



Big Fish Little Fish

Cardboard Box

Annette Greenaway

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Looking up

The sky looks like a blank page today.

Turquoise and white,

With thin ruled lines.

I stand in the car park looking up,

Waiting for words to appear.

As you sit

As you sit thinking of nothing,
Staring into the middle distance,
A glass of water walks past,
Sipping on another glass of water.
Your car keys float past your face
In a convincing impersonation of a crane fly.
Your cactus plays tag with your yucca,
A chair changes colour.
Outside, insects write advertising slogans in the soil
In a variety of languages.
A flagstone leaps into the air,
Flips itself over and lands slap-bang
In its rectangular gap.
These are all commonplace occurrences,
As you sit thinking of nothing,
Staring into the middle distance.

Impressions of Hell

I liked Hell very much, and would have liked to have gone on my holidays there when I was alive.

A thoroughly disgusting place. I suppose that's the point, isn't it? Very clever.

The service was appalling.

I was surprised to see Glen Miller there. It was a pleasant surprise, because my wife and I are particular fans of Glen Miller.

It's other people, isn't it? That's what they say, anyway.

I can see what they're trying to do with the place, but it doesn't quite work in its current form. Tut tut. More thought is needed.

Not the sort of place you'd want to raise kids in.

The Devil was an absolute horror. I hate him.

A disappointment.

Poem for a fridge

no one ever created a masterpiece with magnetic poetry

poetry is not magnetic

it repels people rather than attracts

people are like magnets

they are attracted to metal

they like planes cars and big shiny skyscrapers

and when their buildings fall down

and their cars and planes run out of oil

it will be their own fault

My gran

My gran goes out clubbing on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

She loves her dubstep, her grime and her old-skool D n'B.

She can rave all night.

At six in the morning, she'll be standing on a table

Doing Big Fish Little Fish Cardboard Box,

While I sit at home, watching *Poirot* repeats, looking after her cats,

Thinking how times have changed.

Some notes on the artistic representation of the end of the world

Exercise:

Create an artistic representation of the end of the world.

Points to consider:

What does the end of the world look like?

What does the end of the world taste / sound / smell like?

What colour is the end of the world?

If the world ends and no one is around to see it, has it really happened?

Is the world going to end at all,

Or will it continue *ad nauseum*?

How soon will these events take place?

Within our lifetimes or our children's?

Consider the end of the world not from some death-and destruction perspective,

But as a vision of rebirth and rejuvenation,

The old world ending and being replaced by something entirely different,

Governed by a different set of rules,

Something unimaginable.

If it were possible to imagine something unimaginable,

What would that look like?

Funny story

I worked in an office where they tested the fire alarms on a Monday morning,

So when we heard them on a Monday, we'd say,

“It's OK, they're just testing.”

Then one Monday, there was a fire, and we all burned to death.

Flowers

I am very proud of the flowers I grew out of my mouth, they were all the colours flowers can be, brighter than any other flowers, the purples were the best, all the many shades of purple like lilac and whatever the word for dark purple is. People came to watch and said it was like I was talking, like I was saying wonderful things, but I wasn't saying a word, I was just sitting peacefully with my mouth open while the flowers grew. It was my favourite day.

Don't do it, Ken

Don't do it, Ken,
Think about your family,
Think about your friends.

Don't do it, Ken,
Think about your family,
Think about your friends.

Let's forget about it, Ken.
If we forget about it, we can change it.
Everything is repairable,
Even the earth,
Even yourself.
You have so much to offer on this planet of ours,
You have so much within you lying undiscovered,
We can discover it, Ken.
We can discover it together, Ken.

Don't do it, Ken.
Think about your friends.
Think about Muriel,
Think about Ben.

Don't do it, Ken,
I'll say it once again:
Think about your family,
Think about your friends.

I know sometimes you think

We are all too busy thinking about other things,
Worrying about other things,
Too busy to be concerned about you.
That isn't true.
It just seems like that sometimes, Ken.
It seems like that to everyone sometimes.

Cowards

It is time to stop celebrating and promoting

The strong and the brave.

It is time to celebrate and promote

The weak and the cowardly.

What do we mean when we use these words anyway?

