

SHEARSMAN

101 & 102

WINTER 2014 / 2015

EDITOR
TONY FRAZER

Shearsman magazine is published in the United Kingdom by
Shearsman Books Ltd
50 Westons Hill Drive | Emersons Green | BRISTOL BS16 7DF

Editor: Tony Frazer

Registered office: 30-31 St James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB

(this address not for correspondence)

www.shearsman.com

ISBN 978-1-84861-383-6

ISSN 0260-8049

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Current subscriptions—covering two double-issues, with an average length of 108 pages—cost £14 for delivery to U.K. addresses, £17 for the rest of Europe (including the Republic of Ireland), and £19 for the rest of the world. Longer subscriptions may be had for a pro-rata higher payment. North American customers will find that buying single copies from online retailers in the U.S.A. will be cheaper than subscribing: £19 equated to more than \$31 at the time we went to press, and single copies cost \$14 at full-price retail in the U.S.A. The reason for this discrepancy is that overseas postage rates in the U.K. have been rising rapidly, whereas copies of the magazine are also printed in the U.S.A. to meet local demand from online retailers there, and thus avoid the transatlantic journey.

Back issues from n° 63 onwards (uniform with this issue)—cost £8.50 / \$14 through retail outlets. Single copies can be ordered for £8.50, post-free, direct from the press, through the Shearsman Books online store, or from bookstores in the U.K. and the U.S.A. Issues of the old pamphlet-style version of the magazine, from n° 1 to 62, may be had for £3 each, direct from the press, where they are still available, but contact us for a quote for a full, or partial, run.

Submissions

Shearsman operates a submissions-window system, whereby submissions are only accepted during the months of March and September, when selections are made for the October and April issues, respectively. Submissions may be sent by mail or email, but email attachments—other than PDFs—are not accepted.

We aim to respond within 3 months of the window's closure.

Acknowledgement

María do Cebreiro's poem 'Loyalty', in Neil Anderson's translation, previously appeared in the online magazine *M-Dash*.

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Nathan Shepherdson

the trawler

for Alun Leach-Jones

a common parliament of seagulls
ensures a consistent level of demand and abuse
as the catch hits the trawler deck
fresh human heads flopping around in panic
bright colours amass as pointillist glints
some scales around the eyes so gold
you'd swear they were bounty
off skeletal hands unshaken for centuries

the gills a recent evolutionary curiosity
composed slits starting behind the ear
and following the line of the jaw
now out of water
flare with asthmatic inefficiency

the tails an eonic transformation of hair
a glutinous muscle keratin coat
tapered with eel ingenuity from back of scalp
now physically protest their depleted energy
to indifferent splinters on the killing floor
aware that in non-liquid space
function might as well be a wreath

we need to remind our fishmonger selves
that there is no profit in admiration
and if all echoes are removed from any scenario
we will hear what we are supposed to hear
that hard work is the best Christian answer

the first heads we throw back are the politicians
opposite to romantic suicides but just as poisonous

celebrity heads look good but are tasteless
scientific heads taste great but might kill you
the heads of our own families are out of the question
and military heads might explode on the first bite
musical heads are fine but can repeat on you
the heads of poets though reputedly excellent to eat
are alas tossed away because of low market value
the prize heads are philosophers and artists
the filleted cheeks a noted delicacy
the white flesh lean and stained with mistakes
it flakes like fondant savoury talc
a thread from the tongue to St Peter's table

§

for 25 years you've lived in a tank on my desk
and despite habitat taunts to both of us
you remain happy
not just because i spared your life
but because our intellect locks two elements
and dispenses molecules as a means of affection
and when i need to clean your water
i briefly hold you in my hands
and still marvel how each scale is a mirror
in this interlaced blue wrinkle-free foil
even thoughts are reflected
in the fact that i've never seen another since
the world fell into the ocean
and you returned to the surface
knowing the human line of thousands of rewound lives

i've had many offers from emporia
their saliva behind dam walls made of knives
their washed plates as ready as sin
but there is no temptation
because my impotence in all this
creates your strength to exist
your blood colder than mine and more perfect
age has refused to tie you to any clock

and one day my bones will become ornaments
on the gravel beneath your fins

if anything
we allow a skerrick of authentic fantasy
'a skerrick'- in such a word
the second r can be turned backwards
to form a bridge
with a small but unbreachable gap
where we suspend and are suspended in each other's minds

but for now all we can do
is imagine our different paths to oxygen
while i continue to feed you krill and commas
our gourami glass kiss
as important as the glazier's phone number

silver

for Tom Shapcott

the two whole notes

deep in the ears of John the Baptist
fell just short of holding enough musical energy
to open his eyes one last time

this would've been a miracle
for a head on a platter

one speaker without wires

seismographic innuendo
charts the new shore around his neck

ragged veins
in complete conversation with silver

Cristina Viti

from At Fifty

II

a painfully delicious sharpening of taste
dawn-red, lysergic, irredeemably altered
blunt it you die streaming curses

or wind up crawling at the oracle hole

who are you then worshipper
devoid of all purity
your goddess detritus clogging the gut of the word

who are you bliss whore
forehead splitting like a dead fruit on marble steps
fingers twitching a nightmare of statues' smiles

