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Some Birds

I swallowed that third benedictine probably too soon, but as to birds,
    the barn owl on his beam,
kestrel swivelling on a shaft of air
    and the seagull with a squawk:
and no perceptible effort gliding—
there is beauty in birds and all about them,
the ways their plumage
    fits the planes
    or tunnels in the air,
a wholeness to their colours—

how about that? And their varieties
from any sparrow scuffling in his dust
to cobalt blue legs, the white silken breast
and metallic green spot above the eye
    of the kingbird described by Wallace,
from the friendly redbreast poised
on the handle of a spade that somebody
    left dug into the soil of a drab garden,
to the condor in the Andes with a wingspan
    four times as far as anyone can reach.

No Roman prelates here to aim at them
    their shotguns, no Calabrians
to cut down all the trees . . .

Birds appear also in plays such as that
    of Aristophanes.
*Tio tio tinx* the Greek actor calls replicating
sounds I heard while performing in English
the play out of doors
on a ranch in Texas: spluttering Greek
we strode on a slope and an actual bird
mocked from a bush by the creek
tio tio tinx (though a time-warp
crept in here somehow). The thousand songs
that rush from the birds when Spring
is what they feel—what life
what future might there be on earth without birdsong
to brace, to console, to welcome us?

The swan solicitous beside her cygnet,
survivor of five, the others
gobbled by raccoons—or snapping turtles—
Could I ever, believing birds, have even
gone halfway only with Paul Celan? Since when
did a new coherence between
ourselves and undivided nature
cease to be thinkable?

Hummingbird, how should we greet your
individual occurrence, let alone the scores
of astonishingly robust varieties? Thrush,
missel thrush plucking his worm
from a lawn in Rutland,
Aztec parrot flitting from a palm
among creekside huts in Michoacán,
that erratic wren who flew
round my desk one day and out again—
what sort of world flashed into its perception?

No self-denial there, turning bitter
into life-denial, monkish wheel and rack . . .
What position, however, do their tribes
and habits occupy in the global food-chain?
A large one now as it must always have been,
depending on
vagaries of space-time. Come to think of it,

earthbound I glimpse through vertigo
gradual and huge mutations. Alas,
lonesome the loon calls back birds of Ur,
birds of Babylon,
for brilliant breeds have perished probably,  
what spectacular doves, what secret songs,  
what willingness to be, to be . . .

And unforgotten, nested once in fathomless night,  
a million golden birds,  
an enormous whisper of lifted wings  
now you flock, vigour to be  
in time to come,  
in the exile of daylight

Tiberius must have seen the swifts off Isca  
skim the calm and turquoise water  
and heard their quick shrill cries  
while tumultuous round rocky nests they flutter;  
and horses in whose fat were carried  
spores of the very first fragrant flowers  
heard as anyone today can do  
various birds, calling perfectly.

A Longer Wind

Don’t I know well enough how the world turns,  
Yet a May morning, this one, prompts me  
Less to question the weight of certain sympathies  
Than to memorialize a sprinkle of events.

Wakings, early, from deep sleep or shallow,  
That was the local blackbird, first solo  
And after, to the chorus of a dozen doves;  
As light becomes more largely evident,  
Sparrows rap from the parapets,  
And flitting in and out the gutter, chirrup.

Mariushka soon, her elfin smile, her silver trays,  
Breakfast her scene, applause, bouquets, and kisses —  
I must memorialize instanter somebody’s arrival
Susan Connolly

At a Terry Riley Concert
The Ailing Wife

‘There was a new softness in the air . . .’ wrote Malaspina, approaching Doubtful Sound, at the south-western end of New Zealand’s South Island in 1793. He and Don Felipe Bauza, who explored Doubtful Sound in a rowing boat from the corvette Descubierta, were responsible for 12 Spanish place-names in the area. While the first European music heard in New Zealand is said to have been that played by English sailors on fife, drum and pipes in 1773, the first conceivable instance of a guitar being heard in the country was when the two Spanish vessels visited two decades later.

Punta de 25 De Febrero

It was stained as the sea was stained
tannin-brown. A wintry forest of six strings.
Sweetness, she stood on the pier and passed me the guitar. And with that I was pushed out to sea. I sailed latitudes of frets, longitudes of strings. I worked on my hands. My nails grew, fingertips hardened and, this way, I was restrung.
Isla de Bauza

So had it the talkative hands
with which I accompanied
myself. Slowly as we went
the instrument and I
out towards the horizon of
her ailment
that we might make
dry land again
on this ship I called
The Ailing Wife
sailing calmly for
the storm.

Islotes de Nee

The fair sea, she said,
the unfair sea . . . My wife had left instructions
for the playing of the instrument
in the worst of weather
come rain, typhoon or
waterspout.

But she had not prepared me for
the calmness, these most
unmoving of waters. Slowly,
as we went.
Canal de Malaspina

I clung to her. A lesson learnt from crayfish, the left hand’s shuffle

neck-wards. A lesson learnt from sails:

that we are gathered inwards. A thinness

she taught me. Slackness I taught myself, and then

unlearnt it. J. S. Bach you were

a bridge over the river of such things.

Together we pressed onwards to the upper reaches

of her sickness. A lesson learnt

from gut strings: a necessary tension.

