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*edited by tony frazer*

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**shearsman 58**

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TREVOR JOYCE

*4 Poems from the Chinese of Ruan Ji*

24

Deep grief  
    constrains  
        the will;  
long pain  
    is this continuing  
        fear.

Does pleasure  
    take?  
    Sun  
plunges  
    down  
        the west.

Crickets  
    wither  
        at the sill;  
brief cicadas  
    cry  
        in the yard.

When heart  
    and mind  
        conflict,  
who can  
    discern  
        true inclination?

Distant,  
    a bird  
        among the clouds,  
I would  
    shriek  
        once.

Alexipharms for death  
flourish  
in paradise;  
long flight  
there brings  
long life.

50

Dew stiffens  
into frost,  
grass frays  
to husk.

What moral  
there?  
What truth  
survives?

Bestride  
the stratosphere,  
hold incorruptibles  
for intimates;

take pause  
unceasingly  
for breath.

66

Polar  
cold  
marks terminus;  
escape,  
even by ocean,  
has its end.

Our sun  
    gone out,  
        we stand  
alone  
    benighted  
        and unkinged.

Better  
    tend  
        orchard  
than forever  
    watch  
        your back,

yet see:  
    even the vulgar  
        sparrow  
sits  
    in someone's  
        sights.

In a trice  
    power slips  
        the grasp;  
armed men  
    defile  
        the grave.

Now loyalty's  
    exemplars  
        are all dead,  
tears  
    cancel  
        face.

Give me  
    a purebred  
        from the riverlands,  
let me  
    traverse  
        my range.

70

We, all impassioned,  
suffer  
grief;  
feel no  
passions, know  
no grief.

If not already  
snarled,  
why covet  
further  
traps  
and goods?

Minor  
vortices  
approach  
the utter  
limits of  
the atmosphere;

in light  
the rain  
-bow  
glitters  
and grows  
parched.

Heart  
to ash  
exhausted  
settles  
in a ruined  
house.

Say, why  
should I  
experience

nostalgia  
for the forms  
of men?

How,  
rid now  
of all familiar  
fixes,  
slough  
my self?

---

kari edwards

*the ice complaint is saved as exact change for the one in the mistaken room*

I belong to just one hour – 6 in the morning until eternity; striking the white flag out for no one. did I mention the mechanical intrusion; prolonged psychosis without the business aspects? when I said had a fit, which turned out to be an earthquake, was in fact an hour later and an earthquake nonetheless.

I belong to the morning until eternity, waiting for a decent exposure to lucidity. they don't come any more; just detach someone absent from some social fraternity. I forgot to mention each turning page is a life time, which is a medieval metaphor for the miracle of roses or the rose bowl parade and all that.

I belong to the morning until eternity; no ordinary beggar's scrip world wide distribution random pork sausage; no executed victim, or at least not executed alone in an instant of eternity; an illusion in sweetened condensed milk tattooed with a smile: "I am dead, never existed, just ritual smoke that vanished in the ultimate alchemy; blue obscenities, myrrh and frankincense."

this is high mass; my high mass in artificial silence, an eternity with call waiting. I take it from the bottom up, read backwards, get truths faster and faster; get arms broken, legs shattered, left blind, pale against a carpet. no escape, no eternity.

I read and reread the present, the future and past; snap back to blue gray; no just gray; need a quick adjective; an eternity of ending modifiers.

## ESTILL POLLOCK

### *The Lute Girl*

(after Po Chü-i, AD 772-846)

The maples decayed.  
The cut flames of a few, last leaves  
sank back into the river.  
My host and I, warm with wine and the soldiers' songs,  
led his skittish grey down by the muddy quay.  
The horse shied farther up the bank, dragging its reins  
as my old comrade, wading in at the water's edge,  
pushed hard against the bow.  
As my little boat met the wider stream,  
I heard his voice, disembodied now, *goodbye goodbye*  
and then the dark.