you are the scroll written & rewritten
with all the pain of the many worlds
a palimpsest of bruises in the guano of cathedral spires

until you learn to sing your mind's eye
into breathing the world alive

or else it's down

languages a haircloth belt at the waste of language
stabbed brain of no way in or out
raw-picked scab of habit

down

butchered heart of powerless devotion
poleaxed backbone of injured sovereignty
red raw apron of afterbirthed straight talk

amor vacui: to be fire, devour devour devour

as women cross town with their useless gift-wrapped hearts
their spines are broken accordions badly stacked card decks
waterlogged filing cabinets

their spines are cracked masts weeping cancers of amber

black mothers undone by love calcinate in the sun
as roomfuls of old mija nuncles
wait for a nod from the head boy

but out here there are breezes my love
wild enough to land profligate blizzards of cherry blossom
into the womb of a man & watch him birth

whole new orchards of bright words

& there are scents in the words' folds sometimes

turn me into an old painter man & I will bend you to me
for the cruelty of creation knows no bounds
I will bend you to me in a game of noughts & crosses

you nought me your cross the heart of an old painter
is a garment of white sugar

for the joy of creation knows no bounds
my scrotum an egg sac of eyes I take out
& throw at the plumbline of the sun

as ideograms melt & slide down your skin

your kidneys will sing like wagtails as you learn
to dance by bitch-licking me on a speeding train

& if I beg you in private mock you in public have mercy
for my starkness requires your body that knows

how to turn from a sliver of ice
to a well-leavened loaf to a leashed labrador & then back again
in the time that it takes a lovebite to fade

O requiem aeternam pretty mama
sweet Catholic wench
with your kundalini crown to fight

you too must make way with your storms & your curses

& I will come home a gentle flower
a dead green stick with a head
exploding in silent elegies of colour

what better way to live or to die

except that at fifty if I listen my voice is breaking like that
of a fifteen-year-old boy & like a fifteen-year-old boy
I grow skittish & haggard & easily bored

is there any any is there nonesuch
poem as will call herself by name & surname
& stop hiding in the folds of the cloak of some wounded
[mythical queen]

O poetry come quick
lay your hand between my hipbones that I may remember
this my fifty-year old matrix as now it is

a smooth-spinning radar
a globe of soft white light
a slow dynamo of tenderness

their theories at the ready like brittle pencils
but some souls have as many ages as many sexes
as a waterfall

Ray DiPalma

Princely Sport

No restrictions none
As privileged as fugal
Close to the hurt of things
Misheard, judged so only
To surprise you when you
Most expect it—the fugue
After all—coming and going
But back before you know it,
Though you did all along—
The briefness of expectation,
Myshkin, kept you tongue-tied
Nothing else to be added and
In need of no further conviction
There the moment of privilege

The Evaluative As Invocation

Red on white
Red rather than white
Distinctly opposed
While whispered in capture
Whispered against
In an intrigue of the chastened
The chastened by the unheard
Red warped out of white
Red amused by white
Endless conjoined finalities
Respective incipit in refraction
Circumscribed by variance
And such the such
The perseverant horlieu of minima

Mark Goodwin

Something Slips Through Lock Gates at Foxton

noise like wind through
a complex of twigs

as notes are blown off

-key through the

crack by the hinge
white froth rotates

a lock-keeper's accordion's
white keys tremble as

the black ones thump

algaed blue-bricks are
loaves of a gone

-world's bread

listen a metal smell of sluiced
utterances about ocean

water's noise creased
between lock jaws

a sky being wound to rope

the lock-keeper's fingers curl
round his lock-key's startling iron
as frost's revolution inlays

scrolls along a long black hull

each lock's mechanism holds
repeated glugs & crick

-cracks of past's silence

the judder of a paddle
travelling its ratchet is
every boat that's

ever passed here all

hulls water's held

the lock keeper's brow seeps
salty silvery threads as August
sun cooks ditch-stink each

peninsula of
lock-lever boasts

a lit tip a

water-white light
house on
a black head
land poking

out in

to a sea of
green mid
land hillside

peninsulas repeated as
steps up through

a house of water or
a house of hill

a lock-keeper's pressed
wet glistening bones stretch
from hill

bottom to hill

top

his whole elastic
skeleton is rills &

roars &
trickles &

hollow

passionate glugs from
hill top to hill

bottom

each paddle winding-post has
a toothed bar like a child's

vertebral column

dark grease glistens
on the column's metal notches

on cool mornings dew
collects on the grease

air delivers some

thing a lock-keeper's wri

gging accordion
is a cage of cla
cking ribs or

fingers of white
aerated water &
black lock-levers of

flats & sharps his

wife's voice hides
in the faint hiss
of spray

gathering on grass as a

lock-keeper plays

like minerals dissolving
in water or water's

patient evaporation his

music is
a cold

wet flare yet
dry as by a

hundred years
of fireside

Lucy Sheerman

from* Fragments Salvaged From Her Diary: A Correspondence with *Rebecca

XI

A pause, a moment of agony. The visit has lasted long enough. Everything is charming. The room revolving on its axis, around the arm chair and the carriage clock. Another ghost skimming these surfaces. I rise clumsily from the table, shaking the cups and saucers. 'I want to glide across these rooms once again', says the thin querulous voice. 'To be swept up. Away.' She has lost the gift, of being charmed. I reach for her fingertips, hoping to touch. It is futile. Escaping into silence. It is all a blur. I have lost colour. My face fades in every mirror. Exposed to sunlight. My skin is too thin, my lips brittle. 'I don't mind, I don't mind'.

