

Settings

Also by Tim Allen

Texts for a Holy Saturday (Phlebas, 1995)

The Cruising Duct (Maquette, 1998)

A Panglossian Sequence of Little Riots

(in the anthology: In the Presence of Sharks) (Phlebas, 2006)

Sea Ex/Change (artist's book edition) (itinerant, 2007)

Don't Start Me Talking (co-edited with Andrew Duncan; Salt, 2006)

TIM ALLEN

Settings

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Earlier versions of Sets 31–38 appeared in *Tremblestone*.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Trial Setting | 9 |
| Settings (Set 1 – Set 77) | 10 |
| Setting Examples (an advert) | 88 |
| Setting the Vessel on a Trestle (afterword) | 89 |
| Set Notes | 91 |

for Louie (born 19-9-07)

“... there cannot be a poetry of pure saying; the saying must exist in the said, as ghost to its host.”

—Robert Sheppard (The Poetry of Saying)

TRIAL SETTING

I do not subscribe to the idea that the eye breathes

The eye breathes

I subscribe to the idea that the eye breathes

The breathless eye

Do not subscribe to the idea that the eye breathes

An eye breathes

Subscribe to the idea that any eye breathes

Breathless eye

The idea that the eye breathes

Eye breaths

A jury's say-so scribbled out doodle and paper aeroplane and an erased wig

SET 1

Elves as I was are not strong enough to do the heavy labouring required to get this gleaming monster on the road to the Earls Court Motor Show before I vomit fish cakes on the bus home from the Boat Show. JCBs are difficult to drive and get dirty quickly it doesn't come off ever. Decisions decisions who's turn is it to rain today who's going to scat sing the phonemes and what shall we put in the hangman's lunchbox no we gave him that yesterday? My psychic judge pops up again he must have a love-hate relationship with every accused wretch popping up before him but this time he's telling some wretched company what they can and can't put in our water to make us wistful. The Contemplation Exhibition visits this very town you can witness *with your very own eyes* how the twins Imagination and Luck are not just not identical but don't even have the same father. official though not famous

Talking about writing about football with off the mainland referee. At Argyle I countered Norman's constant referring to past particular games against so and so on such and such a day when the weather was this or that and the score was one-all or whatever with my own cloudy recollections where all the matches just congeal into one memory mass. Everything is frightening, even language that arranges itself into silence. If a last phrase is removed to make the preceding phrase the last and the process continues until only the first phrase is left making it both the first and last phrase what claustrophobic line has the agoraphobic poet put his autistic arse on?

Eavesdropped dirt doesn't disappear it just gets dropped somewhere else but in my book that's disappearing for if as I believe it does the Eternal Return means that life as a whole is meaningless but life not as a whole has meaning and I give you the book of my life to back this up the results will all be there including any soft-hearted sophistic draws with whoever disagrees. If you think the opposite is the case where is your book of life to prove it and if you haven't got one then you had better start one pronto Tonto.

A brook sneezes out of the hillside like the type of person they call a small time criminal.

SET 2

The admiral's feet were so small that when his gran committed professional suicide by working in a laundry all he could do was refuse confusion in the claustrophobia of her slippers which she never had time to put on. A newsletter worth its salt suggests how to grate a great cheese. Stopping and starting in Greek with the patience of the ancients trying to sound them out of the picture but I'll deal with the downright myth of a new world later. The postcard I'm trying to write with a rock ready to hurl in one hand and a drunken tour-guide in the other has a picture on both sides it might be worth a few bob. The scene focuses not on *sailors fighting on the dance floor* which I thought was great when I was selling burgers to the buggers in Union Street and giving them stern lectures about their depiction in metaphysical art but on kids running with crystals lodged in the ridges of their trainers umm I've a suspicion that's Paul Simon. A tradition of geekdom propels us into using a kind of bottled-gas misery a beheaded man spouting poetry from his neck like a lifeless drawing is one of those *the posh can't be shocked* sketches for sale in a frame in a shop in the back streets where a glutinous flood of dodgy formatting makes you wish you'd been cheated or really had. The kind of low-down deception that brings you alive with indignation.