We all know that within the weakest bodies

Often lie the strongest spirits.

We all know that “coward”

Is a word people use to label someone

Who doesn't do what they want,

Or what society wants,

Which is often the most courageous stance a person can take.

The brave and the strong and the cowardly and the weak

Are all the same,

Because we are all the same,

Because we are all the same.

A moment

Standing on a sheet of glass
A hundred feet up,
Holding my breath,
Trusting that the glass will not break,
And I will not fall to my death,
Because I have stood and watched
All the other tourists doing it first.

Tourist or terrorist

“Tourist or terrorist?” they asked me at the gate.

“Tourist or terrorist?”

“What?” I said.

“It’s a simple question,” they said.

“Are you a terrorist, or are you a tourist?”

Or are you visiting relatives in this country?

Or maybe you are here on a work visa?

Or are you – I don’t know – some kind of *student*?”

Airport security staff are getting

Awfully cocky

These days.

Happiness

He doesn't know much about her.
She doesn't know much about him.
Both are more comfortable not knowing.
They'll never analyse it out loud,
So we have no way of knowing
Whether they prefer to keep up the mystery,
Or just can't be bothered to care too much.

He doesn't care much about her.
She doesn't care much about him.
Both are pretty pleased with this arrangement.
Complicated folks, who know what it's like to suffer unbearable pain,
And withstand unbearable joy,
Often feel envious.
There is security in their blandness.
They will not notice when the world ends.
Happiness, of a kind.

The slimmest stream

There is so much power in water,
Even the slimmest stream will corrode
That abandoned shopping trolley,
Until it crumbles and is washed away,
Leaving only those orange plastic handles,
And a lonely pound coin,
Sitting like a wish beneath a shallow pool.

Accidental acupuncture

Jeremy was walking around barefoot
When he trod on a drawing pin
And cured his acne.

Norman fell down the stairs,
And landed on a knitting needle.
It went right through his eyeball.
His vision was never the same,
But it did wonders for his IBS.

Christina was reaching for the loofah in the shower,
But absent-mindedly grabbed the loofah-shaped cactus on the windowsill.
It hurt her in places too delicate to mention,
But her arthritis miraculously disappeared.

Jane's asthma has seen a remarkable improvement
Since she's been on the heroin.

You are my deadly sin

You were water, and I drank you,
Until I could see my reflection in the bottom of the glass,
A ghostly outline of my guilty face.
You were a cake and I gobbled you up,
Barely pausing to chew.
You were air and I breathed you in, frantically,
Not wanting to miss a molecule.
Now I might suffocate without you.

Yes, you are gone, but I still see you sometimes,
Floating in a cup of coffee,
Brushing gently against a leaf,
Or arranging yourself in attractive patterns of crumbs on the carpet.
Or perhaps I am imagining these things,
And you are really gone forever,
Because I was too greedy.

Pathetic fallacy

You are one of those people
Who can tell the sky to rain and it rains.
Trees topple over at your command.
Buildings demolish according to your whim.
If only you knew the immense power
You hold at your fingertips.

Searching for the perfect beat (with Gilles Peterson)

Greetings. My name is Gilles Peterson.

I've been searching for the perfect beat since 1996.

Some people want peace.

Some want harmony.

Some want to help themselves to the earth's resources without guilt.

I don't want much from life.

I'm just searching for the perfect beat.

Been searching on Twitter but I haven't heard a tweet.

I met a techno wiz in Tokyo,

Who taught his laptop to imitate the disjointed clangs of *gagaku*,

And speeded them up to make them more dancefloor friendly.

It was good, but there was room for improvement,

So I kicked him down the stairs,

Snapped his computer in half and dropped it on his face.

I went to Zimbabwe, searching for the perfect beat.

A pleasant young Zulu chap hypnotised me

With a rhythm he claimed had been drummed for generations.

"Generations?" I hollered. "Don't waste my time.

I'm Gilles Peterson, the creator of Acid Jazz records.

I'm looking for the fresh new sound of now."

I slammed his head straight through his djembe,

And floated him down the river.

I stopped off in Lagos to interview Femi Kuti for my radio show.

I told him he was OK, but not a patch on Fela.

