

## Pasternak: The Television-Watching Bed

1

Greg boils up the couch  
and we eat

we're late-model wonder-ready  
and hey! looks like we can get  
parking near the marvellous

Dad's wearing scuba gear  
inside of Mom's waterbed

he's been gone for years –  
or so we thought

surprise, Mom!  
now we know why you have those dreams

2

Jeff connects the lawnmower to the Internet  
he's mowing other people's lawns in our backyard

sorry about the rhododendrons, Mrs Jones!

3

there's someone walking  
around in my clothes as I wear them  
the sign says

Paul Gauguin is on the picket line  
just back from Tahiti  
he can't get his job back

they've hired someone new at Anytime Portraits  
and so Paul  
in scuba gear  
takes luscious red steps around the parking lot  
smooth brown cars  
crumpled paper fronds

hey! Jeff says  
but there's nothing to say

4

my mother's bed  
is a huge TV screen:  
all Dad all the time

even the commercials are Dad

the low rumble of bubbles  
the graceful slap of flippers  
the muffled burbling of his song

a group of my friends gather  
we don't know what Dad is singing

he's telling a joke, Jeff says  
it's O Sole Mio, Greg says  
maybe he's calling for help? Joe suggests  
but we're unable to tell

5

there is something religious  
about filling up a car  
with water

Jeff and Greg and I  
are in Mom's car  
we're in scuba gear and  
there's a hose attached  
to the window

finally the water is above  
the rearview mirror

we're driving down Main Street  
underwater  
don't make the joke about car pools  
I say but no one understands

first stop: the drive-thru portrait window  
we almost run over Gauguin  
but he gives us the thumbs-up

second stop:  
sorry about the rhododendrons, Mrs Jones!  
we shout together  
but it sounds like  
an old lawnmower starting up  
and anyway  
it's a different Mrs Jones

Greg decides to write  
on the back of a parking ticket

he gets as far as  
HELLO MY NAME IS  
before the water blackens  
his pen is leaking  
and we can't find the outside

I lose my air mask  
in the panic  
I'm able to call for help  
before we crash into family  
time at the public pool

I'm saved by a kid and his granddad  
both wearing  
Mickey Mouse shorts

6

I'd like to thank  
the kid and his granddad  
I'd also like to thank  
Boris Pasternak for  
not appearing in this poem

even if I knew who he was  
who needs him!

## Wisdom

O spelunking stalagmite uvula avoider  
the burgeoning repast of my vanquished clavicle  
there are snowflakes, teeth, dinner dishes on the ventricular horizon  
and recently I threw a stick that turned out to be  
part of me  
into the mouth of a dog  
unfortunately the dog was not a retriever  
but ate the stick instead  
O the intra-canine darkness  
the subpoodle intestinal cave-dwelling  
I have lived inside the dog for weeks

we have smelled lampposts, buried bones  
curled in the sunlight, licked ourselves  
ostensibly for cleanliness  
but we had other reasons really  
we are like history  
if history rolled in garbage and let its tongue hang out  
history rolls in garbage and lets its tongue hang out  
but I was just saying that in order to counter the ridiculousness  
of living inside a dog  
to make it seem connected with the really big issues

one day I got the dog to nose open  
the doors of a telephone booth  
and make a call to my mother  
'Living inside a dog is a symbol, Mother',  
it barked for me  
'Frank is that you?' my mother said  
'It's time you came home  
there's no more room in the kitchen  
the dishes are beginning to think  
they own the place  
there's even some got fresh with me

and a side plate insists on watching Jacques Cousteau  
every night at eleven'  
'A symbol, Mom!' the dog barked but all I could hear  
was the clattering of plates and then a soup bowl  
hung up the phone

the dog began to worry  
it couldn't understand what was happening  
inside of it were voices  
impulses towards new behaviours  
no longer could the dog howl at joggers  
and be serene  
I tried to explain but  
the dog became agitated  
let itself catch  
its own tail  
only let go when I imitated roast beef

then a cell phone rang in the dark of the dog  
what else had it eaten?  
was I not alone?  
I remembered my jacket pocket  
they were calling me from work  
why was my inbox piled higher than my out?  
why had my To Do list been given a postal code?  
'I'm in a dog', I told them  
'and I can't get out'  
they were sympathetic, suggested some kind of  
dog-to-business interface  
spoke of hiding my client list in a hunk of meat

'Did I tell you my mother was surrounded by dishes?'  
I said, 'I have begun to worry  
can no longer be serene'  
'We all have our personal kitchens', they said  
'We all have our plates to bear

your services will no longer be required'  
I wept into the dark standard-poodle night  
but by morning I knew what I must do

in the brilliant before-school sun  
my mother answered the door in her nightie  
and the dog dashed between her legs  
I would be fiercer than plates  
would win the kitchen for my mother  
'Run, dog, run!' I called  
but as we crossed the living room  
the dog began to question its inner voices  
there was a warm fire in the hearth  
a shoe invitingly overturned on the floor  
the dog found peace on the rug  
turned twice around and  
lay down

'Seek victory over dishes!' I exhorted  
'A howling triumph over china'  
but the dog would not move  
for it had never been inside

my mother padded over to the dog  
opened her mouth wide and  
swallowed the dog whole

just then Frank my father came home  
opened himself  
a beer and began washing dishes  
'You know, Mother', he said  
'something about you looks different  
I think it is time we had a child'

## The Birth of Writing

1

sometime after lunch  
a sneeze and then  
my teeth come out

rain against  
the platen of a typewriter

I believe I should take this occasion  
you and I  
talking like this  
to state that after the accident  
it was necessary  
to replace  
certain of my joints with  
typewriter parts

when it rains  
when I feel love  
I am apt to  
start clattering

at the end of the line  
a bell sounds  
it is almost always mistaken  
for sincerity

without teeth  
my enunciation is bad and  
I am unable to correct this  
impression

2

we call our first child  
Qwerty  
her thin bones  
paper-thin skin  
we name her in the river

waist deep  
I hold her  
above the water  
like a small Olivetti

we type her name in the rain  
I say something  
unintelligible

a little bell sounds  
the three of us weep

3

we have collected teeth  
playthings for little Qwerty

I give my eyeteeth to her  
a first birthday present

in her third year  
we give molars  
at the back of her dark little mouth  
perfect white  
typewriter keys

4

when I remain  
still  
I am sincere

5

you and I  
reading together  
Qwerty leans out the window  
falls

the clattering of my arms  
catching her  
the sound of a bell

I promise myself to  
avoid margins

6

when she is five  
Qwerty gives back my teeth  
one by one

I am unable to pronounce  
her name

she lifts her hands  
her thumbs joined  
her fingers open  
feathers

typewriter, she says  
typewriter