



Ahadada Books

# Chapbook

## Greek Passages (First Part)

*Peter Riley*

### **Peter Riley**

Peter Riley was born 1940, Stockport, near Manchester, in an environment of working people, and entered higher education through Britain's post-war socialistic educational policies. He read English at Cambridge and has since lived and worked in UK and abroad in various kinds of teaching and casual employment. Since 1985 he has lived in Cambridge, where he recently closed down a mail-order poetry book business. He has written studies of Jack Spicer, T.F. Powys, improvised music, poetry, lead mines, burial mounds, village carols and Transylvanian string bands, and has published two books of translations from the French poet Lorand Gaspar. He also edited the poetry of Nicholas Moore (1918–86).



## 10 Preludes Exománi 2002

There was no journey. The moment we opened our eyes he was there / in the colours across the bay / the red on the blue /  
Trinakrian Sea, its / turning islands // Bringing trouble. That lives here like a stone. / Bringing upright posture, anxiety and  
longed-for repose. That live here like the flowers of the mountain.

†

At dawn, a white light on the top of a mountain / things start to move / an old woman side-flank on a donkey, at dawn /  
wobbling up the mountain, picking over the stones / a Mercedes glides past, the light there / in her eye ever shining //  
Slowness of the dawn beetle / western promise / worth goat-dung.

†

Sky falcon, dancing slowly towards us across the bay / sun sinking into meaning / lands lightly on the seashore / gets up and  
walks over to the bar / and is recognised. // A jovial shout goes up / containing all of us, our welcome. / Slim as pencils, the  
leaves / throw themselves at the music.

†

Simple thoughts, like a dawn bird in my niche / I set forth, stepping lightly / the words / walking the shoreline, testing the joys  
of / simple things, the quality of light, radiating between sea and mountainside like blood // real human blood, nothing / costs  
more.

†

Who was it, sailed from this harbour, who, / sailed out / together / Kelvin tell me / from this small harbour that time / deep in  
the power / we threw all our money into the sea // and what became of that / thing they call love / what powers massed what  
quiet graves / carried that emblem to the sides of the earth // Sea surface tensed out, ultra- / marine against the white walls the  
wind ready, the boat edging out at the gap / everything we ever owned / flung at eternity.



†

The sea light crashed on our heads / the return a cadence of the departure. Always at that opening to the whitechapped sea  
the spirit rests in its disturbance, and / little owls on the electricity wires.

†

Something almost forgotten, making possible a dazzling sanity. / A buzzard swoops over an abandoned monastery garden in  
the hills, like a jet passing. "Whoosh!". / Keeping an eye on the fig tree // Gods came this way and scored the earth / with our  
amalgamated desires / each for all / and the stars, struggling all day to get out of the sea.

†

Acolytes living in holes in the cliffs facing west / now bricked up / bible jug and table these 500 years undisturbed / tortoises  
plodding around in the undergrowth below // the substance echoing the treatises of light // swallow at the door, sun's red eye  
in the bay, compass leaves descending.

†

And such light I've never seen such light, all round us land and sea negotiating / over our blood, casting translucent banners  
across hard earth / thin grey leaves fluttering, thunder in the hills, a new / wind across the harbour, the small boat setting out /  
And the coven of old souls knitting in the cellar, dry chrysalids full of blame, hesitant voters spreading destruction, hand on  
wallet // The world watches, the small boat moving out across the wind / prow set for the world's end / for a year and a day,  
small / chirruping cries, echoed along the coastal cliffs.

†

Sweetly then, / the whole thing / complete and so / ready to depart, and singing: noë noë noë // singing us into being / sings  
shouting: new, new born. // Welcome home, little turnip, welcome to the old song.

## Argolid 2003

I

Pulling the net onto the shore / to market, and market fears, swallow so high // and market loves, the goods brought home / across the bottomless Lake of Lerna / great chasm in sense where monsters thrive / the Hydra on the skyline shaking her heads / now drained and producing purple aubergines.

†

Us too with *our* nothing, *our* / purposeless gloom in half light / long fields of grey stalks pulled by the wind, our gain / hauled onto the land / up the long valley and into the hills // turn and look back, strong hot wind in the face with some water in it, the olive trees thrashing // Our money, our weight / working us, wearing us / on / to the empty monastery.