Punta de las Marcaciones

Our two sons were the Hare’s Ears

outlying rocks on a seaward passage
Something sets us looking for a place.
For many minutes every day we lose
ourselves to somewhere else. Even without
knowing, we are between the enveloping sheets
of a childhood bed, or crossing
that bright, willow-bounded weir at dusk.
Tell me, why have I come? I caught
the first coach of the morning outside
the grand hotel in town. Wheeled my case
through the silent, still-dark streets of the English
quarter, the grey, funereal stonework facades
with the air of Whitehall, or the Cenotaph,
but planted on earth’s other side. Here
no sign of life, but street hawkers, solicitous,
arranging their slatted crates, stacks of bamboo
steamers, battered woks, to some familiar
inward plan. I watch the sun come up
through tinted plexiglas. I try to sleep—
but my eyes snag on every flitting, tubular tree,
their sword-like leaves—blue metal placards
at the roadside, their intricate brooch-like
signs in white, that no one disobeys.
I am looking for a familiar face. There is
some symbol I am striving for. Yesterday
I sat in a cafe while it poured, drops
like warm clots colliding with the perspex
gunnel roof. To the humid strains of Frank
Sinatra, unexpectedly strange, I
fingered the single, glossy orchid—couldn’t
decide if it was real. I slowly picked at
anaemic bamboo shoots, lotus root like
the plastic nozzle of a watering can,
over-sauced—not like you would make at home.
I counted out the change in Cantonese.
Yut, ye, sam, sei. Like a baby. The numbers
are the scraps that stay with me. I hear again your voice, firm at first, then almost querulous, asking me not to go. I try to imagine you as a girl—a street of four-storey plaster buildings, carved wooden doors, weathered, almost shrines (like in those postcards of old Hong Kong you loved) you, a child in bed, the neighbours always in and out, a terrier dog, half-finished bowls of rice, the ivory Mah Jong tablets clacking, like joints, swift and mechanical, shrill cries—ay-yah! fah!—late into the night. My heart is bounded in a scallop shell—this strange pilgrimage to home.

* 

The bus stops with a hydraulic sigh. So, we have crossed the imaginary line. The checkpoint is a concrete pool of grey. The moss-green uniformed official, with his stiff-brimmed, black gloss hat, his elegant white-gloved hands, his holstered gun, slowly mounts the rubber steps, sways with careful elbows down the aisle. I lift this wine-magenta passport, the rubbed gold of the lion crest—this mute offering. Two fingers brace the pliant spine, the thumb at the edge—an angle exact as a violinist’s wrist—fanning through watermarks, stamps, flicked verso and recto, halting at the last laminated side. He lifts his eyes to read my face. In them I see—uncertainty. The detection of eyes, the bridge of a nose. Half-recognition. These bare moments—something like finding family. The mild waitress in Beijing. Your mother . . . China...worker? she asked, at last, after many whispers spilling from the kitchen.
Or the old woman on the Datong bus, who might have been my unknown grandmother. She took a look at me, and weakly grasped my shoulders from below, loosing a string of frantic, happy syllables, in what dialect I don’t even know. She held my awkward hands, cupped in her rough, meagre palms, until the general restlessness showed we neared the stop. As the doors lurched open, she smiled, pressed a folded piece of paper, blue biro, spidery signs, between my fingers—she and all the others shuffled off. Some, I realised then, were in hard hats, as they dwindled across the empty plain, shadowed by the blackened, soaring, towers of the mine.

*

Something sets us looking for a place. Old stories tell that if we could only get there, all distances would be erased. The wheels brace themselves against the ground and we are on our way. Soon we will reach the fragrant city. The island rising into mist, where silver towers forest the invisible mountain, across that small span of cerulean sea. I have made the crossing. The journey you, a screaming baby, made, a piercing note among grey, huddled shapes, some time in nineteen-forty-nine, (or year one, of the fledgling people’s state). And what has changed? The near-empty bus says enough. And so, as we approach, sluggishly, by land, that glittering scene, the warm, pthalo-green, South China tide—far off, I make out rising, mercury pin-tips, distinct against the blue as the outspread primaries at the edge of a bird’s extending wing. So much
taller now than when I left
fifteen years ago. Suddenly, I know—
from the mid-levels flat where I grew up,
set in the bamboo grove—from the kumquat-lined half-octagon of windows, tinted
to bear the sultry, drip-refracted glare—
you can no longer see the insect cars
circling down those jungle-bordered boulevards.
The low-slung ferry, white above green,
piloting the harbour’s carpet of stars,
turned always home, you can no longer see.

The bowl of milk

This evening light
is good enough
to eat.
In the windowed kitchen
everything is white
no longer.
Sweetness overflows, my honey-suckle of
the flame-like tubes,
my blushed tin sink
is swallowing diamonds.
Passing Through Sea-Thorn

sheets of salt -light slice frontal
greys land to our backs sea to our faces

a little vill age of Rinsey & its pure
wet name behind our minds clings to a slip

pery tilt of world as angered January tugs
at it & us with bur sti ng sky Rinse

y at a back of land our feet fed across vague
at a back of a coast’s dumb mouth

as ocean shouts deep backlogs of vast rain
trick ling a long thorns a taut

fraying rope of coast -path passes through
a purple-black blackthorn cloud thorn-

clitt-clatt wind shreds through sharp wood
a wren’s frag ment wrapped in brown

glimpse Rinsey Head’s sing le howled-at
house tightening distances round its gran ite

selfness teetering fast on a cliff-lip facing
sea’s visible sizzling voices & s pray’s

seen scraping phrases & wind’s ever
uttered touches contains deep indoors a floor

-corner with warm still fluff no one has
touched blackthorn’s long inter laced pricks

a mesh of weapon ry ranks of skeletal
fretting either side of footworn hawser-width
clickt-drip clackt-drop thorn  phantoms
shudder under wind   -strings I am spine on

femurs & shins myself strung to  jolts wind
grinds my brow each boot   -clunk disconnects

me to path-pebbles and   thence to sol
id but erodable   depth a bag   of air bursts a burden

of spatters a wet   hammering holly leaves
glisten-rattle   gorse in bloom with boun cing

golden scraps is a hill  side of dancing ram
blers clad   in gaudy yellow Gore

-Tex jackets heat   & moisture leak from joints
in my high   -tech shell   sweat wicks   up through

a finely woven mesh of syn the tic fibres Praa
Sands rushed   by ringing   froth & curling

shrouds of ocean skimming   scum-foam like
weightless bread sliding sideways   a figure