There was no need to kill this one,

Because the insult was enough.

Still I searched for the perfect beat.

I thought I'd discovered it on a crowded club in Brazil,

Until the Red Bull buzz wore off,

And I realised it was just a bog-standard four-four,

With a token Latin flavour.

I hijacked the DJ booth, replacing the spinning disc

With a vinyl copy of *Gilles Peterson's Worldwide Volume 2*,

I smashed the offending twelve-inch to pieces,

Picked up one of the shards,

And stabbed the MC in the heart.

I tried explaining to the cops that I was just searching for the perfect beat,

Yet here I am in solitary, staring at empty walls,

Listening to my breathing,

And that regular *thump-thump*.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

And it is perfect. It is the most perfect thing I have ever heard.

It seems I have travelled the globe searching for something

That was within me all along.

Let this be a lesson to any fool

Who chooses to search for the perfect beat.

Turn off your techno, your drum and bass,

Even turn off your Jazzanova,

And listen to your hearts, my children.

Listen to your twisted hearts.

Perhaps you might learn something there.

A slow day

It's a shame I was on my own when I discovered how to slow down the speed of light. I was in the living room, watching the morning rays gradually poke through the glass before bouncing gently off the white walls. The crystal dangling in the window cast strolling rainbows in eight directions.

I went into the bathroom where there are no windows. I lay with my back on the mat in total black, watching the white hot bubble around the bulb slowly explode and envelope everything, finally reaching the tip of my nose after fifteen gorgeous minutes.

I slowed down sound next. I'd call your name and hear it in my ear quarter of an hour later.

It was a shame you weren't there, because by the time you arrived I'd forgotten how to do it, and you didn't believe me.

My USP

If I was one of these businessy types,

I might ask you, what's my Unique Selling Point?

What separates me from all the other products on the market?

What keeps you coming back for more,

And ensures your brand loyalty?

But I am not that way inclined.

I am not a businessy type,

And I don't want you to love me for anything unique.

I want you to love me for things I have in common with other people,

Clichés, like the way I dribble sauce on my chin when I eat spaghetti,

Or for singing like a drunk in the shower.

You, me and a billion people

You, me, and a billion people woke up this morning,
And you, me and a billion people were disappointed by the weather.
We all had breakfast and left the house,
Still disappointed by the cold,
But knowing that the cold is not the most important thing in the world.
We were walking for the train when you turned to me and said,
There are a billion people out there,
Doing the same things we are,
Having the same experiences and thinking the same thoughts.
I'm not sure how to organise this,
But we really should get together sometime.

Collections

My friend David has a collection of different types of wire. Apparently, there are lots of other people who collect wire, and know a lot more about wire than him. He insists he is not an expert, just an enthusiast.

My friend Tracey has a collection of thoughts. She keeps them in her head.

My friend India has a collection of oddly-shaped cornflakes, which she fishes out of her breakfast bowl when the mood takes her. She also has a collection of crumbs, which accumulate in the tray beneath her toaster. She keeps them in a carrier bag. I know I shouldn't say this, but I've seen them, and they look quite tasty.

My friend Bernie collects the legs he pulls off spiders in a large matchbox in his bedroom. Bernie isn't really a friend. He's just someone I know.

A conversation

Around Christmas time,
I was sitting on a bench,
Smoking a cigarette
And eating a packet of crisps.
There was an environmental campaigner nearby,
Stopping people in the street, politely asking for a small donation.
She stopped a man who was wearing one of those paper hats,
The ones you get in crackers.
He'd obviously been to a party at lunchtime,
And forgotten to take it off.
As they talked, the campaigner couldn't take her eyes off the man's hat.
It was orange, and fluttering slightly in the breeze.
Still, the man didn't notice. He was far too caught up in their conversation.
"I'm selfish," he said. "So, I want to know, what's in it for me?
Specifically, how many seconds, days or weeks
Will my individual donation save from my life?
What's the point of trying to save the planet
When we're all going to die anyway?
Why don't we just enjoy our time on this earth?
In any case, I hate humanity,
And would like the whole of humanity to be killed.
It's the only way to prevent the irreparable damage we're doing to the world.
I know you won't say, but I suspect you agree with me.
Your type will never admit this, but the real reason you're always prophesising
the end of the world,
Is not because you want to prevent it, but because you *want it to happen*.
I'm not saying you're wrong – I'm not one of these climate change deniers –
I'm saying I understand you more than you know."