†

Elleniko, the watch tower, watching the sea / A fleet of wooden ships approaches up the bay on the wind, bringing / trouble, fifty maidens breathing abhorrence, hotly pursued by fifty princes breathing possession / an enormous administrative problem // Floating towns / as tall as the lower mountains, anchored against St Mark's and dwarfing it / An exalted position, and where to go next / monetarist evangelism, consumes its own path. Where are the / binoculars there was a silent bird.

†

Silent that looks at us and shifts / away behind the leaves / No reason to be scared, little / beauty, ring/ dove deeper into the leaves, another / wave hits the stones, grey pitching into rose // O don't you see yon lonesome dove / sittin on yon ivy tree / he's / for his true love, and so are we.

†



Advancing towards us / up the bay, Phoenician traders / The king's daughters walk down to the shore, to see the foreign goods. Trouble: / suicide, putrefaction, bulldozers / war, waving her heads over the wildered plain // *Trouble so long, been troubled so long trouble don't worry my mind* // The news reaches the palace / clouds of dark milk settle on the bay / night comes from behind the mountains / in perilous ease, blood temperature / Revenge, my sweet poison.

†

Wind, tide, trade, our money / sits staring at us, we retreat into the hills. / The tide casts white concrete houses along the shore, with big open verandas trailing vine leaves / *What tide? there is no* // Tide of / else- / where, the / white threshold, the old fear echoes in the distance, and sheep bells in the hills. // The light of our souls downcast / onto the stones of the shore / *Money, what have you done?*

†

Sheep bells in the hills, tuned to the shepherd's flute (they were "very particular" about this) / I am ill, I lie on the bed, bad news comes in: / another Palestinian wedding party shelled, another / history reversed // Take up / that harmony, between particulars, to remember the slowness / of the light rising / in memory.

†

In memory of justice, the length of the night. An animal / runs past the window, probably a marten / earlier there was gunfire – / a wedding, as in Palestine, they fire guns in the air. Here it frightens the wildlife // Death / pacing up the stone steps / the dark boat on the pale shore. / The creak on the office carpet.

†

They died, as we all do, it / came up the bay at them / like a new song //

†



Wake into falling dark / the labyrinth cut into the open / White egrets, and the great white heron, on the dark shore / where they dump hard-core for the new discos. Palaces, megastores, always more than we need attack / the earth and the shy bird / takes wing // Wake into the question: what if nothing ever arrived? Would our biology keep us going? No, the mind / seeking itself strikes the shore / a stone turns / a tone returns.

†

A tone saying / Never mind, death had to come sooner or later. / Larkspur, wild gladiolus, and the orchid Ophrys bearing / signs of lamentation, the dark letter on the gay petal. And the squad at the pyramid signal another arrival, some new monstrosity / drifting up the bay / I have a bad cold, it was sent / as an aid to thought and observation. // Cyclamen, bright flags nodding among the dry stones. Seeking foreign partner.

†

The good ship sail on the alley-alley-o / A gradual understanding comes upon us / of transmission / broken at joy // Lady of the Lake, her / terrible heads / her fishy tail / calling back the dead in the new darkness // Flee this axis / go as far as you can before turning / three times round went she.

†

But you will turn, in the end / and look back across the silence waters, the / roaring gap // deep and wide, perfect justice / on the other side. / Listen. Small bells.



## II

Dear, we are in this small white house on the stony hillside / millipedes curled up on the walls like question marks / the great bay below and somebody is calling / in the night / language seeming to grow out of the rock / like autumn cyclamen / “A power, a concentration, a figure, a voice.”

†

A sound in the night / the dark uninhabited space of song / a Cycladic figure, on its back, suddenly has eyes, and opens them // Tell me what you see / The ceiling of the museum, why am I lying here in the night, so far from home / outside the world / there is no comfort.

†

Helen of the war, dig the grave here / in far countree // The church clock of Elleniko chimes on the half hour all day and all night. After midnight the next three chimes are identical, single stroke. // Helen, this world lay before you, was it worth / a single thought? Her eyes thought so.