& his/her Spring   er on sand   faint & miniature
at a weather’s far   end be   yond behind

this human’s & dog’s   minds houses   flat
white wet paper squares balanced   on an

old eroding rim bet   ween a thick depth of   sea
& heavy   height   of sky all   impossibly not

b   lown a   way su   ggests

Note: Praa is pronounced as ‘pray’ (or perhaps ‘prair’),
it should not be pronounced as ‘Prare’.
Carrie Etter

McLean County Highway 39

tar shrugs goes to dirt
gravel’s slow crunch over
winter with no hill for
frost to the horizon

*

green hectares rising into our
Illinois’ no blond endeavour
but for the tassels dangling
covert threads of silk

*

cycle up dirt-dust’s brown haze
flattening thought a prairie
the only height for miles
a grove its doe

*

sweat and cornstalks taller than
pushed through the close
click into speed sticking hairs
peel the nape free

*

all exhale the green expanse
cicadas’ two notes sunset
the red eye pink strata
push an unwavering line

*
without thought three miles out
an idle porch swing
shrug or flattening not silence
but nothing heard in

*

soybeans crouch along even as
horizon at my back
cools toward streetlamps and cement
glide in the last

Divining for Starters (50)

a diffidence in it even now sloping
not caring to measure goldenrod all the way
past the ice cream truck five colours
of chalk for the rain shrug and be
innocent again if palimpsest toffee
vanilla strawberry choose where
a tumble or taste the strike that
one flavour sure aggregate
Keri Finlayson

Gulls

We know them don’t we
Gulls.
Solid bodied, white. The beak a split scream.
Yelping us up a storm or a turned tip.
Seeding our sky like weeds.
They are not souls or prayers
But whole cathedrals of rage.
Feathered vaults, gathering all known sound and pitching it as noise
Against the false horizon.

Our bodies are inadequately boned for such wrath.
Richly dense they lack the cavities for height.
We open our mouths and bleed long strands of gravity.
Our speech being the opposite of flight.

Ding dong bell

“... spectators, including kings and queens, shrieked with laughter as the animals, howling with pain, were singed, roasted, and finally carbonized.”

Norman Davis, *Europe: A History*

Puss
Cat
Puss
Cat
Puss
Cat

Johnny Thin:

The hinged mouth is a perfect yawning orchid.
Just look at that small tongue. It’s such a firm petal.
And the teeth? Rows of little beaks.
from Internal Rhyme

a conservative impulse tracks down former
lodges bakes a thin run into me down
rough escarpment traps to sullen swerve of
taste a trellis stapled on the deep
tacky postcard view laid waste to submerged
fortunes ruined chambers shredded nullity what
kinds of infinity stalks into cells
lay waste to wilds within me

at this rate of change I buffet forth and back
snatching options as they occur rather than working
back from the overall plan it does me no favours of esteem or
favours of esteem or charity is a commitment
to real time composition instead of wrapping back
instead of wrapping back a shape onto myself
live it out first then write it not too late
by then actually start whilst on the way

I thee obdurate implacable your broken spear demands
this spectacle sunk into a stage managed sulk
bring it up on the plinth shattered attention tries
a triumph of sudden unfeeling grace of servitude

your longing detractors gift you the feelings of
exile anonymous indulgence lying in a sad heap
beneath sky lights lots of clouded ranges distract
distend or do they uplift, mend, suspend?

43
Neck of the Woods

I.

The twig knuckle being caught
lifts up a curl of clear water;
ancient of days.

A small pulse, irregular,
down this groove
arising from the play of water-flow
round the leaves and the brown cedar-spray
as they sway
caught under water.

After each pulse a strange slow dimple
across the pool.
Difference of temperature?

And then at last a movement up in the cleft
where the water also moves:
not the stream, but a living waterlouse.

II.

Mandibles, proboscis
the ant and the loplop bug

a small stand of mushrooms
along the groin of a meadow
under bamboo.

Ferns about to burst out of the ground;
mayfly dancing above the waterflow;
every event in this stream is an irregular wave.
III.

A huge wasted-out tree-stump
almost a level with the ground
with the firm young upstanding fern-shoots
higher than it,
some bowed,
some curled up,
ready to rise. And now I’ve trud on one;
no longer ready to rise.

That wrinkle in the water
that stays,
that fold in the glassy substance
where the fold meets another fold
and is itself ribbed:

1. Silver drop
at about-one-second intervals
down a dark frond

2. Every third pulse, or so
the wave over the rock dwindles
and the ribs start to dry

3. The bird overhead, perpetually
an unsatisfied scale of five notes.

Waves and wrinkles,
back-wrinkling across the pond,
meet and disperse.
IV.

In the vast cavernous hole
millions of work-hands
on ladders, with buckets,
rising and falling
in a centipede-like movement,
like the wind passing over fronds
or the flow of a centipede’s legs
rising unendingly.

V.

St John’s pulpit
now gone, now rotted:
an old sock, dimpled with orange
and bent over like a limp finger
beckoning.

In the stream, under a tomb of living lead
the little bug has implanted itself
very firmly in the side of the living rock.
The twig has stopped rocking,
somehow locked;
only the thickening water over it, in waves,
makes it seem to move.

A dollop of snow lands on the rock,
diverting the pulse;
the pulse melts it;
but for a while it was changed,
changing some other rhythm
downstream.
VI.

Wail, and cry from the unknown creature on my left to the unknown creature on my right.

The open maw full of fungus.

