

# **Difficult Second Album**

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**Simon Turner**

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Simon Turner



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**Simon Turner** was born in Birmingham in 1980. His first collection, *You Are Here*, was published by Heaventree Press in 2007. His poems and reviews have appeared in a number of publications, including *Tears in the Fence*, *The Wolf*, *Horizon Review* and *The London Magazine*. With George Ttoouli, he co-edits *Gists and Piths*, an experiment in blogging dedicated to the publication and discussion of contemporary poetry, which has been up and running since 2007. He lives and works in Warwickshire.

**For Rochelle**

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## Traces

*for Rochelle*

A zipper of vapour  
severs sky from sky,  
speaking of the jet just gone;

a feather cleaves  
to the seed-bell,  
ragged and wind-

shivered, a stray scrap  
of the bird who fed there  
weeks and weeks ago.

Late June,  
and the day's light  
blues towards evening,

the white jasmine's  
palpable musk  
clotting the zesty air,

blackbird and song thrush  
gabbing from the holly,  
beating the bounds.

A poem remembers:  
it's an archive  
of the least detail,

less than a feather,  
less than vapour, yes,  
but something, at least,

I can give you –



## My Rejection Slips (1)

Dear Simon,

Thanks very much for your submission. Unfortunately, I don't think it's quite 'right' for our publication. We're as open to the 'avant garde' as anyone else, but a Giro slip & a cheque for £49.50 made out to British Gas is perhaps taking innovative poetics a little too far!

Yours truly,

The Editors







## Spring Notations

*'As the flow cries'*

### I.

February: late winter  
lapsing into spring,  
& the blackthorn's leaves  
are lispig greenly  
in a sudden wish of rain:

## II. Poplar Diary: 3 Entries

1.

Weeks back, leaf-buds  
dotting the poplar's branches  
showed silver, almost  
white in a clean March sun:  
a light tinselling of snow

2.

The sky clear blue though a little hazy,  
& a vivid yellow blebbing the poplar –

3.

The poplar in full  
electric leaf,  
fattening madly,  
growing dark  
in our absence –  
3 days' growth

### III.

#### 1.

A verbascum has rooted itself in our garden wall. Its leaves are gently fuzzy like an animal's pelt & have a silver-grey tint to them, as if coated with a thin layer of dust. The leaves are vast towards the plant's base, shrinking as they scale its length towards the yellow-crested rocket-rush of its flower-taper. Dozens of spiders have rigged their webs in the junctions between the verbascum's trunk & its leaf-stems: the effect is akin to a skyscraper in mid-construction, New York workmen clambering the scaffold with lunch pails swinging in their gloved fists. Elsewhere I have seen them, verbascums, flourishing in the waste spaces beside the railway tracks, or sprouting from the dust of vacant lots, caged behind wire-mesh fences threaded with bindweed. Our verbascum is no less brawny & vigorous than these garish congregations, for all the oddity of the vertical ground in which it has chosen to settle its roots.

#### 2.

The verbascum is ready to seed, pint-sized secondary flower-spikes fanning out from its central stem, ringing the primary like footballers gathered round a goal-scoring team-mate & holding him aloft.

*July 25th 2008*

## IV. The Birds

1.

Bullfinches, you tell me,  
standing at the window  
first thing this morning,  
bullfinches in the holly  
in the alleyway, curtains  
curdling the milky light.

2.

Starlings feed at the suet cage:  
feet neatly gripping the mesh,  
they dangle topsy-turvy  
like question marks in Spanish.

3.

The adolescent magpie, awkward in his body,  
perches at the beech's crest, chattering flintily,  
goldfinches glimpsed as swift slashes of lemon  
against the dark arabesques of the holly tree.

4.

Wrens move so quickly up the garden wall  
in a jerky stop-start hop-and-skip rhythm,  
it's as if every second frame's been snipped  
from the movie-reel footage of their lives.

V.

woke to snow, early April,  
spring's green smothered,  
only the meanest black sprigs  
peeping through the white –

“Spring is tender, green young corn and pink apple blossoms.

