

Steve Brock, *Double Glaze* (5 Islands Press, 2013)

When we think of double glazing, a number of impressions spring to mind: solidity, strength, sensible sound-proofing. A double-glazed window is a barrier between cosy interior and natural, perhaps hostile outer world. It provides a sheltering buffer, preventing industrial and commercial sounds and smells from insinuating their way into the home. It deadens the noise of traffic. It lets in light, and allows us to watch outside events unfold at a distance. Steve Brock's second volume of poems, *Double Glaze*, provides a window onto the city and suburban life that he shares with other Adelaideans – commuters, restaurateurs, a World War Two veteran, a smooth-talking 'guy', a sailor, fellow poets, his wife and daughter, 'Pumpkin' the guinea pig – that he crosses paths with in the course of his own daily journeys. The people that inhabit the world of Brock's poems are not sheltered by the double-glazed barrier that he often evokes. The glass often works as a mirror in which we see ghostly reflections of ourselves.

The volume is neatly organised into the four themes of work, the commute, writing, and family, and this provides a structure which draws attention to our tendency to compartmentalise our lives. The individual poems provide fluidity within the structure, suggesting that the compartments we construct for ourselves do not always provide a defence against the disappointments and pitfalls of contemporary life. We travel with Brock from home to work, via the laneways, cafes, bookshops and market that situate us in the west end of the city, an area that neighbours the CBD but thrives on its own eccentricities, histories and rhythms that cannot be easily compartmentalised.

Through the motif of double glazing, Brock maintains the steady and objective eye of the flâneur as he observes scenes unfolding around him. The poet often establishes a distance from the action; it as if he sees through a solid glass panel. This has a particularly disorienting effect, as in the poem 'Core', when the poet recognises his own image set in glass:

not long out of uni
 I was waiting at the tram stop
 in a suit
 eating an apple

 when I saw the reflection
 in the shelter glass
 of a man in a suit
 eating an apple

 in a split second
 I recognised the apple

 I threw it in the bin
 & stepped on board.

The lines echo those of Dennis O'Driscoll, whose 'In Office' provides the epigraph to Part I of *Double Glaze*, titled 'Work':

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We age in the mirrors of office lavatories,
watch seeds of rain broadcast their flecks
along the screen of tinted glass, a pane
that stands between us and the freedom
which we struggle towards ...

Brock's poems dramatise the painful splitting of self that O'Driscoll describes: the striving 'core' of self that struggles towards creative freedom is pitted against the ghostly reflected self, a shady doppelgänger in a suit, haunting tram stops and offices.

The poet of *Double Glaze* knows what it is to have multiple identities that fracture and break apart, that are as fragile and dangerous as shattered glass. In 'diggers,' the poet and his daughter dig in their backyard, unearthing toy soldiers that were buried by a little boy who lived there previously. In this domestic, suburban palimpsest, Brock also sifts through evidence of things buried by the father of the boy, 'the \$3000 water bill/the unpaid electricity & gas/the phone bill/council rates/credit card bills/& letters from lawyers' that still arrive in the letterbox. The poet finds 'letters from Social Services' and 'holes/in the walls/& the yellow/nicotine-stained paint' that attest to a father's neglect. Even the family cat was abandoned, and returns 'half-starved.' The poet continues to dig: 'I find another soldier/& imagine the scale/of the boy's battle.' Brock often employs the reflective imagination in this manner, to shine light on what is dark, but also to redress the depressions that often make our lives unbearable. In 'so what,' he speaks of the poet's vocation as transformative:

a writer
creates his own
precursors
(Borges)

& brings
old Adelaide
coffee shops
into being

the *Flash*
& the *Baci*

the city
made habitable
again
in the poet's
dream.

Brock also seems to play on another association: to glaze over means to become unfocused, usually through inattention but also potentially prompted by a burden of details, the minutiae of everyday life, that have become overly familiar. The momentary glazing over becomes a method by which the poet protects himself from the banality of the nine-to-five office job:

sometimes
it's like a low tide
& the objects
on my desk
are left
stranded
around me
as I gaze
out the office
window
looking
for something
outside of me
to fill
the emptiness

This is how 'double glaze' opens, and we follow the poet through the day as he gathers 'a density/to things' through 'shared meaning/around/an experience/even if it was/only/reality tv'. At the end of the day, he finds himself in the pub, 'laughing/over after work/drinks':

while above us
in a window
in the corner
of the room
I see them
crashing
against
the edge
of this
desperate
to get in

but we can't
hear them
above
the background
noise

I see their children
drowning
but don't
mention this
as we wave
goodbye

& take
our separate
journeys
home.

There is a shift in perception, and what initially appears to be a corner window, hardly worthy of notice, is a television set displaying a 'reality tv' of the worst kind. The poet concludes the section on commuting here, implicating us as witnesses, allowing us a glimpse through the television-window onto a horrific moment when desperate asylum seekers, families caught between worlds, are silently taken down into the ocean. Steve Brock's language is at full stretch. The relentless staccato rhythms punch out at us, giving shape to the unheard cries of the children who are drowning. The poet's voice is 'desperate to get in', to astound the reader, to draw our attention to the two worlds that are separated by glass. There is vulnerability here too. The poet's voice admits a human brittleness as the words fall away, lines buckling under the weight of all we're not letting in.

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