†

A great wave comes up the bay in the night carrying / sharpened coins / it breaks and dissolves against a stone chapel in the hills / wooden iconostasis / tuned to Radio Tarifa. // You can't love what you don't know, tracing the ways of / England, its small love. Her eyes / fought so.

†

Dear, I am so far, I am nobody, out in nowhere / millipedes curled up on the white walls like coiled springs / mulberry tree at the front door / ringing in the night, what is that // Phases of delight / coil round my heart when I / catch that music, / tuned to the distant hurt, the small voice.

†

*Vulgar men our / impoverished vocabulary / our power handed to nobodies, pretences of men, unknowables // The lights of Nafplio across the bay / from the shit-house window / divine interpreter / of my song.*

†

*O me it's / O my, what gone become of me, I / used to fly high like a turtle dove, now / all down town just hangin aroun // Last time I saw my maw and paw they were in my dream and I was shouting at them You got no right, to come back / from what became of you.*

†

*Pure old dance-song the jewel in the crown / the old style of Cretan lyra with sympathetic strings running under the board, and pellet bells attached to the bow / the coin- and bell-hung dresses in the folk museum at Nafplio / Every move you make / is a guidance, and a pulsion / of the exchange // The extraordinary silence in the Dhofrion Gorge, from Élonas / above the vegetable fields of Leonídhí / A great fall of space / down past the trees in clefts of rock / a single thought / falls into the earth. Truth / rises into meaning // a nun trots past holding a basin of hot water.*

†

*The white rock eyrie, and all that space off the end of the line / shouting itself to nothing, in time to the sea. Echoing the plea. Take its hand, Susie Lee.*

†

*A quiet Sunday with slight rain, the old man plays his flute in his abandoned house down the fields / Can you hear me, advanced people? I know I am / very far away beyond the clouds / I'm telling you about Mr Vanghélis down the fields, the stone wall builder, the man with the sharpened senses, whose every action is a completed action, rounded, fulfilling its arc // I'm not asking anything for this. The winged archer / perches on my brow.*



†

A mobile phone rings in the middle of the night / Sudden bursts of wind like little tornadoes passing / I don't make a narrative, I / await an arrival. // I'm getting to know this place: three steps down turning half right / into the kitchen / in the night, every window / showing coastal lights / Hello, yes, what? / "Christ is risen".

†

The narrow shore behind Lerna, barely room to walk between the sea and the tall fences of the orange groves / Cloudy day on the stones / and suffering shall cease / and we all return to a pre-Aurignacian repletion / end all this / advance, torment. // There is no path, it ends / squeezed between land and sea / a dark town across the bay / clumps of giant fennel, used in ancient times for carrying fire, the pith inflammable and long burning, we trust it and it / ends and we turn back, one by one it ends. / Roy Fisher hears me, up in the northern hills / and turns to pat / the dog that died.

†

Old steam locomotives rusting in the sidings at Mili / among eucalyptus trees, close to the sea / their couplings fall off, their doors are open / A small village with three bars, where youth pauses // An overwhelming / frustration and anger / a world emotion / lives in the cracks in the floor.

†

There we wept / by the rivers / by the new software / exactly where / youth seeks change / by the electric fence, by the spring flowing into the sea, by the open arm / there.

# Greek Passages (First Part)

## III

We eat outside, under the lamp as it / gets dark, in the company of moths. The lights of the bay / gather at this end, as if pointing the way / towards Mycenae. // Lay down there, and rest, / exhausted by profit taking, close your eye.

†

All the big lies assemble at Mykines, its real name. All the rights to live at the expense of others' labour. / They took the old man's samovar, his one pleasure, in lieu of taxes, since he had nothing. For we hate the poor, and think they should pay for our dinners. / Our credit with razor lips sings this song / *Lay you down and die.* // And the big stories came to Mycenae and wiped themselves against the stone walls

†

Tales of snake spirits, that are repeated out of each other and don't know / which they are. They sit in the glass cases of the museum like Cumberland sausages waiting / for the millennium, for a narrative. // But four thousand years is nothing / common people commit such murders every day, the / nuthatch on the stone wall / lost in a wine of, a possible fullness. Streaked across the eye secure against the day.