Don't put your trust in rusty sculpture either or revisionist disc jockeys who when at home fill their jukeboxes full of Bartók and bebop but no Abba. Talking to Steve and a lone drinker got up from his corner and starting talking like Steven Hawking Jack Hawkin' his Dalek voice towards the bar where an uneven conversation was already taking place between a barmaid who looked like a barman and a customer who couldn't choose between bottle or tap. It was like pouring motor oil on mashed potato. Of course the man wasn't talking about time and space and big bangs even though I couldn't make out a word I suspect he was talking about little bangs then a Screamin' Jay Hawkins tribute band walked in and all of us were instantly auteur.refugee cred

Shelf life. It so happens that in our culture some people share the same first name we take this for granted we shouldn't we should be more careful only when they share both first and second names do people raise an amused eyebrow I bet you you've noticed that too I bet you a fan club of your choice with all the fittings.

SET 3

The deeper you go the shallower the water is because the deeper you go the less distance there is to the bottom. This is very important and gets increasingly more important until it is so damn important that it is not important any longer. Having a party inside an advertisement the studio sun shines on the garden where most of the barbecue is taking place the garden party wives let their hair compete with the summer air for importance. Blood orange in transparent jugs of this and jugs of that. Paws paw hair for just a moment will you.

Inky-blue estrogens streak the steak by which I mean the steak is stroked by the *height of poetic inspiration*. A group talk a group play a group my god a moving group he is surely the son of a moving group. Pea coloured clouds in a pee coloured sky tug at slack harp strings. Cool looker chases the moment into a sallow teak shopping centre where there ain't no nature and an *only browsing thankyou* radical capitalist philosopher bites her face off at a temp calligraphy stall set up outside the Disney Store. weigh down in Dixie

Pan slid casually into his casuals. They tied his favourite causes to a burning martyr and watched the Irish in him flake off. Snails hop like rolling dice.

Can't help it. In the street a cat sat in the road.

Over the fence then over the wall then over the hedge then over the bridge then over another fence then over a car until the party's over the afternoon a queer collection of stamps you couldn't sell at the carboot just as you couldn't sell adults antique toys but now they all want the Etruscan gadgets. A huge yacht on the back of a huge lorry comes up the road into the district's spinning plume. All sizes no ages no grilled scarab no double-decker emerging from the subway disguised as a plain- clothes detective yet. This is no more than conventional buttressing it keeps you from smelling the candidate's rosette. Trapped under laminated surface of sea Pincher Martin is a set free pronoun with grazing rights.

SET 4

Because he fell up the stairs he fell past the stars. Putting the words there for a predetermined effect but not really knowing what that is going to say because until the words appear at the bottom of the page it is the bottom of the stairs. And the other way around always the other way round as if an air bubble in one ear was a speech bubble in the other. Bossy horse puts on a pressurised suit he makes himself do it he bullies himself he puts pressure on himself he backflips into the unknown.

We drove away from the scene eating blood and still not lost for words. Our gear is always on the other wrong way round on and on never stopping never reversing just going forever on and on the other way round then the other way before sideling into endgame free-fall. No vampiric excesses for us. No sexy aint half bad blotch before publishing our memes. A What's In Store For Us shop is an out of stock world a completely negative world not lost in this one and not lost on the other one either because when people move home the cat goes with them, usually. Not in the same sense of course not even sense times nine. In that sense it's more than a fictional device it's a way of talking about over sensitive identities and billboard tautology.

You thought though didn't you that an inner anthology of unused evidence would tell you the tall short story but it was just another abridged blockbuster joining up nowt to nothing nought to zero and the human condition glares back in dialect.

A peak-viewing gallery. Plywood clearly not what it isn't supposed to be or musical chairs. Empirically encoded imposition. Keep wanting to write *composition competition* not partake in one just mention it someone wrote something to the effect that you don't have to believe everything you think and I'd second that if only because it should be plainly obvious but obviously isn't. I tried telling some literature undergrads this when I visited them in a capacity they looked almost offended. He was Inspector Authoritarian and P.C Swelling Magma also. A good dream his job wasn't yours then eh steep plateaux? Escaped borstal boy breathless on moonlit steps to the moon.vitamin deficient Vietnamese highlights

Set 5

Retort. Love it. Retort. Could say it forever. Retort. Retort. Educationally speedy jouissance. Love it. Jouissance. Could play it over. Immediately on empty. Guess it. Unleash it. Love it. High thoughts sandwiched between thighs.

The soil burns. Cuddled in bubble-wrap.

She was jilted by the nexus of a wax figure's thigmotaxis. She married the next man available and immediately found herself emptying rubbish and glancing clockwise. All the king's horses and all the king's figurines and figures couldn't figure what they were looking for in that waist-high peddle bin gleaming like Excalibur they delved into muck and smell manoeuvred past stain and corruption as she liquefied herself in the sump of the plastic sack. The Co-op got back.

