

Shearsman

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Christopher Middleton

The First Portrait

Then she went and died on us,
Just like that. And her face, extinct.
We saw nothing move in it, trouble it,
Or rest content, or yawn, or give her smile,
Or even scowl, for us to laugh at.

* * *

Then we watched while the knife man
Cut off her head. We watched
And took out our loudest voices,
And twisted them in hoots, yelps,
Groaning as the scoop went in;
Spring water washed away the gunk;
Till that was done we howled.

* * *

Then came the woman with her clay
And stuffed the skull with it,
And made her face again, the face
We could not bear to never see.

* * *

A clay face for her, any moment now
See its motions; so for her alone
We copied, breathless, the big silence.

* * *

But to give her all the credit,
Body and head we buried together.
Her clay face had to belong down there.

Our underground is memory of her,
For her the memory is part of us
Who anyway forget. How else
To undo our division?

* * *

Gossips will say an ostrich
Invented such a funeral custom.
We hope her clay-featured egg,
Not popping so its eyes of sea-shell,
Will hatch and she return to us,
Or with her glance encourage others,
Good kin, who drink at Jericho
The waters of our spring.

Note: A man's skull with the face modelled in clay [Natufian, Proto-Neolithic, c.B.C.7500, was excavated at Jericho. See Graham Clark, *World Prehistory: An Outline* 1962.]

Orbiana

I could never help uttering a light soupir,
Just one, whenever the times
Were hard; today
Just one more, it hardly passed my lips,
But murdered they were, such news,
Murdered near Mayence, those two
Who sent me here, to Leptis Magna.

The emperor was never up to it, really,
In peace or war. She governed, Julia Mamaea,
Selecting me for him. So when she found,
To her astonishment, that I, a tiddler,
Had it in me to influence Alexander,
She packed me off, with his consent –
Nobody knew where. Nobody, either, now
Will inquire where I come from, nobody
Will know which city in Africa
Took me in, so I have disappeared.

But the shopping is quite splendid.
In this great new city of arcades,
Several temples to various divinities,
A triumphant arch, the amphitheatre
And almost superfluous fortifications,
There are nice people to listen to
And black weavers who manufacture
Singular objects to recline or to stand on.

Yes, for the Christians Mother had a soft spot;
From Syria once she had a cavalry escort sent
To save that tyke, whatever his name was.
It starts like mine with O and R.
I like to beachcomb. It attracts,
Ha ha, I mean the beach attracts provincials.
And yet, and yet . . . From Rome
And from Pamphylia come

Real artists with guitars, who chant
Devotedly of ocean, even to the moon –
I never had children, what a shame,
And the years of loving, few, complicated
By Mother, them I've forgotten now.
The shopping gets, by the way, a bit
Monotonous. Funds I was allowed
Exhaust themselves, somehow,
Even though I did, if I remember rightly,
Stir up a nasty fracas, insist
On statutory imperial support.

I feel behoved to say (don't ever quote me
On this) that I am not yet negligible,
Negligible enough to mark the passage
From finite to infinite. I was not one to wheedle,
But those officiants, what rot they talk –
Into the atoms they ship their designated
Sacrifices, not into some dock of heaven.
Where bodies tasted chance, they make a waste.

You should see me glimpse, now and then,
Into the shrinking bijou bag under my bed.

The wind cooling profuse vegetation
And the display of stars at nightfall
Are supposed to console. They don't.
Disease, at least, is hereabouts minimal.
What a mercy my destination was not Mauretania.
That's such a long, long way west.
And Mauretians, they do say,
Are a scruffy lot. Please write
To your little friend, Orbiana.

A Demon Sniggering

(On reading Anna Moschovakis' poem 'Six Nights')

“Poetry,” said a voice, “should not
Do philosophy.” What withering Platonism

Was this? Or, hawked by a shrunken pundit,
A neat political scheme? Of itself,

Utterly other than propositional discourse
(Mimetic maybe, but memory's instance

Leaving “a snail's trail of grass-halms bent
Darker against the dew”), poetry bleeds,

And some of it brands (in its veins philosophical
Fire) thought that “ordains what abides.”