†

Kefalari. The water bursts out at the foot of the hill / which shall wash away these stories. // Churches, and a lollipop kiosk, claim the place. Coachloads arrive wanting to buy something / something redemptive, though it might not last. // Up in the windy hills the rain / marginalizes us, serving / every cell of the landscape.

†

The King of Asine has gone / Seferis has gone too. / The citadel, a heap of rock above the sea / the caravan park and the massed hotels along the coast. King, poet, a vertical thrust through all that horizontal continuity and steady cash. A clearing, a void, a cry across commerce, remembering honour, a citadel / With about enough grass among its stones to graze a donkey for a week as the sea diamonds shoot overhead // Come, little donkey, I'll hire you, for a year and a day / and you shall bear

patiently a collection of CDs of rembetiko, demotika and Byzantine chant / in wooden boxes along the coast road and across the vegetable fields 3Km / to a semi-ruined stone house in from Iría which when we get there proves to have no electricity. // We know the tunes by heart, and sit in former time like little waves against cyclopean walls. Ten thousand years, drinking of the wine. Old poets, remembering the oceanic tones of a just peace.

†

Justice that survives in the tales while the actuality lies ten feet down a shaft grave. There was no justice. Tyrins, a fortress of privilege guarding the end of the bay and every advantage structure to be had / Again the split brain advances, at someone's cost / the King so frightened he leapt into a large storage jar // Excavations under the summit palace, left partly open, reveal a Bronze Age circular structure divided into segments, the guide / was maybe drunk didn't have much English and kept saying, "It is the marigold, you know, that little flower, it is the marigold."

†

Mr Domino is our guide now. He will explain poetry, all our longings and the whole chain of flowers. He will expell the reactions and determine the causes. Greece, he says, was where farming entered Europe. / The piano wobbles slightly, I think it is undergoing a dialectic / a spasm of economic disenchantment // Greece entered Europe in 1922 / singing *Yiá sou Lámbrou with your kanoín / O play that thing I've got / heartache and pain and I'm going to die / och, aman aman.*

†

Asia arrives constantly, by one way or another and all the mindless killers we send out / can't stop this flow, of desire / I lay my head / on the salt sea bed, and wake into / white sheets on my nostrils, the edge of light. O take breath, open your eyes, they are all busy out there in the fields, Count Tolstoy in his smock.

†

The mind is a cold and lonely place, its doors locked. Outside in the moving air is where things happen. The doors are painted white, with small windows in pale blue frames. / The vast stone mountains of Greece, with fertile coastal strips and

some high plateaux insufficient to support more than a few citadels run by killing machines, heroes of expansion and development. // The orange butterflies speckled black or brown, that vanished with the first rain.

†

We are out of favour, we are not in the know, we read books with titles like “What, Then, Must We Do?” and “Who is to Blame?” / We kick stones in the road / the dirt road that winds up into the hills, to the empty villages / the houses locked / or not yet built / an erasure / across the forehead / the movement of clouds in the distance // The great redeemer, floating in the mind sad and cold saying, / “A monumental trust lives in the heart”. / Somebody looks up from the news. / The singing is unstoppable. A gecko runs across the wall-o.

†

I lie in bed dreaming the street plan/ corners of dark northern towns / complex of small back streets I can't quite remember / My mother held my hand at the street edge / long ago, and we had our thin riches / there too, the future sailed up the bay as the potential, it seemed, of the entire land / held in the local hand // I dream this. Sound outside, swishing / of trees in gusts of wind / the red earth under the sky's black cloak / That I should come so far from such streets / rejoicing in the same fear.

†

It was Troy's turn / the money needed it. / We destroyed your house, helped ourselves to all the goods, cattle, women / though we got very little of it home. And those / that did arrive / at Mykines / sang of total loss so / full and sharply, we / stood confounded / while our governors / hanged themselves in pantie-hose shouting *new labour*.

†

Old socialists, I think we were trying to arrange for a bit of *space* around humanity, to breathe / in, to venture some trust, multiplying our senses of what we are... // We are forgotten shoes in a shed / creaking irritating questions, about living off the labour of others / which everybody thinks is just great / We are reduced to a single moment, a shout of denial, a syllable in the night. Then we are finished.