The stars were drunk and the water swirled.  
An hour, a moment, ten destines passed  
and I awoke in reeds, downstream to the world  
in the mouth of Ko-pen creek.

In the cool of the evening, the rushes  
trembling, whispering with crickets  
and the water lapping in the shallows, at first  
I mistook the lute strings plucked in time  
for river sounds, then gathered my senses, wrung them  
dripping in the chilly air, and still the notes, and now  
a sweet voice neither above the strings  
nor beneath their liquid resonance, yet  
something of the colour of the forest birds  
calling from the shady canopy, or a handful of river pearls  
rolling in a marble dish, silk split with a sharp blade  
then silence with the plectrum's pause,  
and in the clearing a figure's silhouette  
where the untrimmed lantern flared and guttered.

We faced in silence, she half-hidden by the lute  
and shadows, and I hung in river tides  
and a silver, swimming autumn moon.

Caught in the chords' charm, I sat heavily before her,  
that she oblige a traveller one song more. She said,  
'these notes are no man's, and bitter reminiscence  
ices passion – who are we  
that love should triumph over silence...'  
I stared, transfixed, yet as she rose and turned to go  
she turned again, and walking forward  
knelt, and locked my look in hers.

'I passed my childhood in the capital.  
I was twelve, and with my fingers teased  
sweet sorcery from the strings, and rubbed my voice along the frets  
until the masters of the arts themselves  
acknowledged my worth, and praised its milky subtleties.  
The ladies of the court envied my gifts,  
burning incense at secret shrines  
against simple beauty and a voice that knew the world.

'A look encouraged young lords their applause,  
and silver brocade, and gold enamelled ornaments  
followed me year by careless year, and the wine  
that stained our mouths stained too  
spring's breezy expectations  
until winter came, spare and unforgiving.

'Times changed; my brother sought the wars in Kansuh  
and never returned; my mother died.  
Nights chased mornings,  
and morning showed the truth of fading beauty in the glass.  
The courtiers drifted  
back to their estates, their dogs and wives.

'Humbled, I became a trader's wife, a mean life  
reckoned by profit and separation.  
With the tenth moon, my husband journeyed south  
where tea fields await the scales, and I,  
wandering the river banks these many nights,  
remember the shape of the past, its features  
cut from empty dreams.'

She stared past me into the river eddies.  
Into the silence between us a cuckoo's curdled note,  
or out amongst the dwarf bamboo  
the mournful cries of animals without names,  
then nothing, until vagrant, hollow pipes  
announced the distant villages awake, again the day  
beaten of its hours, the thin beast  
yoked to stony soil, and the shaman at the day's first fire  
casting saltpetre against fever.

Her palm against the strings damped the last chord.  
We departed, companions in this afterlife, she  
to the river path and I – wrongfully dismissed from office,  
exiled here these past two years  
far from the Prefecture of the Nine Rivers –  
to the cold shore and my boat within the reeds,  
gathering around me my chrysanthemum robe,  
bright with dew.

*Fired-Earth Figures in a Red Relief*  
(Pompeii, AD 79)

A shaky, freehand shoreline mocks the notion  
of perimeters— leggy, Italianate,  
the slip-stack tiles and melting oleander  
pooling to a bas-relief of broken gods.

Lizards cling to Mars, the alphanumerics  
of his dedication lost to shrugging earth,  
volcanic ash and knock-kneed, dazed verticals:  
underfoot, smithereens of fractal *tempus*.

The scenery is goat trails, twisting cart ruts.  
The foreground figures sprawl in fixed positions  
of tableaux heat and vacuum, everyday life  
a held breath, sculpted lastly fallen, spellbound.

Their memories survive these exhumations,  
scale models of imagined cities dreaming,  
neither sleeping nor awake, patient within  
the asphyxia of blue skies swollen red.

In the die trace of streets, a neatness nowhere  
in geography accepts time's tourists, here—  
these others, as we, but different now, cast  
cold in gypsum— once fizzing, festival things.