XII

They are straining against this pale ghost now. My childish wandering always leading them away. I wonder: why should Maxim dislike her cousin? The longing to take that other path. Those hot blue eyes, that loose mouth and the careless familiar laugh. Imagine looking from these windows with those eyes and in different shoes. Trying things on for size. It was wrong, out of all proportion. They were all watching and laughing. Defending him. Resenting every footstep, waiting for every false step. A slight awkwardness whenever his name was mentioned. Patience for the slow turning back. Another dead end. I must retrace her steps to the beginning. Sitting where she sat now. At each end of a long table. Separated and formal. As I watched, she would get up from her chair with a quick glance at him. Reminded of that very first sight of her, up on the cliff. She would begin talking about something different. The sickening vertigo. Love swooping her upwards. My own dull self did not exist. Seen through adult eyes, 'You look like a little criminal, what is it?' He cannot see what they can.

XIII

Identical. The same picture, the same dress. Light and laughter filling the rooms, drifting against the hems of this terrible outfit, and the music. Hearing the hollow sound of my footsteps on the stairs. I did not dance. I went on staring at the empty chairs. I was transformed. The costume folded away, the pristine slippers. I unwound the little story I had spun. He did not belong to me at all. Over, long before midnight. He did not try and stop me. Upstaged, I looked up and saw I was myself again. Here to watch him speak his lines at the dress rehearsal. She was haunting me through him. He would never love me. Play acting, I was forgetting my cue. They asked me the same questions as if I might eventually recall what to say. Perfectly marvellous. I was caught in the blaze of attention. Who was I to stand at his side, suffering with stage fright. She was still mistress of Manderley. She was still Mrs de Winter.

XIV

Where is she? What have you done with her? Air heavy like water; like a slow poison. Her, always her. Flesh has melted. I cannot lie still. Wherever I walk, wherever I sit, in my thoughts and in my dreams, I meet her. The ache that will not ease no matter how I lie. Almost touching. Hands that wrote 'Max from *Rebecca*' on the fly leaf of a book. A noise, as if from far away. Among a thousand others, I should recognise her voice. I shall never be rid of her. Darkness receding into the blue. Heartless. Sightless. Heavier than air. Pressed down on the coverlet. Light seeping onto my fingertips. A kind of warmth I suppose. She would never grow old. I could not fight. She was too strong. Perhaps I'd forgotten how it felt. This freedom from consequence. As I said her name it sounded strange and sour like a forbidden word, a relief to me no longer, hot and shaming as a sin confessed. Delirious. Eyes black. He doesn't love me. Desire weighing me down. I would kill her all over again. I feel the slow burning across my skin. I hear him give a startled cry but I do not care.

Anamaría Crowe Serrano

on first reading Stuart Kendall's *Gilgamesh*

spasms because
you move the maenad in me¹

 tongue
 between your toes
 slow curl under
 paleolithic suck

these garments in the later paintings wispy
veils and want-want weave are too
 dreary
 dead as sleep in Nineveh²

 I've ripped them up gauzy arabesque
of the type you imagined
 in your weaker moments
 might be
 pulled off a shoulder
 teased away to please
 reveal...

¹ we can make this
 tomorrow's fetish we must

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineveh>

y aaaaa wn

my mouth
cannot
be naked
any
wider

i'm off to ride the bull if not slay it
before hunting your gods

who said love is like a red red³ rose...
it is
and there's the rub

we need a good secateurs

i digress the real garment
is not wispy gauze but woven with my pubic hair⁴
the primitive joy of it
against your thighs and your crotch

your hands chained
behind the chair

³ so clichéd and Neruda's poetry is over-rated too

⁴ Bethesda
houses your civility healing
is irrelevant after this

Peter Boyle

Gaston Bousquin visits Olga Orozco in her Buenos Aires apartment, late summer 1981

She eyes the aquarium with its one remaining fish
and intones in the voice of the cat: "*Tú reinaste en Bubastis.*"
She goes under the water of her tiny aquarium
and hides there, goby-like, under the greyest rock.
She is invisible, knitted into
the long caul of her days.
When she returns, full-woman-size, through the front door
she takes a thin slip of paper
from a box of dreams by the broom closet
and watches the green and purple twists of smoke
rising from its pyre. In the crook of her arm,
on the white tips of her fingers,
lie traces of that shimmering light
things bring with them from the time
they first moved out of water. Exiles in the strange land
of carbon and air. She is a deity
of the other world. Through the sunken
eye of a rock-face, down the spiral of chiselled
steps she precedes me, the taut sway
of her African kaftan grazing the stone,
into the tropic garden of my future.
I am destined always
to misunderstand her, to
misrepresent her, to be a small carrier
of her transmuted inoperable virus.
She reincarnates and is born backwards
among her Irish and Italian ancestors.
Even perched on this sumptuous chair,
she feels puncturing her face
the stones that will lie above her grave.
Though I am talking to her in my halting Spanish
I already feel her presence