The Co-op got back to me. Sucking poison through a window. Another knock-on. Another knock-on effect of love language and law. If the *London Review of Books* fought Alice in Sunderland and Attila the Stockbroker won it would be because, if it is not too crass of me to say so, *it was a clash of symbols*. I'd object I'd retort that I'd have something to say about that forever but once co-opted what you eat is what you wear etc. It's a single cream applied to a double-entendre. Sweating shoplifter in a turtleneck jumpsuit pours the cream over himself as if milking himself. Self-love and self-hate marry in a little German church amid the little German hills of England.

A transitive set of opportunities. Think of a low little number and double it inaudibly as unmetaphorically a broken heart breaks killing me gracefully with faithful old improvisation and the busker who was singing it in American stops accordingly and says *blimey, blimey mate*.hateful systemisation

No vanishing guitars are in my arms. The Green Man entangled in mangled tape of Elvis's *Stalin Malone*.

An ambiguous quorum of anorexic thieves.

SET 6

There was only a war-aftermath in England everywhere else especially everywhere else in Germany any Japan left went on just the same with no side effects and a perfect France appeared in the middle of America and all the Russias playfully disappeared into Little Italy. Or inside every egg is a piece of suicidal nonsense trying to get out. *Dance dance wherever you may be I am the Lord of the ripcord*. The world was in ruins and it made great TV a boost to creativity and zippy image. A silver sword *Cut* said the Director a black gauntlet *Roll* said the Director a grey coat *Cut* said the Director and *Cropped windswept hair serialised just like lice ridden corn is the effect I want* said the Director and somewhere south of the sky it all worked for a little lad who proceeded to plunge a rusting ski stick down the throat of a fighter pilot.

On our own feeling special and lost like an orphan who is really the prince of the country he is lost in. A kind stranger picks him up and carries him across the rapids towards the block of flats where the lad is brought up as one of the man's own and there he grows up to be kind of kingly in all he does and people respect him without knowing why he marries the first girl he meets at college who happens to be the daughter of a disarming industrialist and they go on to have no children nothing zilch nothing comes nothing happens except the end of the dynasty in domestic secrecy but when they aren't holding each other tight they are as industrious as the flats are high.

Provisions for progress cascade from an occult distance. Pressure group descends on the poor bugger manning the tollbooth like a waterfall of ration books but an initial redemption comes in the form of *will you go out with me* notes like musical notes and after music comes maths then science and double history where listening to the lesson we learn that we'd like to get our own back on all the evil shits who've presided over us but even the mildest punishments seem impossible getting one of 'em who hates apples to bite into a russet thinking it's a pear. Our own come back to us but they've changed and are no longer ours alone. The obstinate fisherman has only caught a cold he sneezes onto a Henry Moore in Promised Land Sculpture Park where sodium light lit skateboarders don't look as bored as the sculptures. On a distant Dartmoor Debbie sings *the tide is high I'm moving on I wanna be your number one* in one ear while Churchill's speeches about beaches surge in the other.

SET 7

The shadow of a rattle rattles. The English papacy throws the fact that these are working beaches off the cliff-top. Enquire after their tricks and they box your ears and tell you you godda buy their box you open it as if it was a book therefore out flies a bedtime fable. Physical alienation puts a mental strain on the copyright company the managing director votes New Labour because he thinks it's an oxymoron he's wrong. Oh lay. The writing's bloody awful but the food is good and the girl-talk machine-gunning the tropes is infectious. The seedy theatre breathes in-and-out with the human tide and private eye in the shadow of the theatre is on my side which is good because he's got more legs than Weymouth Pier had the last time I looked.

Quintessential trivia. She kissed him he said he wouldn't wash for a week he saw her just before the week was up she smelt his feet from ten feet away so never kissed him she never ever kissed him again. We don't learn our lessons but at least we're on the register. Allegiances to music and fantasy marry on an imaginary day and they walk down the aisle as fantasia plays through its plot of how a sharp working girl and dumb princess swap jobs for a TV series the congregation is made up of one-time courting couples who ended up in court before coming together reunited by cultural bon-bons. This contemporary body is *contained of* sold council house stock no room in the inn for dolls in doll's houses even bulimic love-bitten Toby jug is *contained of* a gumshoe character alighting from a tram which ran a tramp over.lunch hour circumcision

Solo creative force cast a shed of doubt in the collective garden. The promises of an after-life were given too early they had a disrupting influence on machine-shop camaraderie. Recreational muse witnesses a lonely consummation on the commons. Red Cross certificate turns out to be non-applicable south of the river. An accountant has some charming little abstracts of his wall at work on his wall at home. Ritual cramp dreaming sleeplessly of creative momentum freezes a lyrical sequence into endless rows and columns of coaches we search for the Argyle bus in vain the buses move off two by two to a jangle of spurs to tour flash new bus shelter shirts before they're desecrated by an arsenal of stink bombs and vandals' hammers. Don't ask!

