

a coast of willows and mist.
Without a trench of dark blood

I have come where the tenses
elide. The past re-opens
to a nervous link through an
electronic gate, or the
Gate of Horn. Cell by single
cell an identity wakes,
as out of distances new
lines form: a true dream rises
out of earth and memory.

from Rosehill / Roger Garfitt

1

Cumulus forms and drifts.

Some
part of the children who play
here is light chasing on an
empty playground.

Their voices
as they rise have distance
in.

On the edge
of the moving city, they look over
houses their grandparents called
mushroom growths.

2

History fell behind us,
in a crook of the river,
on another, lower hill,
a groundwork that goes down ten
centuries, or seven feet.

Two miles west, on a gravel terrace,
our speech is as a strong city:

in three names three gates still stand,
though the Southgate has fallen

—our security that the names
come unbidden, from time out of mind.

Here weather is the change
a shadow makes in the shape
on a wall, and the hours a depth
in the colour of the stone,

a past that we commute to,
old centres only the banks
can afford.

Bus queues line the Cornmarket,
bound for the outer estates.

The fare stage is in Old French.

3
Pitched into fields, on hillsides
where the post-war tide left them,
before the next high water.

Seven prefabs are still here
to recall our origins.

The hill's first settlement. We
walk to the shops at the Top.
We wait at the roundabout
where the bus turns.

Change becomes stationary.
Silence made to be broken.

John Cassidy on Roger Garfitt

The hectorings which British poetry has sustained for fifteen years or more, on both sides of the Atlantic, seem to have had only a limited impact on poetic practice. There have been loud and public instructions about routes to be followed, but poetry has for the most part followed its own nose. Ambition, risk-taking and the ditching of burdensome traditions are admirable virtues, none the less enviable for the persistent salesmanship with which they have been recommended; they may indeed be requisites we cannot afford to be without.

What I suggest is that qualities like these are not so blatantly recognisable as some commentators would have us think, and that there are other excellences worthy of pursuit. The associated faults of overt ambition—posturings, rodomontade, the approach of the ludicrous—are no less inimical to poetry than debilitating gentility. A paradoxical form of daring is that