The codes converge, the codes,
At times they miscegenate, as gods

Come alive in a freshness haunting
Hope, in unarmful belief.

They do seek it out, in the citizen —
Freshness, to ventilate

Atavisms, change them into
Productions, of justice, of the good.

Your Aeschylus gave Athena this to do.
Then one by one the furious

Eumenides, at her philosophizing well,
Freshened, into food. Freshly, yet,

Voice, you did so turn the words
As to discern, in their penumbra,

A demon sniggering too,
As facts, turned ugly, speak true.

[The quotation in lines 7-8 is from Diana George's story 'Filzbad', in *Chicago Review* 51, 3, 2005]

Warren Lodges

Theberton, Suffolk, May 2005

We wake inside a carapace of pine,
the brain-room cladding nailed up by the dawn,
a backwoods dream distilled, inverted — porn.

Too plausible to prompt a shriek or groan,
the poisoned puddle in an English lane
reflects its map encompassed in the grain.

Lost in these swirls we feel a bit unwell,
the bathroom no more soothing than the hall —
a perspex shield sees through you on the wall.

Such wards of wood unbutton to the nurse
whose strip has long since tossed aside its tease.
Longevity, pokerworked in Japanese,

I wish for you, wrinkled samurai
who needs a prayer for every doubtful door,
the pine so seasoned and the wind so raw.

Devil's Judge and Jury

Any judge who can steal the teeth from a kiss,
the tithe of allpence-ha'penny from a purse
and the fierce red truth of love from a curse

qualifies, amply — welcome to this notorious case.

Here's the file of all the jury's gutless pleas.
Here's the cell where they sleep and here's the keys.

Their first gambit is to demonstrate just cause.

Count their days as weeks, their weeks as days.
Submit their limpness to the gorgon's gaze.

Tall dolls are the leverage you have on short guys
who run the numbers for the lilywhite police.
Standards, loyalties, trust migrate like geese.

All Strasbourg now requires is an educated guess —
far more humane than people's hit or miss.
But watch your mouth, your gold — gold digger's kiss.

What power or intelligence

Fourth Flight of the Imago

What power or intelligence charts the unfathomable channels and gulfs? What magnet stirs and draws glaciers over mountains, lava through volcanoes, waves over rocks and sand, sand through the clepsydra, and, quicker than the fall of a single grain, wills or drills through the brain of a merely fallible creature the intention that guides the hand that pulls the wheel a fraction this way or that, and so spills out more cruelties, confusions, calamities, reeling across history, through individual lives? Are destinies governed by motive? Or by unpredictable dice-throws, spins on fortune's roulette? And justice? Is there any? If so, confess you cannot see or scry the hidden channels it flows along, runnels it cuts through the palpable, or marks it erodes on time. You cannot see or scry, let alone trace patterning in the pattern, or even know if there is one.

Why will this pilot, winning at cards in the mess room, survive tomorrow's mission, and why does that other fellow in the corner, intent on his letter home, know he will be shot down? Why has this team already lost the day in advance, no matter how finely prepared, and however experienced and respected their commander, while that other band of leaderless desperadoes, whose entire tactical manual consists of a sheaf of scribbles bundled in a rucksack, their training a tasteless diet on one obsessive dream, outrageously possess themselves of all hope's panoplies, and dare to assume the swagger of outright victors?