No bold poses, mimicking the immortals:  
instead, on a day much like any other,  
a field hand, pausing on the slopes, sees sparrows  
burst and burn, before the shaking loose of stars.

---

**JOHN LEVY**

*Emily Dickinson and N*

Emily Dickinson: "... to N's I had an  
especial aversion, as they  
always seemed  
unfinished M's."

A world of the  
unfinished  
next to the finished. A  
world, for

her, alive and  
emotional, full of  
seeming, all the way  
down

to where a letter is never  
fulfilled  
no matter where  
it appears.

*A Speck of Suspense, or, The Fate of a Particular K*

Few people read a poem for the  
*what next, what next* sense of  
suspense. For example, to find out

what will happen to the sound of a  
particular letter as it journeys  
through the poem. The suspense of

hearing, say, the fate of a k  
that started as captain  
(k at the steering wheel)

and was rebuked, then kicked  
by cruel kismet, and knuckle-  
headed knaves, onto the deck, onto a k's

knees

then made to walk the  
plank  
to the concluding kerplunk

---

**John Levy** is a lawyer, working as a public defender in Tucson, Arizona, and was a contributing editor to this magazine's first series in 1981-2. Tel-let published his chapbook *Oblivion, Tyrants, Crumbs* in 2003. **Trevor Joyce** lives in Cork, Ireland. The second edition of his Collected Poems, titled *with the first dream of fire they hunt the cold*, was published by Shearsman Books in the UK and USA in November 2003. Two chapbooks, *Take Over* and *Undone Say* have also recently been published by The Gig in Toronto. He was awarded a Fulbright scholarship in 2002-3, and in 2004 was elected a member of Aosdána (akin to the Académie Française, but restricted to creative artists). **kari edwards** is based in San Francisco and is the author of *iduna*, (O Books, 2003), *a day in the life of p.*, (subpress collective, 2002), and *a diary of lies* (Belladonna #27 by Belladonna Books, 2002). edwards' work can also be found in *Aufgabe, Fracture, Bombay Gin, Belight Fiction, Van Gogh's Ear, Vert, 88: A Journal of Contemporary American Poetry, Narrativity, Shampoo, Big Bridge, Boog City, Word/For Word, 5 Trope*, and *The International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*.

ALISTAIR NOON

*Slight Things*

Landscapes hang there, highways in the air, curl upwards, sideways, to the base,  
intimate mists coil around outhouses, hiss in the grass: *There, then where?*  
The eye names hill, plain, is a flux-map, a flower for an evening,  
invisible lines launch clockhands forward, or  
jolt them brake, sunsets loiter;  
the globe as an orange, its prised-off segments.  
Morning repaints the land, not hill but plain, not plain but pine that stabs the  
crumbleground –  
yesterday red earth, today brown, tomorrow blue?  
Hills roughen and smoothen, fields stripe green and yellow, carnival faces flow –  
city observes country, pixels on a screen,  
our breath condenses to a journal,  
the ideal pine, the real heights and diameters, the rule and its pig-trough  
of exceptions,  
glimpses of a loco, pine sparsens, the brief arc of streams –  
across ridges and oceans, landscapes to guess at.

*Wilderness*

*For Valeri Scherstjanoi*

There's a bottle  
on a pebbled shore;

and a bell,  
kicking in the air;

a horn, harsh  
as bark;

and an engine  
in the constant wind:

there's a saw,  
icy as a stream;

and a drill, white  
as the sun;

there are the clear  
peaks of a hammer

and the dark lake  
of a voice.

*[Untitled]*

A question flutters, still green:  
how long will litter seal to the ground?  
What weight stops departure when  
lightest leaves sprint with the wind?  
Ringpull, acorn, styrofoam, fork –  
easy to alter the fallen fact  
or brook, quicker over stone:  
for an eye's brief look, oil-unstained.  
From refuse container, roof and drain  
sparrows horde, their shapes then drowned  
in bloom-draped bushes, to surface  
faster then before, faster  
than the fuselages from below,  
exhaust-prints lost in the blue  
sahara, undercarriages preened, sound  
recoiling, body sucked sunwards –  
a swelling, failing, recovering lightburst  
squashes the space between the entrance gate bars.