SET 8

The brilliant problem with nuance is that it always belongs elsewhere. Take prog rock for example it failed not only because it lacked concentrated space in which the nucleic could explode the little things which turn man into music when played by excited citizens but by too consciously ditching three minute impermanence for double-sided permanence it unconsciously planned its own dated nature. Its nuances couldn't travel. This is not an attack it's been attacked enough but a pointer as to why it left itself open to attack. Insecure trade-off biro lyrics show us why the bored can sound-write interesting while those whose lives are brim-full with balance can only bore you see pop is obviously made of tiny bubbles of nuance each reflecting another bubble's world of bright tack sizzling grime respect down a gutter of suds carrying itself to the sacred river of against-all-odds joy. A chord imposes like a logo a tune prints into a vein. Deafening discovery of silence and desirous scribble don't last long but while it does it lasts and lasts.ladder riots across imperfect square

Mandarin has the mind that can make the following link but it is a facility he prefers to delegate to a poet: *a great range of serpents impatient with nuance take hours to split*. You are not yourself with such green information. The delay issuing your personality profile card from the first such machine on the first ever motorway-stop is the ticket to a whole new universe much like the old one in everything except the insect size details. The delay is not important so much as relevant. The peaks and troughs of songs replaced cats and dogs homes *umm* says the mandarin.

Sunlight flies into your eye like a flint chip. Nonchalant problem solver slips on what others stick to. Once enrolled in origami class bridge the span between fat chasm and thin temple desk with a blunt bit of wisdom then crash-land concord into the grounds of a rock millionaire but he's not there he never is though archery ranges and trained arches are so march through an arch to the cockney tunnel where a snare drum joins in as indicated on the tour t-shirt then proceed under said tunnel to *enlightenment with closure* in the form of a large child a child so large in fact that mountainous does not describe him a pitch plus pavilion almost describes him and I could go on almost describing him thus until you forget how at large this child is but I could never forget. Normal sized children drift into an inlet where an outlet sprays them with effluent.

SET 9

During the course of an average Mass a mousetrap catches a hippo quite roughly nine times and every time this happens the hippo is raised by force but on average not every hippo is caught some escape back into their crate. The magic moment in the Mass came and went as if by text—snap—a great weight swung through baptismal urine until it was parallel with what it had previously sloughed off to avoid becoming embroiled in unparalleled envy. The dummy had lieges in its throat but the smoking ventriloquist was *as clean as a whistle*. The serrated edge of heaven and the buttery curves of hell moved blankly like Elizabethan war. The guns were loaded which means history was loaded which means steps were taken to construct University courses and pass them. Breton's paradise became a trace, a footfall, an approved school.smart meaning impertinent

Mickey-taking affliction in thrall to rash scarcity touched on a reason to be reasonable. The radio republic in the dowager's blackout let syndicalists in on the archaic rules of syndicalism and and hell finally broke lose from the Earth and and evaporated into heaven before condescending to return for the flimsiest excuse of a scented pocketbook and and a charity biro. My father sawed through the secret of stone. The secret was it was made of milk. The things people say are set in fibreglass.

Uranium ultimum town of churches not a mile from these synchronised swimming sirens in sulphuric order repeating the glitter of chaos in a pattern of golden A's is reordered by the reedy piping voice of a protestor *the Romans are coming the Romans are here the Romans are going the Romans have gone the Norsemen are coming the Norsemen have been and gone the reptiles from the treasury are coming their wives are cleaning on all fours their babies are thrown off the trail*. A weenie harmonica no larger than a buttercup and an inertial tram join up and buy a newspaper I mean they buy the Newspaper as a business and institution it will complement their strategic empathy the way a wino does a dinner party. Oi, cocktail waiter, wake up.

Hunting for plums in the plump haunt of the National Forest.