Little gleam of sun on the lower part of a tree-trunk; this was a meadow.

Tree rockets off to the left to start a new life.

Here a deer lay.

Little fists of fern-ends, grass growing out of a crack in an old stump.

And the bubble with the rhythm of a heartbeat and the dangling hairs as if from a twat with the beads of water on them evermore thrown up by the stream.

VII.

The leaf-edge lifts and lifts on the water, but not regularly; the whole mass of them, leaves and cedar-fronds, shakes like a belly, irregularly, and on the upturned leaves the globes of water wobble, but don’t move.
Underfoot

all the birds have come to this bancal
on the high path between Sóller and Deia
built stone on stone by Moors a thousand
years ago for olives, oranges and carob

in February they are feeding the fires
and flames catch the leaves and blaze
almost to the arms of the man who
settles the twigs it could be my father

who still makes fire run through things
but here they are re-making the old
cutting and burning the ripe wood
leaving young shoots on gnarled trunks

the voice of the chainsaw echoes in
valleys smoke hangs high and drifts
the terraces are held against the mountain
by the dead and the living their hands

their muscles the salt of their skin
at dusk the mountains shift to grey
layers of rock are smoke and mist
and the sound of the chainsaw stops

just this spade and this pick scraping
making the little difference and underfoot
the cloudy cyclamen and by the side
the dark leaved aromatic myrtle
Ash

All that remains is dry
fragmented bone,
the rest is vaporised
and gone. We’ve held to this
and set our teeth to give you
the first day of autumn.

Pulling grass and groundsel
free, we make the bed.
Is there a good way to do it?
Just face away from the wind.

Grit and substance falls
to earth, a finer grade suspends
in air. This is the place
for calcium phosphates;
Out of a garden you can
grow what you want.

I think of her all the time.
Grey ash settles on the back
of a black frog. In fits and starts
we go on.
Astrid Alben

The saddest tree at Kew

There are words that twist the fingers raw like only once, and yet again once more.

King Kong, when asked, is a film about immigration and if you have ever examined an MRI scan you will know that the spine does not resemble the great ape’s but has everything to do with long telephone calls.

Paranoids are the only ones to make sense of anything, connecting everything, and although that may not be flowers, it will be something, just like a sigh is another way of holding one’s breath.

There are burnt words in a battled silence and if you have ever listened to goodbyes you will know that they shout and gape a mouth that slides down a mountain like snow.

The saddest tree at Kew cannot speak or hang up and rain on its leaves longs for the spring. The female species of the tree has apparently not been preserved and in context hmmmmm is a string of DNA for putting on hold and all things broken and struggling to mansize and beingthere.
Memorandum

(i)

slush fun/d. i’m in love with my illness. can i tell you about it? please let me tell you about it. wait! why are u covering your ears? i want ear covers too! please over me. i want to be your cover girl. i covet her. i am a covering for distant planets.

(ii)
i writed. i waited for u. u weren’t there why RU busy? UR always busy when i have a problem. i want to know! will you be still. will you be still busy if my problems vanish? will you be you. who is “you”? will u appear? what will u appear as? am i part of yr appearance? is your appearance important. i’m apparent now. more than mine? what is mine? be careful of mine(s).

lets do lunch. lets do debbie. debbie did dallas.

(iii)
the scene has discolored. i awaken. naked talent. the dead are often rescued. tired obituary. killing jamboree. ghost apprentice. goodnight stuff.

i want to suck the giant tit that is mount fuji. and a mint julep.

giant pail of regret. moist men. secret black list.
i see sky everywhere.

kitty occult.

Never infect sound.
But artificial fork.
It’s erasing already.

(iv)
just restless people roaming
the earth. we aren’t just. we are the earth. we aren’t
just people. littered with people. people with litter. so so
very. the very one people so. little people.

(v) You think to yourself:
And next you:

(vi) How could we
be attracted to other people? I did
feel a little left out. He’s really
feeling stuck in his
job. They have a long
history of competitiveness. I’ve
been attracted to other
women. What
an embarrassment.
Okay, but.

(vii)
What a creep of a brother. I
didn’t pay attention to anything.
That day. It was disgraceful.
average: 3.0

(viii)
in the goals of Americans. Movement
has teeth. tryout a shot. less
than the future
fishing for beginners

it is usual to have a line
    either actual or one that
        is carried in the head—
success does depend on this

it is better to be as close
    to water as you can—preferably
        with a little depth—though
fish are not known for their intellect

it is good practise not to sing
    or chatter for this is serious
        business and depends on
concentration from both the fish and you

it is customary to throw the fish
    the line—include bait at one end—
        hold the other—if nothing happens
be assured the fish has not drowned

it will take lots of time as all serious
    fishing does—may never finish
        the scale of the task is so huge—
remember you are preparing to invade another world

it is said that if you catch a fish
    and let it go the fish will soon forget—
        only you will remember—
good to know if continuing to fish
One page blank, one lined; lined (right), blank (left); lined front, blank back, reversed from the centerfold (blank, blank), the final page being lined (as is the first), each blue line—neither too dark or too pale—a pleasing distance (8mm) from the ones above and below. She hovers, inhabits the spaces between. Each blank page remains and will so remain. Each, by requirement, should have upon it a drawing in pencil or crayon in a child’s hand: some aspect of desire, of a world seen not as wanting. Who knows the demeanour of those who wouldst populate such unruly realms?

The Onlooker dictates

Neither pen nor paper (to hand) nor any notion of such, this she ignores (as does he). Something in common? Patience/desperation: action/stupefaction—I think not. He may very well reach the end before she ever begins. Take that page in a notebook (Stock No 201194) some way in: ‘I never thought you’d get this far’ her tutor had written, and she hasn’t. Lines run through her head (the beautiful bounty of silence never hers) deeply wrought: chatter, mutter, matter, utter tripe—like that stuff from the inside of a cow, white, visceral, on a tray in the butcher’s window. Repeat after me. How could anyone stomach it?