in the houseboat I will rent on Middle Harbour
and her smile, her shyness is there
waiting like a second shadow to greet me
beside the gruff Immigration Officer
at Friday Harbor. She is present
in the cigar that stuns me and weaves
circles of trance in my expensively imported head.
I walk out onto a balcony over a gully
and she is sitting there, nursing a cat—
it finds the hidden milk behind her long-dry nipple.
I sit in the chair opposite.
Neither of us can find words.
We both know what it is to come from the moon.
“Continue walking,” she says to me without speaking.
“It is your destiny to walk to Patagonia.
Once you reach its final rocks you must pledge
always to stay south of the Equator.
You are not destined to find any home—
settling anywhere would prematurely tilt
the balance of your cerebellum into some
wayward dash into death.
Never trust the algorithms. Place yourself securely
in the isolated helm of going under.
Keep your eyes fully open
as the vampire insects of the cosmos swarm towards you.
Trust this solitude and what it says to you,
this reticent tongue-tied intelligence
that moves only in singularities.
Gleaned from what is much older than human,
recite the authentic contours of falling.
And now to cross this bridge of arsenic, as we say.

“Choose
but don’t cheat, don’t whisper any counter-spell,
any words of return.”

Norman Jope

Nightfall

The volcano's shadow hushes birds
on this late spring evening. Spread out in its wake
is a succulent country with its myriad fields.
It is still all there to be eaten
and my life is so brief that I mourn and celebrate
this fact as I sit on a hill in the Auvergne
by the power of remote viewing, listening hard
to the final evensongs of tiny birds
and in love with the tiles of isolated farms
and pungent herbs the colour of stars.
Mortal in the face of earth and sky and gods
who withhold their blessings, yet persist
on the far side of cloud, I consider my words...
and what remains is the passage of a mind
through time, to nakedness and numbness,
an absence into which the fading song
will fall, as if into a well, as the green volcano
merges its shadow with the night.
At the end of this longest of days, I am dumbstruck
by my strangeness, by the magic of my brevity,
by my life so singular and uncanny
that somehow it seems mythical,
no matter how mundane—and perhaps, I think,
it is you that dreamt me as I watch the stars come out
in a darkening space that arches over Europe,
and, perhaps, that space will contain us
in our deaths as in our lives, in an afterlife of birdsong
and pipistrelles darting, beating winged hands in the dark.
For now, however, the birds are hushed.
More mortal than benighted, I am backlit by death.

Isobel Armstrong

Three Lamps and their Bases

1

golden dragon swells round
the blood-red bulge
of the lamp-base as
eye smooths a gleam
in the glaze touch
sees the cool crimson's contour
gilded scales thrash

2

butterfly
wings webbed in gold
embedded in enamel cinnabar
and symmetries of lotus flower
carmine white and carmine
among scrolls of green

four folded companions
embossed at each corner
among tendrils of lotus flower
those winged eyes
blue-pearl pearl-pink pink-pearl pearl-blue
unable to flutter
but ever on the watch
fix their sealed looks in pigment
pearled gold-ribbed wings
eyes
unbruised by any gaze

3

in
deep azure

just beyond the lamp's curvature
a half-seen bird of
paradise dives for cherries as
blossom surfs golden boughs
in a flush of orange – pattern rhymes
over and over
daisy carnation peony peony carnation daisy
gold-veined petals
cascade from a basket of flowers
incised on deep blue
on which a basket of flowers
is incised where cas
cade orange-flushed petals threaded
with gold where in the rounded surface's beyond
birds of paradise alight
to bite cherries
a flower just might
from out the deep blue azure fall
out of the order of things
with a ceramic chink
on the table
on

Peter Boyle & M.T.C. Cronin

from Guidelines for New People: Anti Commentaries

Cosmology

There are five parallel worlds and they drift seamlessly across each other. On the first world household objects float unencumbered by expectations, the dog not quite on the mat, the mat rippling off the stone floor, the sink gliding by talking to the water. Cups and saucers circulate, the dead tenderly brushing the shoulders of the living. On the next world speed and grief transfer their energies, while joy sifts slowly downward, the precipitate of ripeness. Threatening to outweigh the others, there is the blue world where light seeps towards the erasure end of the spectrum. In the smallest of the worlds anger and pain pound against enclosed walls. No exit. The fifth world cannot yet be described. It awaits its language. Of it they say, "Let your heart learn openness."

Commentary

As an inhabitant of the smallest world I must ask why you have written *Cosmology*. I have been swatting flies for many histories and can find no reason why. There has never been a way out of not understanding.

Astrology

The sign of the bumblebee. The sign of the fly. The sign of the two year old boy. The sign of the five year old boy. The sign of the hellish mother. The sign of the fly catcher. The two year old boys have the job of the world. A dendritic system. Like the mind as it designs a brain. Designed to take itself off. Remove signs. The flower has no sign. The stars have been falling into it forever. Don't mislook at or misread the signals. Among you are the stars. You are among. Whose left hand? Whose right? The fly is very easily caught sideways.

Commentary

As an inhabitant of a small world where the only fate is a collective fate (viz world disappearance) I fail to understand the fascination with a multitude of individualised signs. Unless stars read their own signs. Unless the flower, demanding a sign, falls into the world of anger.

