The Time We Turned
The Shearsman Chapbook Series, 2014

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The Time We Turned

New Poems

Martyn Crucefix

Shearsman Books
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The map house

for D.T.

I

When I knew him I knew him in the city
then in this northern town

there he was walking towards me
still balding aggressively though slate-grey tufts

and corkscrews the colour of the skies
on that morning above the fells

proliferated over and round his ears—
there beside him the son I’d never seen

though by then he was already six years old
and that morning already two Easters ago

II

We lost touch yet I know why he comes
to mind now that we have settled

if temporarily in this house whose owner
has decked it with maps of all kinds

both upstairs and down—so from this sofa
I might triangulate the distance

from York to Berwick-on-Tweed
or between my youth and two universities
might trace an absentminded finger
across the bulbous relief of Wales

even along the network of paths that run
between our local lake our local fells

III

One of those evenings we met in the city
he confessed his love of the thrill

of standing on the ground floor of Stanfords
on Long Acre of being surrounded

by maps and globes and charts in books
maps unbound in shallow pull-out drawers

maps rolled in cylinders or displayed on cords
those gleaming plasticated lumpen reliefs

of the least populated regions of the world
of foothills mountains deserts littorals

IV

He wrote of it or perhaps we simply talked
across the table spills—some way

he made it clear what really excited him
was not the length or breadth of a map

but it’s other hidden dimension—
he’d wave a hand and shake greying curls
and indicate something almost lost
in a corner somewhere squirreled away

like a tiny after-thought or like a coin
of the smallest denomination

something always there if you look for it—
standing before a framed ink-sketch map

of this northern town I hear him again
it’s time you fool—the date don’t you see?

V

Still obedient after all these years
I squint into each framed corner in turn

but grow distracted at the surface of things
end up tracing a walk we took last night

along Rawling Street past the iron gates
of St Mary’s and across the car park

to Crow Park and the lake where happily
we took far longer than we’d planned

leaning on those blue-painted railings
running above the little brown-shingled strand

where every evening pleasure-boats for hire
are beached and roped one to the other
VI

The sun fell bright toward the black hill
we’ve not yet learned to name and we cursed
ourselves for not having a camera—
it felt a moment worth the preservation
especially as across the flat-clean calm
like the glassy delusion of another world
a red-painted dinghy drove to the beach
its sails furled its sleepily-turning outboard
cutting suddenly though the little hull
possessed enough momentum still
to drive it securely to the yellow shingle
where two figures worked to make her safe

VII

It was that instant the sun’s disc dropped
behind the hill—light cut theatrically
and the temperature plummeted too
as we turned back toward the narrow streets
and if I could explain anything of this
walking on Long Acre or through Golden Square
or with his son along some wind-swept beach
I’d want to tell it right—some obscurely-