

Talk Like Galileo

DAVID SERGEANT

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Acknowledgements

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Talk Like Galileo

for my Mum and Dad

Process

To gain this, gain this element
Bangled as a leopard skin with shapes itself

Which might be hung up like a curtain to dry
But would fructify into a crystal surface

Through which you'd see what was, what was not there
(Presence coding through the beads of air)

People off moving at an incredible distance
Smoke uprising from astounded chimneys

On which you know you'd cut yourself if you were there
So sharp they seem, malignant,

Like the brother of a man you might have killed
The ink you spilled so many years ago

Uprising now, its fingers round your neck
(Each cause regathered by its lost effect)

And everyone agrees the noose's fist
A monkey's hand that's shrivelled to a grip

Completes your look, as when a necktie shifts
And seals the knot above the spotless breast.

The Cornish Chough

The chough has long been associated with Cornwall but has been extinct there for several decades. There have recently been attempts to reintroduce it into the county.

Well, I've seen them too. Have seen, in fact, two,
Or even three
Of the famous birds. The first out near Land's End:
A man beside a dog accosted me
In a most unusual way, and pointing through
A drifting fume of cliff-side seasonal mist,
He sectioned out what seemed to be a crow
And expanse of granite, and patting his
Binoculars invoked the RSPB
And whispered chough. '*Chough*'.

Pronounced to rhyme with 'muff' or 'duff' or 'rough.'
A word my friends
And I had used, with more phonetic spelling,
To signify the touch that might attend
To one's own knob, in the argot of our youth.
Not to be found in any extant dictionary—
Trans. and intrans. verb, you know, *to chuff*.
He was dialling the Royal Society
As I looked back from the pathway's trailing end
And then departed

Into another season, climbing toward
The meadowed peaks
That rise above Nanjulian, the land
A glossy heft and wend of streaks,
The grass-blades ceding, mixing, straining forward.
There I saw two I knew, strutting old crows,
But with a jolly sailor's gait that led

To that programmatic jump where you just know
You already know something: their curvy beaks
A flippant red

And the cry all wrong, a kind of zapping bled
Through distortion
With a comic fall at the end. *Choughs*, I thought,
And squinted to enjoy them through the sun—
Thought of calling a friend but thought instead
Of the pamphlets and anthologies I'd seen
Who'd welcome a bastard sort of Keatsian ode
On a Celtic-cultural resurrection theme,
The soul come home, the exile seen in vision,
A blanker slate

The uninvited centuries vacate
To leave a place
Where spirit stands untrammelled. Harmless, no?
I watched them pick across the threshy space,
Cawing to each other. Another date,
Another country . . . and can you see them then,
Wee little Balkan beasties, picking at
The faultlessly ethnic brain
Of a Serb or Croat? Branding-marks of race,
Of tendered soil

And all that virtue. Of course, it's laughable:
Not here, not now,
And not with this, a dim romantic crow
Convenient for those who'd like to go
And live on cliffs apart from other people.
But still, an epigram: beware the one
Who'd take a definition like a pill

Or nail the breeding wind against your tongue.
Beware the country singular as snow.
I thought of one,

Lover of poetry, gentle Yorkshireman,
His words to me:
'The most Cornish person I ever knew
Was French: she'd dive each day into the sea,
Come rain, come shine, through every bloody season.
Now pass me that through your *identity*.'
O femme aquatic! I'd eulogise that run,
That plunge, to self-located buoyancy
But look—the choughs are readying to fly.
Regard the rock-

ing on the feet, the mutual crouch and set,
The final cawing.
From here they'll go the trackless coastal way
And let the currents justify the wing
On which they ride—a current I might take
Myself, upon the edge, approaching here,
An ocean breath to mix-in and translate.
Perhaps you feel it now upon your ear—
The softest kiss, that faint withdrawing
Waking note?

In Spring

The bony trees
Fork into the sky like tributaries—
I had forgotten.

There, and then here.
The blossom
Is clouds of pink bees

Or confetti, entranced.
If I were tiny
I'd clamber through

And open each bud like a letter.
How the jeans you wear
Unzip

Cooking Up

Mmm-mmm, sweet chicken glazed in honey,
Kinda sexual. Now take these lines of coke
And snort them off the face of this steel knife
And smack the open face of this steel pan
Because the steroids we've been taking in the changing room
Are peck-peck-peckering away
Like every cock is turned into a finger
Tapping on a door, or perhaps vice-versa,
Never-mind, I SAID CHOP—

Reduce your chicken stock and stall in jus;
Rabbit meat is underrated;
I source my produce loose from farms of puce;
My biceps are richer than Braille
Beneath the fingers of a blind woman
And with my cooked spaghetti
I could tie your spindle arms behind your back
And fuck you on the counter from behind
Till you gagged.

Did I just say that? Never-mind. I need a haircut.
WAITER! In this quintessence
Of essence of excellence
You see an image of the Holy Virgin
Done out in tarragon and butter
With nipples of cream. WAITER!
I own a house, a farm, a house in London,
Another house, a farm, and a nuclear shelter.
WAITER! My quads are those of a boxer:
I will go down fighting.

Epitaph for a Footballer

So blessed, he spoke no language people speak
When visiting the Queen or on the street,
But spoke the language of his twinkling feet.

Each game's a perfect sentence never heard
And players grope to find a single word:
He lived inside each sentence till it stirred.

But off the pitch he could not get it right,
Like trying to walk by using laws of flight
And make the difference up with booze each night.

Picture in his prime the crowds he drew,
The games that ebbed and flew, his give and glide.
What would it take to understand each pass?
He got slotted through
The gates of life, was waved onside
And is now beyond us.