---

**Alistair Noon** lives in China, where he works as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language. He has translated from, amongst others, August Stramm, Gennadi Aigi, Mayakovsky and, more recently, from Classical Chinese. Poems have been published in magazines and anthologies in Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Russia.

NANCY KUHL

*Divining*

There are answers  
    in arrows, in their arched  
paths in green air. Afternoon  
    tea spilled into china,

and a girl — back to the crowd, hands wooden  
as any snake charmer's — reads  
    the trajectory, the splitting  
    of air, the landing, angle lodged

in the spilled grass. This is  
    the love of promise, stuck  
45 degrees from the gentle lawn.  
    And there are answers in the carousel's chaos,

its spin, the rise of horses and reaching  
for rings. Calliope tin  
    and swirl: shards of light  
braid themselves into what must be

a man. A house — which is not  
    a house but the iridescent  
curve of an oyster shell — is caught  
    under a spill of mud and rock.

There are answers, too, in the teen-aged lovers who drive the curves  
of Red Hill Road until it bends into Kings Highway  
    near the elementary, near the brick church.  
Or say they are grown and mute, peeling

    the old wildness from their skins — couldn't they  
    find answers there? Couldn't they look  
into their hands and know something?  
Who couldn't learn the secret —

the tarot's tripping fool, the smooth language  
runes scatter like salt?

A Saint Christopher medal swings  
from the rear view of that Dodge.

### *Keys*

Some men love order. One  
boards the bus at 6th and Chestnut each  
afternoon at 3:07. Until the bus stops  
at the train station, he walks

the aisle, shouting *Turn off the music; No  
gum chewing; No eating; No drinking.*  
Another, seated in the bus's last row, stands  
in his place at 3:15, yells *Can't you read*

*the sign* (he points at the stenciled cardboard)?  
*Passengers must remain seated at all times.* This  
happens every day. At 3:18 they get off the bus, race  
to catch the same 3:20 train. I imagine they are at it

again by 3:21. Theirs is collapsed wanting.  
Certain nights I dream their faces, broken,  
listing in the bus's back window.

\_\_\_\_\_

lowest note; list of solutions (as in: the Master used a);  
the hold which plaster has on a wall;  
a pin, bolt or wedge (as in: a cotter); a cardinal  
point; vibrating steel tongues; spiritual authority  
(as in the Bishop's or the Spiritual Power  
of the); primary claw of a hawk's foot.

common in phrases and proverbs (such as: to the street; as cold as a; and book).

\_\_\_\_\_

Marigold custard: crush 1 cup of marigold petals; mix with salt, sugar, nutmeg. Scald 3 cups of milk with 2 vanilla beans and an egg yolk. Combine with dry ingredients. Cool before serving.

---

The air in here suffers from suggestibility; it stinks of rubbery skin. And what's left behind.

---

My friend wanted to live in a kaleidoscope;  
she painted every room in her house  
a different color. The bathroom on the third floor,  
battleship gray. This is what it means  
to be in search of origins.

---

Wives' Tales: Vinegar will dry  
up all your blood (not true).  
If you eat too many carrots  
your skin will turn orange (True: palms  
and the soles of feet).

---

I served divorce papers to suited and severe men and women every Friday in July. I once chased a woman three blocks, waving her bulky envelope. Her red blazer flapped behind her like a cape. By block two I was gaining. She wasn't one of those pumps-in-handbag-gym-shoes-to-work types. She had no idea how to run. That was during the city's dry spell and hydrants were opened all over; they bubbled like picture-book fountains. Imagine that.

---

black-canal. blue-ferry  
route. yellow-rail-  
road. green-bridge. red-snow  
emergency. double  
green-covered bridge.