She feels sick

And as she leans forwards, wretched, retching, an image – this would be an etching – begins to form: the symbolic contents of her (add a few belongings) spewing from her own wide mouth, caught in mid-stream; such precious artefacts, a lifetime’s worth, so fine and neatly drawn. How pretty a picture would that be?
Young Woman With Scythe

As if soil was noise, the legal notice shivered on the barrow. Louise tore off her scything gloves. High on a pine, wild parakeets, harbingers of change in our climate, stared from their margin, chattered about apocalypse. Carefully, eking out a holiday, I watered plants. That’s my dialect of territory against the elocution of possession. I looked for so long at Louise’s face that, in the bedroom mirror, it smoothed mine.

Woman in the Canon

Heads are floating at every level of the staircase, marble, bronze, sometimes with a shaven shoulder.

Carry on up your long bud-sprout stalk of a kail runt torch: a cabbage head lit by a candle on top, its thick packed leaves hard-veined as winter. Your arms are out at the elbows in this stairwell crowded with murals of mythic actions—but what does it matter who landed the boat or fought off the invaders?

Hold up your cabbage head uncooked, uneaten, a simple candelabra to the canon. This multi-storey atom of the arts hosts men on every floor but inbetween and going down I give off light.
Song from a bamboo flute in the dark

We hear the breath,  
the movement of fingers

before the notes  
linger like steam curling from the earth.

Half the moon has fallen  
and wrapped itself in a bed of lichen.

There is a hole in the night,  
soft and black as liquorice

through which we hope to glimpse  
the Aurora Borealis.

The colours of the song  
move through red to green and yellow

as if we are summoning  
the sky to come alive

and dance for us.

Tonight, temperature is stretched like elastic.  
Snap. Zero degrees.

Ice crystals glint like raven’s eyes.  
The flute makes no promises.
from criticism (brief lives of poets)

U. J.

hobbyist in his summer dacha
biting on crackers, spitting snow
untrained in implausibility
offhand carpenter back from the city
tables stormed
by postage and handling
the ink garden’s minor superstitions
metric neatness, terracotta replicas
disinfected mouseholes, a set of slides
(his father’s dog still barking)
a little listener on his trail:
picking of stones, test moves
shadowy transitions
additional embarrassment thinly sketched
a rewrite man
in the guise of a Tibetan golf instructor
leaving no traces on the beach
(period detail)
eary on someone discarded
the wrong ghost
while hunting snails

R.W.

thick ice and tall windows we are told
metropolitan railway
expert paperhangers, house painters
trumpeting like elephants
when they meet each other
beau monde
as though the parcel postman
A Road in Berlin

On my daily route to or from Oranienstrasse via the Penny Supermarkt for a bottle of cheap dry white to drive The force that through the green fuse. A road equidistant from the Kurfürstendamm of my once-a-week treat at the Ice Cream Parlour and the Kurfürstendamm of the glamorous prostitutes. The road with the Ringbahn train screeching along the elevated tracks, sparks flying; with the Turkish gastarbeiter, with all the little ateliers and artisan shops: the cobblers and picture-framers, the sewing-machines and joinery. Everywhere movement. Old men struggling with ladders and planks of wood; young men balancing massive panes of glass; little trucks bouncing over cobblestones; bicycles, tricycles and mopeds; the heady smells of paint, rubber tyres and sawdust; the pervasive whir and whine of sewing-machines, of lathes shaping and scraping and moulding in a symphony of industry. That was the road with the mad women where at any time of day you’d see them hanging out of third-floor windows, screaming and gesticulating. The artisans ignored them. If they glanced up, they looked down again. I never saw them laugh or make a ‘knowing’ gesture. Yes, that was the road where lost women popped out of windows like cuckoos from the clocks of ancient minutes.
Song

It hardly felt adequate downloading soundbites;
it tastes so sweet to save targets under pseudonyms.
In a sense that is part of the same slipstream,
flip side of the half empty, says the sceptic,
or so They will announce again & again,
as a pap-fed lexi-minimum. The ampersand
is becoming more and more pleasing
as if its promise of the syncretic ennobles and accesses
Great Things: “is this the way that thoughts are tending”.
Public opinion crescendos in this make-shift footstep
and I settle into the sushi box you’ve long neglected.
In that I detect the sigh of the self you’ve tried to conceal, for,
“it’s been such a long time,” you find yourself saying
to cover the interstices left by the scuttle
in the other direction that may well have been noted.
Unctuous excess may seem to you perfectly natural
but people aren’t so easily manipulated.
You’ve left a notch open there for
people to snag themselves on;
an “invite hook” I call it in my better moments.
“Oh, is that what they’re calling arrogance nowadays.”
Whatever suits the par for the hole-in-one dialogue
(the T-Shirt announces his intentions,
strut-swaying along the street).
Excuse me. Yes? Ex-cu-oose me. Yes?
“There’s something tactically surreal about your swagger,”
she mentions, evoking the long dead but peristaltic memory
of Antonin Artaut. To which the only response can be the cold-shoulder and a mention of the weather forecast for
this time last year. It seems such a heady waste
clawing to this always “redolent” rhythm
when so many tintinnabulations beckon.
And I am left gazing at the bath water and the mights
with very little (but little enough) sense of the (relative)
agony of being linear.
Sub-section on the ‘relative’.
We all know we’ve invested a lot
Of time in offsetting the guilt
When we talk of anything or moan
About our ‘position’.
Mountains of Sisyphus clauses “of course”
Burthen our talk until it’s a wonder
Anything ever gets done
(By which, of course, I mean said).
Caveat—warning—forewarn.