Luminosity

There are voices in the sun's lights on the water. But they are voices which do not speak. You can feel them in your forehead if you listen hard. They are grey but not like shadows because everywhere is dark. If you want to hear these voices you should expand your chest. When it is as wide as all the silence they will enter you together with every sound. Then the lights of the sun will tell you what they told the water. Something the water did not hear.

Commentary

What you cannot hear, was it ever meant for your hearing? When the chest is expanded to the four directions, the voice disappears.

What you cannot speak, is it the buzz of the fly that has already spoken you?

Diluvianism

Before the deluge there were more records of the worlds. The black genoa fig and the brown turkey fig were listed. So were the long lives of the dead. Harvests were noted and on worlds where they were not needed patterns were classified and duly catalogued. If a world existed with only a single pattern ingenuity filled the record books alongside tibrons and platypussaries and nomadidae and a people called the Laz. There were scribed leading men and leading ladies; leach-men and laymen. What could fill the lists went far beyond the worlds themselves. But only one thing surpassed the flood of all worlds. How they were thought of.

Commentary

In silence stands the list of the enduring. Not named and not thought of. The maelstrom of what no one noticed. Before and after flood.

Trajectory

Every night you get up, cook breakfast, go out to shop. You drive slowly in your sleep, wearing your flannel pyjamas. We go from shop to shop as you hunt the always elusive ingredients for the dinners your grandmothers made years ago asleep in other countries. I walk beside you, seeking to avoid arguments for the law is not kindly to couples engaged in violent public altercations as they sleep. Soon he arrives—your brother, your boyfriend, I'm never sure which. It's hard shopping with the dead always wanting to add in their commentary, still it's something that must be done when life takes place in reverse between midnight and dawn. You insist on a jog through the park. The moon continues its trajectory from east to west yet you travel steadily north in your sleep, towards lakes in sub-Arctic forests, wind-grazed tundras. We come to the always open airport and read off the destinations we plan to go one day when everything will change. With you as dawn approaches I climb back into bed. I watch as one by one the pages I have written go blank, taking back the life I lived for twenty years watching over your sleep. I will never clean up the trashed streets that lie in our wake. Love goes on striking us down and claiming us.

Commentary

I am getting tired of watching over you as you sleep.

Tim Dooley

After Herrick

I was delivering
with what talent,
verve or conviction
I could muster
some element
no doubt of the
heritage strand
of the National
Curriculum (revised),
when a Julia
or Celia took from
her pencil case
a handful of coloured
markers and started
to construct log fences
or oxers—delicate,
suspended by their
own weight—on
the desk in front
of her. Absorbed
by the task and with
half an ear open
no doubt to Juliet's
fate, she inhabits
a bubble of youth
I would not burst,
that time's transhifting
has failed to wear away.

Michael Farrell

Singing

To understand. Realisations in the shower
Now I've sung your story I know about the
Shifts in voice—it isn't all one perspective

Ahh Ahhh Ahhhh

A saying isn't said just because it sounds good
It's broad-humoured, yet can be said plain in
Front of children; if you sing it even better

Ahhhh Ahhh Ahh

You know one thing about a song from
The radio. You know something else when
It's coming from your own throat—that's
The note. A song doesn't belong on a page
A song isn't on it like paint. A song, a
Page make structure, make place, thing. A
Thing that can do and change and be ruined
You know that door doesn't belong to a woman
Or a man, it's rather everything you're leaving
Everything you're running to. But you sing it
Like a drowning or a jumping up through a trap
Door and it's yours. Sit down, there's a guitar
On the fire—it plays no good but it burns beaut
Ifully. Didn't you have a love like that? A life
Weren't you born here or close enough or far
Away? Didn't you drink enough wine to make
You doubt it could stand in for anything but it
Self? It was all too general, too general, too
Universal, we didn't want it, we didn't want
Anything that way, not like a novel, not like
An allegorical painting of Hope or Victory

Let that kind of suffering belong to those times
Let it all be the blinding drift of good after
Noons and nights that were just a movie of
The moon. We wanted to be—we were—shel
Tered. The song we sang then was about a dog
That had gone wild and its character was com
Plex and it saved someone's life in an unexpec
Ted way... and we didn't die: we took a good
Hard look at our lives in the words we sang
It was a joy. The song itself was the girl, the
Boy, the dance, the stimulation. It just had
Too much class to make it explicit. The song
Had moves that took us where we weren't
Supposed to go (we supposed). And we
Looked around, it was the night, the trees

And the words had changed. We ate the burnt
Guitar because we thought that's what you do

Heidi Williamson

Newton's Rings

Difficult to make out
in this still black and white
sonogram if the halo
surround on your shining
bones is a light shadow
thrown by the instrument,
like a coffee stain in reverse, or
your mini sea as it laps
around your form. Difficult
too, to imagine you, inside me,
in full colour. It's only
as you emerge through the
difficult prism of birth
that your colours
astonishingly graduate

Peter Robinson

Street-Combing

for O.

Sun's setting behind us at 5 pm;
a turquoise stripe below a rain front
strokes in sudden severance,
as does the sunshine after rain.
We're out street-combing once again,
out along the pavement's edge
for snippets, abject filaments
of telephone junction-box wire.