---

From a distance, a dead sheep and a dead deer  
look about the same. If a sheep dies  
when the ground is frozen, you can  
haul it out to the highway, dump it,  
drive off, and no one is any the wiser.

---

I shine shoes on the busiest corner  
in Philadelphia. I draw a circle on each  
cheek with discarded apricot lipstick. My mother  
has moved to a leaf-shaped island where storms lift

dogs and even cars right off the ground, plant  
them, sometimes, miles away.

There's a gray leaf pressed  
to the windshield. It's stuck  
in the wiper blade whining  
across the glass. Back, forth  
back. They're calling for rain.

---

Nancy Kuhl, who lives in New Haven, CT., is co-editor of Phylum Press with Richard Deming. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Verse*, *Fence*, *Phoebe*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Cream City Review*, *The Journal*, and other magazines and her chapbook, *In the Arbor*, was published by Kent State University Press.

PETER BOYLE

*The Museum of Space*

In the museum of space you open the lost codes. They glide around you – emblems and word fragments, pierced shells that become once more perfect spheres. You remember watching a man counting the beads. Though small enough to vanish into his hand, they tumbled through infinite circles. As you looked out one window, the cliff directly in front loomed up like a future you would never scale. Why are water and sand always used to measure time passing? They must then be the one substance – what never gets dry, what never gets wet, the absolute embrace that says, Wade into me.

In the high empty room of the museum the artist sits in primordial solitude, slapping layered paint on the wall. It twists and curves, at one moment resembling his face, at another the sky. The same idealized bubble sustaining both life and extinction. And the children who walk across the room scatter iceblock sticks and chocolate wrappers that give a wispy transience to the portrait.

In the museum of space no art work is ever completed. Sand and water filter in equal measure from the ceiling to the basement. Constructed on the ancient alignment of heaven and hell, the museum opens onto the silent inexhaustible corridors of the brain.

*The Philosopher of Leopards*

“Peacocks flutter in autumn.

They have lost the will to migrate.”

(Shen Shen, philosopher of leopards, 3003)

Why is a child’s ear like a carhorn?  
Why are toes always too heavy for the journey?  
Forever ahead of every shadow  
the philosopher of leopards has no names.  
To her even adjectives are insufficient,  
not yet truly fleeting (those niggardly noun-huggers!)  
Verbs trouble her deeply –  
their imposed repetitions,  
all those runnings and jumpings and glidings.

She has restricted herself to the classic languages  
consisting only of 'buts' and 'wells'.  
There the subtlety of a gaze,  
the sadness of a hand that has given up on gesturing  
could best approximate her texts.

The philosopher of leopards does not translate.  
It does not matter to her  
that the Japanese version said "what. . . what . . . what",  
the Persian "now. . . now. . . now",  
the Polish "and yet. . . and yet. . . and yet"  
so long as they got the intonation right.

The leopard is the landscape without holes,  
the hand blurred by the foot's arrival,  
the spots that are the snow  
that was the sky.

Disappearance is all.

### *Apologia pro vita sua*

One night in Paris I saw glowing in a small shopwindow a page of René Char's handwriting: *Recours au ruisseau*. The delicate ink of finality. At the foot of the poem I saw where Char had dated it – three years and two days before my birth. At that hour the backstreet, somewhere between the Musée d'Orsay and Opéra, was completely deserted. Lit by a single lightbulb, the window seemed to have waited over half a century to find me.

Last night I dreamt again of my own death. Guided by the head priest of some strange church I was ascending the inner staircase of an immense tower, just ahead of me my family and the serene and tender face of the Buddhist poet, my friend Judy. We marvelled at the wall we were climbing against – a magnificent rust red patterned in waterpipes, putti and other embellishments of the underworld. With my crippled leg and damaged body I had fallen behind the others when a stair broke, the cracked stone slab crashing into the darkness below.

I woke on a stretcher inside the church. The priest had bandaged me and removed my calliper and I lay there praying that I would stand and walk again.