Dawning into shape before our very
comes the clinching metaphor
with quite enough anchor to head our lines
isomorphically. Like the Galloping Gertie resonating.
“I GET THAT THRILL WHEN YOUR WORDS CAREESS.”
The duress this internal rhyme puts me under
to make the connection between all things.
(Caveats roar in my ears positioning away
from the inevitable interpretation).
And, when I say ‘working’, what I am really saying
is that this is a performative designed to translate
all this indolence into something worthy.

“There you are, there’s another.”

Four Codas in search of an End

You were already there even before I knew I wasn’t
even close and it’s only now (1 year on) I come to the
same conclusion that you had already come to (I now
realise).

Reading all this high-fallutin’ stuff but really snuggling
up with a glass of shiraz and Christine Aguilera whose
lyrics challenge in other ways.

Your titles are confined, like vox pops, to the temporal
bulletin from which they were born.

And I still prostrate myself before it despite myself
and others.
Then sat we
in ergonomically engineered office chairs
*homo sacer*—soccer mom hauling son
by minivan to muddy field for soccer match.
Washington Bullets & Paris Match

 langue & parole she stands between two stones
the gall—& for the love of God safety ratings

several stars not the Pleiades given Honda Odyssey:

- Rollover Resistance Rating
- Static Stability Factor
- Driver’s Side Impact
- Passenger Side Impact
- Thoracic Trauma Index

thus by minivan to muddy field fallen leaves
jamming the wipers.

These—software & systems applications
cartographically reconfigured—rhizomatic colloquy.
& for the love of God don’t be fooled. Testify
to the reification of abject rage inflected.
Index down. Ulixes Comicus is clearly
not the man we thot him be. This is all something
of a terrible travesty—something of a convention.

Ulixes at the office ensnared in detachable
drop lift cubicle panels complaining
carpel tunnel & lower lumbar—the pain
of supplication
of examining data feeds more valuable than
the data they contain.
Penelope neither Creeley nor Cruz supportive subaltern in the margins of the fold; by minivan to muddy field for soccer match between Ithaca & Ilium, watching her son receive a yellow card—the boy Telemakus a legacy tired of bearing witness to soccer dads swooning his mother in the margins & tossing bones from buckets of KFC to form a beggars banquet.

He a legacy plods across muddy field in muddy clothes cleats worn down to ineffectual nubs.

Ulixes at the Manhattan Office mired in Microsoft Office laboring through overtime now unpaid under recently amended federal guidelines shamefully & sheepishly received.

Parodia sacra nelle letterature moderne . . . 

that is Novati but not Novati, rather “the grammarians of Toulouse arguing over the vocative of ego amid the crash of empires.”

Their passing songs like stones rivaled a thousand furiously written theses these the epic song of the Cantastorie bellowing in Tuscany & their minds then as now on the conflict between Christians & Moors

wandering troubadours wearing Depression era sandwich boards
telling tale of Ulixes &c

(this according to the mighty working
whereby he is able to subdue
    nothing other than himself)

But don’t they talk tough
    around the coffee pot
    or in the parking lot

where every vehicle is leased. So that:
for a thousand years, we had lived like this—cut us a cake.

wish.
i held my head in my hands.

what i had left behind—

the days inside my heart—

before i was born, i could see my father, through the trees.

why had he left the land that he was from—

the children’s voices, in the room—

the hands around the clock face turned.

in damienne i could trust my words; my children’s names.

why i had left—

in the place where i was from, a river flowed. men had fought;

bloodshed, leaves falling.

i kept the words in my heart; i kept the ring in a chest;

from her hair, for me, she had cut a strand.

i am reminded of the white lace dress and the ring —

the clock ticked—

my daughters’ names

eva, asha and kara—

i wished to tell the story—

the pictures in his mind, no words could tell.

this story is for you.

damienne wished to turn the time back—

the rivers of blood to my heart flowed.
i never knew that to damienne my world would turn—
the globe spun small in my hand.
the story was here.
at last something began to grow, our daughters, this verse—
as a child, i never knew.
the depth of my skin, penetrated— stopped.
the spreading of the disease.
beside a river shiloh told me stories of the land he was from,
and how i could heal—
some kind of light i saw—
filling the room.
beside the river, i read; the book closed in my hand—
my hand covered his, without the white lace of the dress,
without the cake cutting into my dreams.
i had left behind the land that was my home—
beside the river shiloh read, turning the pages. tears fell—
the children he had left—
not knowing when he would see them again.
the story ends—
ours begins:
beside the river as shiloh read, he had wished for damienne—
when he was young, the place shiloh knew best was his home.
i wanted her to live—
make a wish—
blow.
Winter of Murder

I

Any moment lived only once
bears within itself
its own irreversible error.

They made me give up my wings.
They taught me treachery.

No other news.

II

I lived like a whole split in two
One side an enemy to the other
On my right red-hot sands I walked
An old memory chills my left.

III

Candle: touchy. A mollusc
consuming itself with its own flame.
You exist to melt, you believe in your fate.
Unnoticed when dying, you’re the time of fading light.

No love trembles for all eternity
A candle dies of lost entirety
and some day man dies of pain.
IV

The well I carry on my face
the cold climate,
the heavy leaf on my skin
the weight
I stop and turn and touch.

I tear the curtain that rain draws between us
I pass beyond sleep’s vine in my chest
soon the world will forget me, I don’t understand it.

Cold climate,
that I stopped and touched
I too will forget you.

V

If man dies he dies one day of pain
of being unable to meet with himself again,
of life never staying where he left it,
of the mistake being irreversible.