You have your cloth-bag for each object:
packing tape, blue or yellow twine
towards up-cycled basketwork...
I've got the bits of scribbled paper
and now, back in my element,
can hear the tug of spoken words,
their ebb and flow between us
'on a day to honour', as you said.

It's a day with rain clouds up ahead,
but also sunshine after rain
picking out pale green mildew
luminous on a wintry bough,
making the white house opposite glow.
Belisha beacons flash their orange
and I'm struck by all this perseverance
as you stoop for one more *Merzbau*
scrap of stuff beneath my notice,
love, lifting it into the light.

Weather Events

We had stepped out for a breath of air
and as if on the edge of a blind precipice,
had strode across the sodden meadow.
You were giving me some good advice.
The news might mean our world is dying,
dying with us, but without us too
on one more perishing January day.
Still I caught birdsong this morning
and the good man doesn't brood on death,
nor avoid the thought, come to think of it.
But something rotten below the bridge,
a swollen drain, some stagnant water
brought that every third thought back
to each depredation of predator and prey.

Swans were struggling against the current.
Their element so far extended
they splashed about the roots of trees.
The river paths impassable at points;
yet we had walked out to survey
this flooding of the valley floor.
White seagulls rose up from its waters.
The flights of locks were good as useless:
torrents overwhelmed sluices, gates,
the run-offs skimmed with waste and slime.
So much was driven down in the flow
of extreme events now, well, I ask you,
if you're giving me some good advice,
how do I treasure what we have to let go?

Damian Furniss

1928

Tirana, Albania

King Zog

When the Prime Minister
declared himself President
the President decreed
he be crowned king—
planes rained confetti,
sheep were slaughtered,
two thousand men freed,
two hundred hung.

His palace was superior
to a second string casino
in any minor Belgian resort,
its guest bedrooms
wanting for nothing
but distinguished guests.

The valley men wished
a plague of blind bears
on the men of the valleys—
they needed a strong man
to keep them together,
to hold them apart.

When a would-be assassin
pulled a pistol on him
Zog drew his golden gun,
took aim and fired,
pinning silver medals
with scarlet ribbons
into his assailant's chest,
the ash undisturbed
on his perpetual cigarette.

1929

Alsace-Lorraine, France

The Mighty Line

'Our playgrounds echo with unborn children.
The mothers of the lost are grey and barren.
Not all men who returned from the last war—
and we here have much to thank them for—
returned from the war they won as men.
My friends, this must never happen again!
Monsieur Maginot unrolls his master plan,
sketches trenches in the air, baton in hand:
'Here, the last line of attack,' he fences
a ghost, 'must be the first line of defence.'

'Beneath six feet of concrete, Generals,
your mess undisturbed by uninvited shells,
chefs shall enjoy the cool of a kitchen
fully equipped with air-conditioning.'
They raise a toast to the Lion of Verdun
with a Riesling bottled in the Saar Basin,
resolve to reshape the land between Alps
and Ardennes, that the Boches be corralled
in their tanks, hoiked out like snails,
to amuse the mouth with beurre à l'ail.

1930

Gujarat, India

Salt of the Earth

'In the time of our elders,
back in Britisher time,
the Mahatma walked
the ghats of Ahmedabad
to the flat pans of Dandi,
took the salt of the sea
in the palm of his hand,
offered it to a country
that was yet to be born.'

Our guide wears khadi
from his cap to his dhoti,
hot steps their march
into a thicket of lathis,
mimes the head blows
of steel-tipped bo sticks
the length of saplings
wielded by striplings
clad in webbed khaki.

'And here is his statue
carved out of saltstone
to remember that time:
last year men came
and thumbed out his eyes,
left him face down
in the watering hole,
licked at by buffalo
and buzzing with flies.'

Paula Bohince

Acrostic: Charred and Luminous

Charcoal briquettes imitate shadowy mice the owl
hunts, only crumbling over fire instead of shredding in a talon.
A minor difference. Meanwhile, our rabbit stews in the BBQ. Serve it
rare. In smoke twists exploits of its bones.
Radiant baby, fat like moonlight in the pan's dented corners,
edged silver turning black.
Designs come. We interpret them, grate
Asiago, grind peppercorns. Loose rabbits won't do.
Nests are ungovernable. One of our brothers stages a coup:
delves into brush with a sack and a hammer,
litter removed from the mother, mother the star of our supper
under this lunar eclipse (how lucky!). Sky
minus moon equals an occasion not to be missed, a pinhole helmet.
Icarus himself would have laid down wings to see it.
Nothing in the sky to guide our eyes, the ahhs and
oohs a type of funeral song. Don't be sad. Grill the meat,
undercook it. I know how you want it: soft, buttered,
salted. Eat it in the dark before the moon comes back, by crescents.

Anne Gorrick

The New Sentence

for Ron Silliman

The dematerialization of writing
took place in my kitchen
The postindustrial experience is difficult
as an interior poetic structure
always semantically given
in Multi-channel Installation Fullscreen
This is a breathtaking event
with underlined content

When do you become eligible for parole under “the New Sentence?”