In the poem Char promises that he will “begin again higher up”, that when all is destroyed the river will speak. The priest’s voice flowed on, a darkened stream in which I could recognise no reflection but which held, I sensed this strongly, no malevolence. Weighed down by his robes of office he was simply doing what he could, human and divine, to summon a miracle. Impatient to rejoin my family I tried to put the calliper back on but my fingers no longer knew how to grasp laces or buckle straps.

I rested at the top of a low hill where the dry yellow grass folded around me. In the distance, unreachable now, was a small stream that divided me from the others. The magic rites of the church were beginning to take effect as I woke again in the air a little way above myself. The panic of not being there for my children came and went in waves like a long cargo ship buried in the shadow of bridges, like everything else abandoned to its own fate.

I remembered the flooded world of Char’s landscapes, barges gliding through villages and under fortified walls, and that beautiful word “I’amont”, “upstream”. I remembered the confident builder he was, defiant of all downfalls. I was already dead and I was still only just underway.

---

**Peter Boyle** is an Australian poet living in Sydney. His three collections of poetry *Coming home from the world* (1994), *The Blue Cloud of Crying* (1997), and *What the painter saw in our faces* (2001) have received several awards, including the New South Wales Premier’s Award, the South Australian Festival award and the National Book Council Award. Forthcoming this year from the University of Queensland Press is his latest collection *Museum of Space*. His next book as a translator is *The Trees: Selected Poems of Eugenio Montejo*, due shortly from Salt Publishing, Cambridge.

**Monika Rinck** lives in Berlin and is the author of *Begriffstudio 1996-2001* (edition Sutstein, Berlin, 2002). Her first collection of poems will be published later this year by the zu Klampen Verlag. **Nick Grindell** is a professional translator, also living in Berlin.

**Estill Pollock** has recently completed *Blackwater Quartet*. The opening movement, *Constructing the Human*, was published in 2001 by Poetry Salzburg Press; it is followed by *Theories of Fugue* and *Tsunami Muses*, selections from which are being published by Flarestack Publications in 2004. Several poem sequences taken from the final part, *Adventures in the Gothic*, are selected for wider publication in 2004 in British and American journals. American by nationality, he lives in Essex.

MONIKA RINCK

*Four Poems (translated by Nick Grindell)*

park

the white light in the streets  
bundles the city and in the park  
above the paths where summer's burned  
stand sails of smoke.  
we'll sacrifice your chastity first, dearest  
and get the gift of language in return  
spent and relaxed the bodies lie  
in the shade of speech.

feelings at windows

supplementary desire takes place when  
ever desire itself adds that which  
even fulfilment, if it existed, would lack.  
when the unknown meshes with the absolute  
in the mingling light at evening windows  
and distance dissolves into expanse. i shout:  
i want none of what i already know!

otherwise there's cold solitudes  
like there's cold chicken in paris restaurants.

**disembodiment**

tapirs are complex minions of diligence.  
the way they go about on low-down legs  
with their much too dainty hooves –  
parading penumbral beasts that send  
gravity into a measured sway.  
their tracks are surely indiscreet patterns  
where those in the know  
can decipher their only joy –  
proceeding to mate with the utmost politeness.  
but their voice, we are told, is a feeble zizuzizu  
not unlike the squeaking of suspension coils.  
sunday, get out of bed and off to the museum  
where behind glass their wired skeletons  
wait for the second lesson:  
today the animals will learn from me  
what it means to be anguished  
but agile nonetheless.