...

Winter is the snow with black silhouettes.”

*Vincent Van Gogh to Theo, June/July 1884*

## VI. Spring Images: after James Wright

The moon dissolves  
in the silky tatters  
of your laughter.

Thunderheads are massing  
in the architect's green dream.

Blind animals sleep  
amid the stripped bones  
of the morning.

## VII. 13/05/08

Reading in the garden in the mid-May sun, & *The Grasmere Journals* won't keep still in the wind, but the clarity of them & the freshness of them & the simple plain images, almost naïve in their plainness & simplicity but which are yet charged with all the force & brilliance of real poetry, the wind can do nothing with these, though the pages shake, turning without my choosing. A blousy swell of forget-me-nots goes wild in the breeze & the poplar breathes its river green & deep.

## VIII. Folksong

The flower in me  
is a broke-backed weed,  
leather-dark leaves,  
petals dishevelled,

stones & trash  
blotting the ground  
of the empty place  
where it prospers –

## IX. Croftmead Journal: Kington, Herefordshire

23/5/08

Buttercups grow high & lurid on the verges. White froth of cow parsley. Tits with their ceaseless two-note peeping. Blackbirds raising a squall of music as they jink from tree to tree. Rain on the air, though not cold. The wisteria has climbed the guttering on this side of the house to flourish messily at the apex of the roofbeams. Between a gap in the tall hedge I see a rabbit feeding. Many rabbit holes in the coarse grass (later we watched a rabbit digging in the flowerbeds, shovelling dirt out of the way by using his head like a bulldozer). Electric sizzle of forget-me-nots wherever the eye falls. The leaves of the mock orange leathery, in many places shrivelled, perhaps from heat – some days in April abnormally hot – curled the way paper curls in fire, though without any signs of charring. Black spots on certain leaves. Lichen thickly blotting the branches of the apple trees.

24/5/08

The blackthorn in blossom: many of the petals in full growth, a luscious creamy white. In some cases, the petals are shrivelled & decimated, leaving only the spiky hub with a few rusty shreds of blossom clinging to it. This has occurred at various points along the length of one branch. When I get in closer, I can hear robins chit-chitting in the hedge. They must think I am after their nest.

Remains of a rabbit: a front & hind foot, & a portion of the hind-quarters. The remaining fur bluish in colour, a surprise this, like cigarette ash. Bones of the leg stripped clean, though some crimson staining.

25/5/08

A heavy rain – not tropical but persistent – with gusts of wind every few seconds. Saw a blackbird on the path, intent on gathering nesting materials. Cocked its head to the left, then the right, listening in to another bird's call. The pin-point machinery of him: a brisk & delicate energy. The trees turn to liquid fire whenever the wind roils through them.

## X. Spring Haiku

1.

bald jasmine sprays sprawl  
across the trellis, bristling  
in brisk April air

2.

the chestnut's flowers  
gathered in tapered clusters –  
spearheads or candles

3.

first bat of the year  
light shifts gear into violet:  
black trees, wings ticking

4.

red champions joust  
in the bright & tacky air:  
a canvas, drying

## The Fields: Two Approaches

### I.

The fields  
are a difficulty,  
unspeakable,  
the crops gone,  
the bald land  
ploughed into seascape.  
Clots of dirt  
baffle the ridges,  
deep shadows  
wallow in the troughs,  
with jags of vivid colour  
set amid the duller earth:  
wildflowers  
staring through the dust.

## II.

Early evening, the sunlight a woozy amber, clouds lightly dusted on the cobalt sky, stipples of salmon & battleship. Trim blocks of regulated copper cover every visible acre: the military tedium of wheat. Galls on the oak leaves, wasp-hollows pricked in the dust. Life here thrives at the edges merely – in the rank pond, bloated with algae; in the willowherb's flowerhead cupping two clinched cardinal beetles, their crimson wings offsetting the garish fuchsia; in the waves of nettle & bindweed greenly cresting & splashing across the hedge boundaries. Behind makeshift fences, the ragged plenty of allotments.