Exhausted from our long journey
we decided to go straight to bed
Click on the New Sentence button
Any omission is pointless
So, I’ve gone back, used the backspace key to remove spaces
before the new sentence, and add only one space

The new sentence—which could be the same as the old sentence—is
scheduled to be imposed on Friday

Your sentence lacks a subject
The new sentence is outright “unlawful”
You must start a new sentence
more or less ordinary
with a curious niggling apropos
with no specific referential focus
with heavy kinetic stress
theoretical hesitations
This probably has most to do
with a very strong feeling that telling stories

actually is an idea of history
that shudders with a gorgeous sets
broken apart by signs of equivalence

The new sentence is an investigation
a navigator of the labyrinth
a word as commodity
The alphabet gap has lodged unasked
in some vague after light

The night of the trial, angered relatives of the young men kidnap
Silliman, take him to occupied New York, and sentence him to hang

There is electrophysiological evidence
of disrupted sentence processing
of mimetism and montage
that aim to disrupt existing forms
Repeat these sentences, with slight alterations and rearrangements
When they were pried loose
these tears often thwart the reading of a complete word or sentence
torqueing the theory of existence

Albany to show us what's underneath
the summer death... the bark in the sentences of dogs
that awful brown fence
I caught her in mid-sentence
These verbs mirror relations of natural force
in the household of God
refer to the new creation
while your nook automatically
inserts new text into the preceding stanza
to double the sentence count

These are spare unraveled acts of attention
It took an entire document
(if that was what it took)
to get rid of one discordant-sounding sentence
This is why I write a sentence like the second one before this one

In the pressure chambers, there are echoes
I like to think of it as a day of recognition
Various other actions arise ex delicto
All variants drop the word “the” before “science”
I wrote this sentence with a ballpoint pen
Seminal grandstanding in charismatic direct
Leave out the verbs
Screw up the narrative
No Other Sentence Could Have Followed but This

Now the students have to redraw their pictures to match the new
sentence

Jeremy Hooker

Hurst Castle

'It's very special how there are ways, a field, a place, where our deepest creative concerns connect.' —Noah Pikes

1

Dear friend,
you have sent my mind racing,
skipping the years.

2

You will know how the sea
runs up among the stones,
how it laps and lapses,
surges with the tide.
And wind whips off the foam.
And the Shingles buoy's bell rings.

Behind us, granite walls,
concrete, brick, rusted steel doors
clamped shut on cannon mouths.

A symbol of power,
once our playground,
empty as a cockle shell.

3

Somehow this place is a way.
I feel I can talk to you through the walls.

4

Remember the Franciscan priest
immured here for thirty years?

A poor, infirm man, one side
of his body palsied,
how he would shuffle
in a dark, narrow room,
the only human sound
his jailor's tread. Other voices,
the sea's whisper or breaking crash,
a gull's cry.

So news of a far world came to him,
free voices,
which spoke of imprisonment.

5

Who were his brothers then?
And how could he bless?

6

Your voice, dear friend, was choked for years,
unknown as a foreign tongue,
locked in the throat.

At last, released,
it spoke a name that was new to you,
your name,
with a force opening the body's dark and narrow space.

7

You take me back.
So many fields, cities, countries.
And this is the place you bring me to—

This way
of wood and brick defences,
old jetties, the granite castle
with its giant weight of wars
an empty cockle shell.

Words bring me, your words,
words we have spoken to each other,
that connect us to a world.

Outside this narrow room in which I write,
inside, penetrating the walls,
I hear voices that speak of the sea.

Julie Maclean

Bruthen Holocaust

Hurling through rain
Lightning has struck
While ten k back
Fire in the bush
is out of control
Three red trucks
Sirens full wail
Ironic

It gets dark in a minute
Winds bend trees to the horizon
Gum leaves ping the windscreen
Hailstones threaten to pelt our bare faces

Road becomes river
and as we slow to stay afloat
the girl from the green campervan
parked across from us
Probably European
is squatting in the gravel
Her stream of piss
steaming in the sudden
fall in temperature
Air now freezing

Pale rare rump is pointed in our direction
Tempting a fork
that could skewer her to kebab
I reckon
My man and all the men, now curb crawling,
have something else on their minds

Bare flesh of arse
Black strappy top
Plaits of a fräulein

Alasdair Paterson

My life with the pirates

Flag

What colours? To sail under? There's a question or two. Old salts favour a multiple choice, best kept in the flag locker snug as gunpowder, to be run up the mast at transmission time. Clue: the message is the mayhem. No codebook required. Our minimum recommendation:

The hourglass ultimatum

Anti-coagulant red

The compromised anatomy

Black spot bat flap

Crossed instruments of torture

The jolly event horizon

Plank

Timber, shivering. Fastidiousness of swabbed decks. Weapons to sharpen. Pressure to relieve. And always the sea, element we're on and out of, unaccountable, our bosom enemy. To propitiate.

So a rule change, a refinement in the game of wooden walls, after *stand by to repel, after strike your colours*. Bring it on, the loser's shaky forfeit, a one-way passage out, extruded claw of ship-substance that dangles, drops for sport, deeper than plummet's sound, down and deep as krakens sleep. Or so they say.

No hope of an escape for them, no surfacing again, except in your dreams, in the breathing spaces between your dreams. Here they come, all the plungers you watched the water gulp and swallow, come specially to you, breathless to share discoveries, their buried treasure. Shells and bones, mate. Bygones. Be bygones.