No love trembles for all eternity,
a candle dies of lost entirety
and man parts
from his wings one day.
“I filled silence with names.” Codified things. I have known the sky’s and the trees’ infancy. There have been trees I have made friends with. There still are. I didn’t understand the Milky Way. Nor numbers. (They behaved as if they had yet to be discovered.) Except for eight (5+3) with whom I became intimate friends. (Who hasn’t?) A little with zero too. (It’s not been so easy to find zero.) I’ve heard terrible things about three. Why? I don’t know. To know is a number. And I’ve also met one. You can’t think with one. Some numbers are born guilty. One of them is one. I loved stones without asking why. The relation between the pebble’s name and its shape has not been proved. I couldn’t find a thing on the history of black amber. Fine. Mystery is everything. There are some consonants I couldn’t read. (The letter’s spirit abounds in consonants. American Indians knew this well.) I accompanied birds. Except for the turtledove, birds know nothing of numbers. Horses, I understood, don’t dream in the East. (In Homer horses weep.) I have seen mountains while walking. And thinking as they walked. Recognition impedes reason. *The World is ours!* Said the snails, talking among themselves. I can’t say I understand that. Nor that I don’t understand it. One should read snails.
As you talk about rivers the rivers themselves are talking, grasses are in their eyes. Time is an illusion. Write this down somewhere. It’s not true that spirit has no outward facing view. Jesus’ ghost still roams the earth. (I only ask. It’s only to question that one writes.) Those who forget their youth stagger in the morning. The rose exists because it is named. Stone got its name when its face was found. (Which is why masons turn stones around and around in their hands.)

I want to return to your eyes. And then . . . There’s no such thing as “then.” “Then” is outside history.
The Conversation

/  
when they ask what your body was like  
you will understand sacred dimensions  
only temples know in their cracks

what do you call soliloquy?  
what do you call prayer?
: desecrations or lost works,  
the weary hours  
pain’s sour grass, this city of the arrogant  
where little is left of its history

soft collapses of matter  
psychological schools exude ornaments, all faked for dementia  
liquor of agony;  
you’ll agree  
it is difficult to love or die without language

[This world is language that is from this world]

//

Hope will be an amulet  
cumulus,  
tumulus,  
[ashes inside the urn  
forming a tiny pyramid  
that generates the illusion  
of all that elevates]
a cheerful evening

1. swaying
ashen backs
of elephants
like grass in their passing
shake the bushes
rip off a few branches
to chew on slow and pensive

2. the cook
for the food

3. for a westerner
what westerner
does not have
a cheerful evening
his cheerful evenings

1. chestnut joe

2. at the piano
a whole day

3. rolls back
it is the cold
of the night before
the cold has a hold
on us

1. rolls back
it is the cold
of the night before
the cold has a hold
on us

2. at the piano
a whole day

3. chestnut joe

1. I cheerfully begin
once more
what do we see
when our eye
is not constantly
eclipsed
by recoiling eyelid
2. the cook
for the food
shines likewise
3. has lost
meaning
now that in the distance
a permanent river crossing
is being built
1. at the end
of the day
when everybody wants to go home
at once
2. during the building
of that new bridge
during gale-force winds
a serious accident
a blockade
of that bridge
3. to the others
who with grand gestures
draw through the air
how the bridge should be
1. this time I walk into
the park
from the back
even as the crowns
touch each other everywhere
1. I look at
the other strollers
only earth nameplates
on stems
of bare plants
it gives me pleasure
to look as if
there are nuts
3. not only do
the surroundings disappear
the object too
on which initially
the attention is focused
1. she is absolutely right
what you have too often
seen no longer works
this is how monkeys play
2. a double role
3. until we have had enough
1. by evening helicopter
they are shattered
when at last
together

1. the newspaper lies about

2. in the room
the rest is quiet

3. it is good
that seldom
leaves
the living room
of the owner

1. it is good
that seldom
The city of white stairs

Lisbon, city of white stairs, numberless poets have descended your stairs, your loin-like stairs, describing that descent towards the glimmering blue Tagus with its hints of yellow. Or they’ve sat in the furthest corners of dark bars wondering why their lives are so miserable, why their destinies are too long for something that can’t be put into words, drunk these little cups dry and asked for more, asked why life hadn’t given them a different role to play. And they have described descending the stairs, described longing for something unsaid that they would never achieve and, as if to prove these words, they drink more booze so that they might feel something, even for a moment, even the oblivion of drunkenness and they write about getting drunk and at the same time get even drunker. And they drain their cups dry, write verses on the stairs that lead them down to the Tagus, on other cups that are still to be emptied so that this rolling downhill might be forgotten and life might take an upward curve, like the idea of flying or the act of flying itself, they rise from their chairs as if they were just getting up and heading out through the bar door while the last customers call out their names.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ASTRID ALBEN grew up in England and now lives and works in Amsterdam. Her work has been published in several poetry magazines; she was recently longlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize and is also the founder and editor of Pars, a science and arts publication (www.parsfoundation.com).

JAMES BELL lives in North Devon, and co-hosts Exeter’s Uncut Poets reading series. Tall Lighthouse published his collection the just vanished place in May 2008.

İLHAN BERK died on 28 August, 2008, at the age of 90. He was one of Turkey’s most influential poets, and also an acclaimed visual artist. His publications in English include Madrigals (Shearsman Books, 2008), and A Leaf About to Fall: Selected Poems (Salt, 2006). Further volumes are forthcoming from the same publishers.

LINDA BLACK’s first collection, Inventory, appeared from Shearsman in 2008. She lives in London.


CLAIRE CROWTHER’S first collection, Stretch of Closures (Shearsman Books, 2007) was shortlisted for the Jerwood Aldeburgh First Collection Prize. Her second, The Clockwork Gift, will be published by Shearsman in 2009.

