The Slip
Also by Simon Perril

Poetry

Hearing is Itself Suddenly a Kind of Singing
A Clutch of Odes
Nitrate
Newton’s Splinter
Archilochus on the Moon *
Beneath *
In the final year of my 40s *

Criticism

The Salt Companion to John James
Tending the Vortex: The Works of Brian Catling

An asterisk denotes a Shearsman title.
THE SLIP

SAMPLER
night breathes caulk
exhales

I remember the ripple
of sails

their snap
as the wind broke

behind us
the asses back

of Paros
– or was it Thasos?

Where poke
the bones of home?
2.

Hermes, sheep-thief be praised; he says look upon the day as a scabbed knee to be picked upon

some scaly fruit the body blooms in friction ’gainst this world’s serrated edge.

Zeus’ blade is laid across the firmament; and he slices at our permanence

so we bake served in the dog days
3.

hail the potter
who lays liquid trays
under midday glare
that they may adopt weight

who finds there
the rudiments of shape
woven from water
and silt cake.

May we, similarly,
hear with our hands
the sound of the shape
held in clay
as we wedge at the edges of form

and throw it
into the felting dark
4.

I walk the standing water
that pools in the agora

it wets my ankles

gathers as I leak

I feel it lap

in the civic cracks

of morning mouths.

These inopportune fountains

spout
being once a man
I can speak of it
as water runs away
from source.

I’ll pause
in the speaking
for the course
is ’cross inhospitable ground;

and the sounds I’ll make
shall take us some distance
in understanding
the persistent labour
of breathing
6.

I sit in the said
being force-fed Thasian pickle

by he who kept counsel
in Hera’s precinct

with Dame Harangue
confected a sour paste

such thick marinate
of Parian iambs

served me stone, sent me
and my family

to beds
of cool marble
The oracle plotted us
a path in riddle
replete with animal guide

‘take,’ shook the Pythia, ‘a beast
in your midst; one might
use its stealth.’

There are a wealth of tracks
can’t be landed
with the ingenuity of traps;

there are some acts,
slow to unfurl,
that outlive their maps
dead people’s things
few know
how keenly they sing

yet I’ll hear them
at the ends
of both my daughters

notes left
in surrounding air.
My thought

turns to bedsheets
hung corner
to corner
9.

Telesicles, of all knots
Omphalos
binds us tight.
You recall, old friend,
the air drum-tight
at the world’s navel

our descent
towards the grey
sea-spray of olives
at Amphissa;

how we were walled
by the Shining Cliffs
my knees
hobbled like a crane’s.

Let us take, you said,
the weight off our feet
by the Castalian spring
regain your wolf-steps.

We did so,
and pressed on,
met the Kourai
at Delphi.

Friend, you bought me
a gift there, outside
the temple of Apollo;
a fine jug
of black-traced glaze

On one side Dolon
the trick-wolf tricked
on the other
Theseus joined freed slaves
a-twist in geranos.

Old friend, may I turn this yarn
back into its ball;
recall we sailed
at Delphic request
a bristling ship and supped elsewhere.

We supped elsewhere.