Valerie R. Witte

from SILKYARD

[UNTIL THE TIME OF SPINNING]

3, AND THE MANY SHAPES OF CLAWS

[
To make
a strong
skeleton
two or
more reeling
the silk
borders
of fields
a form
in the sea
what
a mouth
wants
the ends
of limbs
]

[3.1]

To make a strong skeleton reestablish the laminar preventing

a breakdown, originally | *She was starting to disappear
herself* | when applied

to the face subduing anatomy | *Under cloth or a woolen
band, sunhats* | then

a crest between nipple and lip, suspended

a mesh of protein constructing small arteries | *If held
back, of fullness*

pretended | fossils are expressions of locomotion, flagella

or wings, where contraction an elaborate network of appendages

reduced to backbones | *And she hated the draft against her
scalp, a reminder* | little

ropes hold eyes, set close | *To cover an absence, what shamed her* |

Scott Thurston

Two Poems from *Moving*

late spring in the leafy autumn
merlin emerges from yew tree
screen ascending again –
potentiality only human if withheld
from the actual

to solve a cipher look out of the
window; particularity as the enemy of
the reading commons or this
intentionality somehow bound up
in a single self

between a show of public pain and the
divided closet upper partials added
to the chord, the implied basic line
slate paper weight to re-humanise
the picture of the work

unhampered by ulterior interest
the judgement of the siblings a
recognition of their resistance, burning
an effigy of the daemon to prevent
a return, repair the space

the dance making the rest of you
visible finding the wild line lost
the crowd placed a book
before me fear of locking in more
forcibly your snake dance

§

juli Jana

ebb tide

gulls and waders wait
on rotting racks

beneath wave-wash

lugworms hide

burrow break

segments a-mix

with shell & bone stone

& broken glass

whose eyes are those fixed vacantly

like sea-sway scurrying

on sticks sideways

a head hardened flat

a mouth askew

hair entangled

amid the wet & waste

a fluorescent cold fire

it cannot sink

it cannot swim

can only

chase what drifts

in the wake

of breakers

Kent MacCarter

The Plumbing Network under Dolores Park, San Francisco

after Thom Gunn

Off in to outer space you go my friends, I wish you bon voyage

—Buffy Sainte-Marie, ‘Moonshot’

1.

Outbid curiosity

download it

tonight. Beat it with grace

Make it squat. The long draw

of pig iron tells off its concrete. A big kid with chalk

sweating out murals

of hazard. Compact cars. Aprons of chug

it cups anthracite wax. Think

of all those boots

stamping in *Gunga Din*. Think of a bellydancer attempting to headstand

the baud rate of modems

swarming her legs

as Theremin antennae. Subterranean

frescoes pitching Campari

dries. Spawn. And with them, answers

2.

It knows a someone

who was never let to sort with dolls

when he was puny

so he bag-snatches from girls their security

front lawns or

heads on Halloween

peg leg and arms

leaving its demographic with half-filled carparks

metering atop *their* breastplate

worming under the carpets and plummeting down
conduits
an overcommitted jellyfish
to hide-and-go-seek. She finds
an ideal cut on niemanmarcus.com
yet is stung by the price

Bullseye fresh

The oubliette itself.

5.

Things are getting altogether Beverly
around here
events of disposable razors. It. It cannot
plumb me
to swallow down
such blunted dazzle. It knows the Chippewa in Minnesota
got their man
Angelfood cake. And bait. On shoddy hustings a man
so primordial
he can dial up San Francisco Bay
a man without no
telephone. Sweet Jacalyn
obeys a corner. Chews
her IP
address and believes no husband
of hers
shall hush-puppy with dolls. Or cry in basements
of a car wash
one below the next. Think of all those heels
in *Cabaret*. What would Isherwood make
say? And in what Pantone? What
is it?

Ulrike Almut Sandig

translated by Karen Leeder

ladies and gentlemen, if you please, listen
a hair's breadth to the side and beyond follow

the sound trace of the electronic poem on its path
past the speaker boxes. can you already see

music and sounds? can you already hear
the coloured lights? **the electronic poem**

is a poem within a poem and well
hidden in the wave forms of the future

that one moment later is already
our history. it hovers at the ears of Edgar

Varèse's grandchildren – and is past.

*after Edgard Varèse's **Poème électronique***

María do Cebreiro

translated by Neil Anderson

The Original

My red pencil follows the snow.
As it stepped it set new words free.

Before you they mumbled
inward.

After us they spoke.

The crows also did important work.

“Dark is my kingdom when you walk.”

I throw the crown to the floor,
we share the time it takes
to get to my pencil:
“follow me, don’t follow me.”

And time, time burns up.
It burns and leaves no ash.

Our wine is acid but it’s ours.

The Trace

I lost this poem.

You've also got to take into account
the crows' work.

It started out like this:

My red pencil.
Snow underlined.
Semen inside.

It ended like this:

Follow me, don't follow me.

Our wine is acid
but it's ours.

(Follow me, don't follow me.)

Loyalty

I tied up the manuscript. Smothered the words.
He said: "Untie me."

Do you want me to touch you like this?
I read his lips:
"Care for me. Don't cover me up."

You have my word.

The poems slipped from their bindings.

They create blood ties.
They work toward milk.