remembering.



Besides: We should not cruelly give ourselves hope,  
we should extinguish expectations that our returning  
will be filled with Tom Jones and a few lines from  
the Green Green Grass of Home. I was playing this  
in my room and when I stepped out and I caught  
you crying

'And there to meet me were my mama and papa'.

They abandoned you and what keeps us alive is not  
the belief of being re-united - although you did  
place an ad in the paper where you last saw your  
mother 50 years ago - but the belief in going on.

Arm in arm, we left together,  
space and distance was all we left behind  
still we arise.  
We had nothing to sell.

The fridge is defrosting,  
the self-timer switches are turned off and confused

All those things that are you aren't you are there  
waiting for you.

Inside: between each electric hum  
Crackles a still present continuum



Time goes on but  
the curtains are muddled  
open yet drawing closed, the cupboards unhinged  
emotionally emptied  
and your cup needs tea-bag-hot-water for your tea.

Waiting, expectant, for a momentary appearance  
A parable of arrival?

---

Black bin bags garland the outside  
announcing a return  
to be filled with you

We cleared the house.  
box after box after box after box  
not one thing to sell, a worthless life  
Me and my sister went through the house  
box by box by box after box,  
by box by box after box  
by box.

Blag bag discarded  
after black bag, piling  
black upon black

the lifetime of bills,  
the narrative of ephemera,  
an industry of filing,  
the trips and trinkets,

a landfill of life

THE REST WE HAD TO SELL.

---

The charity reclamation company said  
THERE IS NOTHING OF VALUE HERE  
except mourning and this house of lamentations  
Arise

Here this place contains nothing  
but the beginning of uncertainty  
little except the occasional gulp of emptied air  
This dust marks the place where our story is ending

Here are my favourite sounds  
Here are my favourite smells  
Here are my favourite fears  
Here are my favourite pains  
Here my delusion, and fantasy.

I Arise.





I can't go on

You turn to the house  
just a shape now  
without form  
a disturbance in the air  
no more limitations

Today's here now always  
present  
will be forgotten  
by the dying memories of tomorrow

Don't be sentimental, tell it like it is  
we all add it up to sum total  
of every moments laughter and each days fight

I am on fire with grief,  
with the uselessness of it all  
I'm on fire with anger and that I am forgetting  
Your being and not being  
I reach out and hold onto nothing  
it was all I had

I Arise



















House 6

Afterword: Peace Perfect Peace - Abney Park  
(Cemetery), Summer 2009,  
After George, with Hannah before Theia

Both inscribed and described, to  
the Sacred Memory of those  
who fell asleep  
these words are for ever in our thoughts  
for this kind and affectionate life,  
chiselled into these stones and the  
Safe arms of Jesus

Memories (without gesture but an involuntary nod)

There is a pattern in this movement  
left by the hand and eye  
carved into  
a counterpoint from  
the supine stoop  
and body's stance  
a mortal symmetry

Posed (in balanced near light)

You are, safe in the memory of my arms  
the flex of the lie  
each liminal detail described

A space choreographed  
and measured, by an unhurried  
last lean, forward momentum  
a quick-step onwards, slowly  
treads softly  
through nothing but deliberate  
limitations

these bodies, who pass a way  
this way, Peacefully to their Rest

Repose (and rest a while)

gently silently falling asleep  
Peace Perfect Peace

It is quiet, contained stillness (in silent legatos)

Quick now,  
lets go  
mourning is not over  
still time,  
more tempo  
in the percussive chattering  
of a whispers soft reach  
muzzled  
into this absent beak

Do not wait (Pause)

Do not stay (Pause)

until this day's done and  
emptied its meaning

Short was my time  
but longer is my rest.  
I am not dead  
but gone a while before  
into life eternal  
in sure and certain  
hope of resurrection

Dry up your tears  
and do not weep  
The sorrows have now passed  
Excoriating the world of every sense(s)

Still (feeble)

Improvising (still)

For you are with me  
For you are within me  
Fear with me  
Fear within me  
Forgive me, forgive me,  
forgive me .  
Words he never spoke  
I love I love I love you



Dedicated to George

With thanks to Jeff, Bill, Hannah and Theia  
2015

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