RITA DAHL is a Finnish poet whose work has appeared in anthologies and journals in Portugal, Australia, Great Britain, the United States, Nigeria and Canada. Her first collection of poems Kun luulet olevasi yksin was published in 2004 by Loki-Kirjat press. She is Vice President of the Finnish PEN Centre and is working on a book about her travels through Portugal.

F. VAN DIXHOORN has published five collections with the Amsterdam publishers, De Bezige Bij. He is the recipient of the C. Buddingh Prize for best first collection (1994) and Woordlijst 2007 (best collection) and was nominated for the Ida Gerhard Prize (best collection, 2008). Readers are encouraged to view his website at www.wonderlijkeveleek.nl, where the web versions give a further idea of how the poet wishes his work to appear to the reader.

CARRIE ETTER teaches creative writing at BathSpa University. Her first collection, Tethers, will appear from Seren in 2009, and a second, Divining for Starters, will be published by Shearsman Books in 2010. Her chapbook Yet was published by Leafe Press in 2008.

GARETH FARMER lives in Brighton and teaches at the University of Sussex.
KERI FINLAYSON was born and raised in Cornwall, but now lives in Swansea, where she was the recipient of an Academi Writers’ Bursary. Her poetry has previously appeared in Poetry Wales and Poetry Cornwall, and a first collection, Rooms, will appear from Shearsman Books in 2009.

JANICE FIXTER lives in south-east London. Her second collection, a kind of slow motion, was published by Tall Lighthouse in 2007.

ROMINA FRESCHI is a poet, teacher and literary critic. She has an MA in Literature from the University of Buenos Aires, and has published, among others, the books redondel, Estremezcales and El-pe-Yo. She publishes the review Plebella (www.plebella.com.ar).


LUCY HAMILTON lives in Kent, where she teaches international students at Ashford School. Selections from her translation/sonnet version of the prose work The Legend of Lalla Maghnia following the Arab Tradition are published in Modern Poetry in Translation (3/8, 2007) and I am twenty people! (Enitharmon, 2007).

CAROLYN HART teaches at London Metropolitan University. The work here is drawn from an experimental novel in prose and verse.

SARAH HOWE was born in Hong Kong in 1983 to an English father and Chinese mother, and is now working on a PhD on the visual imagination in poetry at the University of Cambridge.

JANE JORITZ-NAKAGAWA lives in Japan. Her books are Skin Museum (2006), Aquiline (2007), and EXHIBIT C (2008). Poems have also appeared in New American Writing, Otoliths, Tinfish, and many other journals.

BIRHAN KESKIN was born in Kırklareli, Turkey, in 1963. Her first poems began to appear in 1984. She was joint editor of the magazine Göçebe from 1995 to 1998, and has since been an editor at a number of Istanbul publishing houses. Her books include Kim Bağışlayacak Beni (Who Will Forgive Me, 2005—a Collected Poems), Ba (2005) and Y’ol (2006). Birhan Keskin was the 2005 winner of Turkey’s prestigious Golden Orange Award for Ba.

PETER LARKIN is a librarian at Warwick University. His most recent book, Leaves of Field, was published by Shearsman in 2006. The whole of ‘Stone Forest’ will appear in his next collection Lessways Least Scarce Among (The Gig, Toronto).

PETER MAKIN lives in Japan. Best known as a critic, and the author of some fine books on Pound and Bunting, his poetry has appeared several times in Shearsman.

DEBORAH MEADOWS has a new volume, Goodbye Tissues, due from Shearsman Books in early 2009. Her collection involutia appeared from Shearsman in 2007,
and there are also two collections from Green Integer. She lives in California, where she teaches in the Liberal Studies department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

GEORGE MESSO is a poet, translator, and teacher. His books include From the Pine Observatory (2000), Entrances (2006) and two collections in Turkish. His translation of İlíhan Berk’s A Leaf About to Fall was published by Salt in 2006. Shearsman will publish his third collection of poems, hearing still, in 2009, as well as his ground-breaking anthology İkinci Yeni: The Turkish Avant-Garde. He is the editor of Near East Review.

CHRISTOPHER MIDDLETON is one of our finest poets. Born 1926 in Truro, Cornwall, he lives in Texas, after retiring from his professorship at UT, Austin. His magnificent 700-page Collected Poems appeared in June 2008 from Carcanet Press, Manchester. His Palavers, and a Nocturnal Journal—an interview and excerpts from his journals—is still available from Shearsman.

DANIEL MUXICA is a poet, novelist and publisher. His published works include a number of poetry collections—most recently La conversación (2004)—and the novel El vientre convexo (2005). He has also compiled a number of anthologies such as La erótica argentina 1600 / 2000 and El arcano / el arca no (contemporary Argentine poetry). He created and directed the literary magazine Los rollos del Mal Muerto, an uncomfortable magazine consisting of eight rolled sheets of paper, 90cms x 30cms.

GREGORY O’BRIEN lives in Wellington, New Zealand, where he is Senior Curator at the Wellington City Gallery. Born in Matamata in 1961, he is both a widely-published poet and a widely-exhibited painter. His most recent poetry collection is Afternoon of an Evening Train (Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2005), and his most recent prose book is News of the Swimmer Reaches Shore (Carcanet Press, Manchester, 2007).

RICHARD OWENS is studying for a PhD at the University at Buffalo / The State University of New York, and edits the magazine Damn the Caesars.

MATÍAS SERRA BRADFORD is a poet and translator from Buenos Aires. He has edited an anthology of English poetry for the Spanish publisher, Lumen, and his own work has recently appeared in PN Review, as well as several Spanish and Argentine journals. The poems in this issue were written in English.


SCOTT THURSTON is a lecturer in English at the University of Salford. Shearsman publishes his two collections, Hold (2006) and Momentum (2008).