The campaigner smiled, still staring in silent amusement at the orange piece of paper

Wrapped around the man's head.

“Thank you, sir,” she said. “You've given me a lot to think about.”

I continued sitting on the bench,

Smoking my cigarette

And eating my packet of crisps.

Conditions

I will never leave you,
Unless you leave me first.
I will always take care of you,
And comfort you when you are feeling sad,
Unless you fail to take care of me,
Or if you're feeling sad because of guilt
From sleeping with my sister.
To have and to hold,
Unless you have and hold someone else,
For richer, for poorer,
Unless you spend all our money on drink and gambling,
In sickness and in health,
Unless you're sick-but-not-in-the-medical-sense,
From this day forward,
Unless we change our minds about the whole thing,
In which case, forget it.

Reading Dostoyevsky

At school they tried to teach me Chaucer,
But I didn't understand it,
So I read Dostoyevsky under the desk.
In maths, they taught me maths,
But I didn't like maths,
So I read Dostoyevsky under the desk.
The teacher said, "Annie, you must listen to me.
You'll never amount to anything reading Dostoyevsky."
They just pay them to say that.

When I left school, I got an admin job at a computer company.
The work was quite boring, so to pass the time,
I read Dostoyevsky under the desk.
My boss caught me, picked me up by the scruff of the neck,
And swung me round his head,
Knocking down ceiling fans and shattering light fittings.
"Dostoyevsky?" he yelled as we span. "Dostoy-bloody-evsky?
What's wrong with a more contemporary novelist,
Like Doris Lessing or Ursula Le Guin?"

When I was unemployed, I'd go and sit in the pub down the road.
It was the sort of place where you stood out
If you read anything other than the *Daily Sport*,
So I'd sit in the corner with my lemonade,
Reading Dostoyevsky under the table.
No one noticed me.

Eventually I decided to go to university to study Russian Literature.

I went to a lecture on Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,
But I'd already read that one a few times.
Luckily, I'd brought along some Chekhov in case I got bored.

What fools

Remember all those fools back in ninety nine,
Who thought pandemonium would strike on Millennium night?
Planes would fall out of the sky, they said,
And we'd be plunged into darkness.
What fools, we thought.
What buffoons.
What nincompoops.
But one day, all these things will happen when we least expect.
There will no countdown, no celebration.
Planes will fall from the sky,
The lights will go out
And who'll be laughing then,
Apart from fools cackling in the darkness?

Further notes on the artistic representation of the end of the world

How can we quantify the end of the world?

How will we know when it's over?

Will it be when the sun explodes and shatters the planet?

Will it be when all the animals and plants are gone,

Or when all the people have gone?

When all the people have gone, there'll be no one around to say,

It's Armageddon, OK? It's official.

The last person to die will not know they are the last person,

Even if there is no one else around for miles,

And they are lying on their back, sucking up their last breath,

Like the procrastinated puff on their final cigarette,

They will still think of this as just another commonplace occurrence.

Just another death.

Just another death.

Just another death.

Neighbours

The man who lives in the flat above me
Gets drunk on his own and plays cheesy house until the early hours.
It's like living above a club where only one man ever goes,
And he's the DJ.
The music gets louder as he gets drunker,
And so does his voice, with profound proclamations
Like, "YEAH!" and "HERE WE GO NOW!"

I'll never complain about this man,
Even though he keeps me awake.
I can't bring myself to disturb him,
Because I used to be him.
I could say my music was better than his,
And that I knew how to really party back in the day,
But that would just be my opinion.
I don't know the guy's name, and I've never seen his face.
I hope he's having a really good time,
And not just pretending to out of desperation.
I hope he's finding himself rather than losing himself.
And I hope that one day he comes to the decision, as I did,
That it's time to turn the music off, and enjoy the silence,
For everyone's sake.

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For more information about Annette Greenaway, and to read Annette's second poetry collection, *The Joy of Atheism*, visit www.philistinepress.com.