**the disciple**

an obstinate disciple, so youthful  
but the one whom jesus loved  
who laid beside him at the last  
  
kissing him was like kissing a door  
slim flat stern with hinges on one side  
but moveable on the other  
how it swung open how we fell  
there were boats and we took them  
our nicotine-sour mouths in each other  
like an element to shape something from –  
the bitterness gathered in the hollows  
when it wore off we smoked

in the end a rain fell  
a rain we could barely believe  
it turned cold, things got wet and everywhere  
the shivering began – our  
three-dimensional talk folded.

then the plain grew wide and dark  
no one was left, not a sound to be heard

when i meet him again he can speak  
i think he is my brother  
say something, he says and i speak

---

## MARK WEISS

*from ELEGIES*

4  
Temporary lives in the tidal slough  
where four feet out the bar has become  
a long slice of sand, parallel to the beach,  
glazed by the wash  
of the receding tide  
(the water as silver and quick  
as a school of alewives).  
There is a need for continuity of purpose,  
a study beyond the instant.  
The moon tilts  
like a rakish hat, those dry  
lava planes called  
“seas” clearly visible above the horizon.  
A crow flies eastward. In the distance  
children, dogs.

..  
.

6

The drowning man's thirst.

.

Building a structure out of moments of clarity.

.

Let's imagine ourselves through *this* one.

.

To heal the schism.

.

As if to demand of the listener  
light streaming through high clerestories,  
The mechanical squeak of a gull's wing. To deny clouds  
to deny grey flowers  
to deny all colors. I say  
the lips the hair  
the purple iris.

..

.

7

Said nothing. Slipped a knife  
between his ribs.

.

The war to end time.

.

Had to climb over a wall  
to get here.

.

What you want  
is a strenuous analysis  
of the simple  
act,  
the doe  
forming  
its cheek  
to the man's  
hand.  
The fact:  
her face molded  
to the man's hand,  
the geometry of passion

for all practical  
purposes endless.

..  
.

9  
The mythic event of entry into the earth  
made banal by the proliferation of tunnels. I know  
what the hill hides, what's under  
the hill.

..  
.

10  
ON GREAT SOUTH BAY

All day the night-chill  
nestles beneath the eaves of the house,  
waiting for darkness.

.

The sun seems to hang in the sky.

.

*Any* source of joy.

.

Underfoot, the weathered terrain of old boards.  
The sharp squeak of two trees  
rubbing their branches.

.

34 swans on Great South Bay,  
a dozen baymen, and  
one white sail. Sharp steady breeze  
southerly, off the ocean,  
sun to the south.  
Wind-blown sumac.

.

Because a fire was in my head.

.

Low sun through the thicket of overgrown sumac.  
Now 46 swans on Great South Bay  
feeding and preening and  
spreading their wings to the last light.

.

And then  
the dark passion  
intrudes upon sunlight, my heart  
aches and a  
drowsy numbness,  
or worse, the stalker that  
battens on happiness.

.  
And I built him a bower in my breast.

.  
Very quietly trying to change things.

..  
.

---

## DAVID GREENSLADE

### *Animals*

When I fall in love  
animals appear  
at the very edge.  
I follow them –  
the birch-white spike  
of a blue heron  
waiting among reeds;  
the yellow head  
of a green woodpecker  
cackling as it dips  
across a field;  
a black otter  
shaking spray  
like a fireworks display;  
two kingfishers  
burning through river  
willows below the filthy  
railway bridge.  
I walk with unfenced,  
untidy horses

near a basin of  
flooded spear thistles,  
learning phrases off by heart.  
There was a fox  
and, near Sand Lake (Ontario) a bear;  
even the Babylonian track of an artichoke  
when I reclaimed my oldest daughter.  
Where my limits are indistinct,  
fade, shine, I watch  
dragonflies pincer  
at the abdomen.

*Tulip Tree*

One glorious night  
when every blade of grass  
carried a hod of stars,  
I wanted to sleep under a tulip tree.  
I knew by morning the ground  
would be white with frost  
so I found some cardboard boxes,  
taking my time, busting  
them open like wedding  
presents in the dark. All  
night the cardboard shifted  
underneath me like escalator plates.  
My pillow, a pair of boots that wouldn't fold.  
If I slept I don't remember.  
There were other voices nearby. I woke  
every time I heard a peacock bray.  
White scooped petals fell like boats  
from the moon towards me. The city shimmered  
like burning alcohol and I was happy  
deep in the drunken poem of my tree.  
The wet park stained a boundary  
around the island of my sleeping bag.