# Greek Passages (First Part)

†

Though my story is hardly begun / the white flower falls to the ground / the jay screeches across the fields, now freshly green  
in November / for this is Asia, and always has been. Here we live what we are / as a delicate garden, small blooms at the edge  
of the desert / invaded by ultramarine and the rosy pink cloud unfolding, cross of all.

†

A reason for coming here. And dreaming in the night, of a steadfast resistance, and the joy and fear of belonging. // The shout  
outside, its moment, as it encompasses us / taking us / up into the entire landscape / of mutuality, shouted out onto the  
mountainside. Thus the double wings of the small brown moth on my arm, fluttering open in the breeze.

†

The Argive Heraion, the first place last. Vast arena of hills all round in low sunlight and the wind threshing the olive trees / A  
German tourist in shorts who walked from Mykines, the patient guardian in his hut watching television, everything / shaved  
down to a film on the earth / Power's monumental lock on sense / a smear of stone on a rise of ground. // Immense  
possibilities of breath. And, secured by distance from market serving, passionately affirmative.



***The Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems (Jesse Glass)***

**0-9732233-8-3**

*The Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems* presents the best of Glass' experimental writing in a single volume. Glass' ground-breaking work has been hailed by poets as diverse as Jerome Rothenberg, William Bronk and Jim Daniels for its insight into human nature and its exploration of forms. Glass uses the tools of postmodernism: collaging, fragmentation, and Oulipo-like processes along with a keen understanding of poetic forms and traditions that stretches back to Beowulf and beyond. Moreover, Glass finds his subject matter in larger than life figures like Phineas Gage—the man whose life was changed in an instant when an iron bar was sent rocketing through his brain in a freak accident—as well as in ants processing up a wall in time to harpsichord music in order to steal salt crystals from the inner lip of a cowrie shell. The range and ambition of his work sets it apart. The product of over 30 years of engagement with the avant-garde, *Passion of Phineas Gage & Selected Poems* is the work of a mature poet who continues to reinvent himself with every text he produces.

***Secret, but Kept it Room (Mike Gubser)***

**0-9732233-7-5**

*Secret, but Kept it Room* explores the development and stasis over time of self as image—at once real and artificial, subjective and perspectival, engaged in the physical world and torn from it, a self often disappearing into non-self. Mike Gubser treats the art of poetry as, in some sense, the art of experiment and problem-solving by placing the notion of self in various contexts—romance, depression, friendship, travel, memory, isolation—and poetic forms—visual, musical, lyrical modernist, numeric—to see how it reacts.

***At That (Skip Fox)***

**0-9732233-6-7**

Skip Fox, with the concern of an entomologist, presents passages sprawling and pinned in a shadow box of observations and odd lots. Framed under double glass, the mounting board of *At That* writhes with a cast of freaks: Ezekiel in the streets, a kitty bomb squad, sadists on steroids, the shadow of Cadmus, kingfishers, omen clad apertures of evening with cicada wings, heart attacks of clouds rolling in off the Gulf, a city mouse, spastic proctologists, and so forth, all projecting their "goods" in spate: smatterings, obsolete creeds, mordacious stumps, "furious opinions, exaggerations, fabrications," neo-prophetic stylings, verbal molestations, elegiac mumblings, the silence above a shallow grave, etc.

***Ahadada Reader (Alan Halsey, John Byrum, Geraldine Monk)***

**0-9732233-3-2**

Combines the lively, challenging work of three experimental poets, Alan Halsey, John Byrum, and Geraldine Monk. Halsey's group of poems resurrects past versions of English, turning with peculiar spellings and striking frictions of their grammar. Byrum's work, entitled "Approximations," is a shifting visual text work mainly utilizing the text block, pointing to the form of a word as art itself. The final selection of Monk's work rounds out the book with her varying forms and sharply constructed lines.

Ahadada Books is a small press first begun in 1999, publishing titles both online and in print. The aim of the press is to present new writers and literature that, to paraphrase Francis Picabia, speak with you, envelope everything, and belong to every religion. We present broadsides, limited-run chapbooks, and perfect bound books of diverse literary forms.

Online publishing is an integral component of the Ahadada Books project: to get important voices heard. The World Wide Web facilitates this endeavour, allowing a potential audience of millions to access our site and read authors that they might never find in their local bookstores.

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