Glaciation
Also by Will Stone

Poetry
The Sleepwalkers – Shearsman Books (2016)

Translations
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Will Stone

Glaciation

Shearsman Books
This book is dedicated to the poet
Michael Hamburger
(1924-2007)
in fond memory.
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‘The glaciers creep like snakes that watch their prey, from their slow rolling on; there, many a precipice, frost and the sun in scorn of mortal power have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle, a city of death, distinct with many a tower and wall impregnable of beaming ice. Yet not a city but a flood of ruin is there that from the boundaries of the sky rolls its perpetual stream…’

— Percy Bysshe Shelley

‘Mont Blanc – Lines written in The Vale of Chamouni’

(1817)
The Oaks

In May the oaks on the ridge thicken strangely towards evening. They begin to command, take over, they rope in the hedgerows, they deepen. When the flaring of the human subsides the owl’s amber eyes stare out from the cage of contorted branches, to follow the field mouse carrying corn, while we slumber, the hunt goes on, and in the morning the dewy blooms deceive us.

You sit beneath their dusty branches and calmly seeds parachute into your hair. For once you might see with those eyes, connect, rake over, receive answers. But they are unable to signal. Our worn out bellowings for meaning drift uselessly up into their canopy and are snuffed out, saved from themselves like the staggering flames of spent candles, from the dream of some deliverance that limps stoically in our wake.
Restoration

On palm-fringed paradise islands
over creamy sand and through
polluted surf the real ocean abandoned
this extinct generation still plays on,
unaware that plans are in the final stages
for its obliteration. Brazen,
they dump their sacks of organs
by perfectly azure pools and poised
leap up from white springboards.
Beneath palms, confident in their wealth
they lounge, as they have always done,
lost in the lack, lured to the shallows,
all the effluent that darkens the earth
from the outflow of their shadow.
But above them unseen the moon’s ice scythe
is sharpened, to the stars are handed weapons.
All the planets and terrifying expanses
of nothingness gradually synchronize.

When the powerboats stutter and their engines stop,
when the flight is grounded and can
no longer take off,
when the barbecue coals refuse to glow,
when the maid fails to sweep the patio,
when receptions are abandoned,
and the guests’ mail remains unopened,
when shoes left out are set adrift un-shined
on the dark canals of hotel corridors,
when the breeze lifts parasols and waves
begin to curl like great silver razors,
when the horizon’s guillotine sweeps down
held in the vice of sea and sky
and untended children like heralds cry,
you’ll know it’s not the end of time
only restoration.
Winter Light

All grey, the diamond glass
and distant estuary, mercury
that once crept into the cold snare
of land and stayed there.

No relief in the graveyard for souls.
An icy wind keeps the spirits
pressed to the clay, and hoar frost
ravishes the inscriptions.

But from the marsh the cathedral emerges,
and the first flame of gentle hymns rises,
an amateur choir, a feeble congregation
beneath the angels’ powdered faces.

The beautiful gift of their decay.
Nailed there, saturated with prayer,
they bless the terrified birds outside
losing strength in the black hedges.
The Heart

At school they held it up in a jar
I saw the purple ventricles and aorta.
I saw the human heart passed along
in buckets stretching weedy arms
to end in a hiss of steam and sweat,
the sly contempt of flames.
I saw the valves, one with a kink
and felt the shape of that lumpen thing,
and heard the nervous statements of students
as the stainless steel sunk in.
I saw the heart fail or thunder on,
a flayed horse bursting through a copse
and hearts that wait in bone-armoured chests
I’ve seen them wave hopefully
like the silken tendrils of sea creatures swirling,
forever reaching into a dark green void.
And I saw people target the heart
and once in a cemetery I even saw one rise
somehow gasping to the surface.
But no one heard the cries or cared
when mercifully I smothered it.