ANDY BROWN

*My Hair Shirt*

On the fringe of Nothingness lies a choice: tell the truth or live the lie. The lie is inviting but empty – a ballet of fear and curiosity. The truth is inviting and full as an autumn barrel. Just as river currents speed up here and there, so memories part and stream around us. My eyes pullulate with big gummy tears. We hang suspended in the heart, skulking in the jumble of each other's foibles.

'Tell the truth or live the lie.'

With a big clumsy boot heel, the life we dreamed of often is scraped in the dust. The familiar turns a stranger. Night falls and buries us alive.

'Tell the truth or live the lie.'

I stumble on, a wind from nowhere pushing me. Turning back into the corridor of our lives – a station on the underground of intimacy – I cling to your face like a fly. Your eyes are little crucibles.

"Perhaps we *could* adapt to a new life," you reflect, "free from all this language."

Across the blush of obscure dawn, we stare at each other like decorative book-ends.

*The Past*

Archbishop Ussher of Ireland *proved* that the world began at midnight on the 23rd October, 4004 BC.

Perhaps you thought as once I did the Past, which made the Present possible, was the crystalline palace of ancestors? Or that Time was a mountain pass and what we thought must be a mirage turns out to be an impassable wall that makes us feel we're moving forwards in Time but standing still in Space?

Perhaps. But this is no time to discuss our appraisal of the flaws in Paradise. No, Time resides in what we *like* avoiding.

Does that wreck my theory of looking at maps of the past and willing ourselves there? Perhaps.

The pass is preposterous. That should read 'past'.

### *The Author*

In the corner the fridge hums, hungry as a Venus Fly Trap. The author – he who owns the fridge – does not relish the idea of trying to buy back copies of his own book but, on seeing his reflection in its sheer chrome surface, realises that his work is less plausible after all these years of suffering his own personality, and so the contract begins...

‘There were once these two towers, I mean brothers; I mean... there were once just two reasons for doing anything Power and love, ah yes, Love, soi disant and yet, so distant. There were once these two lovers...’

Morning parks a thunderstorm above the author's roof. He is made thinner by the dimming light.

‘... and then your feet beat you away... My stomach made a falling leaf. So this is how you leave, I thought, listening to the blunt clock as I emptied the bottle...’

The clock's hands fan a never-ending present. He writes his billets doux long since his lover has gone. He writes his at dawn; can't justify it – feels well short of par; the words stumbling from his pen like a line of drunks.

‘Love scratched in the dust with sticks will blow away. We carved our names in bark but, like the tree that falls in a distant forest, at night, whilst no one else is there, it all took place whether we were looking or not.’

The author lives off the headstones in their own back yard.

*The Short Career*

Coming from the West we have already come  
From the Land of the Dead, our journey was long –  
We left them there snapping at butterflies.

*from an Aztec mourning ritual*

“Life’s emigrants extend their filaments. The chapels grunt below their spluttering flues. We haul forgotten litanies to our lips, opting for the joke in the garden; the crease between *Belief & Knowledge*. Hope is not enough for what’s not yet happened.”

You were already speaking like a ghost when you slipped on the muck of existence.

It was never you, but the thought of you that caused the pain; the truths we carried in us. Not that there was much at the end of things: a few pieces of the jigsaw scattered here; a few there.

People seem to live and die with such great crust.

Explanationless planet.

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**Andy Brown** is Lecturer in Creative Writing and Arts in Exeter University’s English Department. His prose-poem collection *Hunting the Kinnayas* appears from Stride in April 2004. At the same time Stride are republishing in one volume his two books of interviews with poets and editors, *Binary Myths*. His most recent verse collection is *From a Cliff* (Arc, 2002).

**Mark Weiss**, who lives in San Diego, is the publisher of Junction Books and is the author of two collections of poetry, most recently *Figures: 32 Poems* (Chax Press, Tucson, 2001). His anthology of Cuban poetry, *The Whole Island / La isla en peso: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* will appear shortly.

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