Why does this man, who knows the ways
of petals and leaves, grains and stresses of wood, complex
territorial calls and love songs of parlous birds, gas
himself at dawn on a shuttered car's exhaust fumes
in the snowbound front garden outside his own garage?
And what lottery makes of one woman a stony faced
harridan, surly through each of her marriages,
grasping through divorces, despite all previous
generosities of privilege, rank, fortune, beauty's
adornments from birth, even parental love, yet
bequeaths this other, raised in a tenement,
not especially lovely, intelligent or gifted, such
inviolability in the radiance of her passion
that even the crassest and clumsiest of her lovers
is awed, humbled, transformed by the gift she gives –
herself – till he curls, spent and snoring, dreaming
himself a child again, as his frame rises and falls,
like a schooner moored in harbour, while she, wide
awake, smiling, lies cradling his head on her breast?

Whose are the powers that distribute the world's
talents and gifts so unequally: between the corrupt
minister, who by hiring unscrupulous managers,
will always be successful in twisting the law
to monopolise futurity, while the upright
poor citizen, steadfast in outmoded honour,
will die for his scruples rather than ask one favour
let alone tell a lie or commit one rotten deed,
although his whole family be bound to go under?

What hand, against the odds, pulled the Warsavian
musician out of the queue from ghetto to gas chamber,
denied Death his murder, and saved this man to play
for thirty more years of audiences? Why was he chosen?
Why him and not another? And why have fate's

faceless administrators selected that impoverished aging woman, in her damp shabby apartment stinking of tobacco smoke, for a stab in the back from a deranged neighbour, whom she asked in for tea and a biscuit, because she took pity on him? How can a life depend on something so trivial? A biscuit! And can such minuscule details determine history's shapes? What causes, if any, cause cause? Ordinary principles? Chemical switches? Spirals of predictive genes? Are master keys to structures of significant action to be picked out of bunched forgettings, insignificant details, local colours and scenarios, unnoticed backgrounds? How absurd those intrusions made by Necessity in the guise of mere appearance which, if ever recognised, only get disentangled afterwards, and frequently too late, as fate's quirk and sleight of hand. Unstitching the threads knitted by time into time invisibly, isn't hard in the contoured editings of hindsight, nor is their staining and patterning with retrospective imperatives. Tess's letter to Angel should never have gone unread. She did not deserve that. Desdemona should never have dropped her lacy handkerchief. If only (enter name) hadn't got up to catch the earlier train for a meeting that September morning scheduled at the Twin Towers. Spilt milk, spilt blood.

Yet when armed units from his region's other tribe, led by masked mercenaries with outlandish accents, arrived by night in trucks to raid his village, and herded two hundred and seventeen men and boys into a barn – what external signal, click of bolt in barrel, dawn flicker reflected off metal, half-glimpsed between loose planks in a fence, crunch of boot, somewhere outside the gate, warning from on high, apparently unconnected chill running up and down his spine

inexplicably prompted this one prisoner, an easy-going man, never before noted by his family or workmates for being remarkably quick, brave or cunning – unlike his elder brother or better-schooled, richer cousin – to move to the back and fall flat on his face before the bullets of the firing squad squirted morning death through the flesh of his fellow-villagers locked inside there with him? What voice told him to lie low beneath warm bleeding corpses of neighbours and companions and, at the very moment before the assassins barred the double doors for the last time, and threw in straw and petrol to torch the whole building, what irresistible command impelled him to squeeze out of the small back window and roll away in a ditch? And what strength, welling from what irrepressible source, drove him to spend seven nights tottering half-crazed through intricate forests and over pathless mountains, eventually to recognise – and name and accuse – his kinsfolk’s killers? Why this man? Why not any other?

Why this beautiful athlete and that dwarf or cripple? Why this one in a wheelchair from birth and that one deaf, dumb, blind? Why such uneven distribution of nature’s wealths and gifts? What help is there in knowing that, under this sun of unreason, minutiae weave and twist unpredictable patterns and mindless impersonal factors leave indelible fingerprints? That’s just the way things are, smiled the rainbow in his head to the terrified torture victim. You can die now, if you like, whispered the fallen gas mask to the conscript abandoned in No-Man’s Land, hands numb with cold, because you can’t reach me, can you? I know it’s absurd and unfair, but I’ll murder you just the same, shrugged the vast, wind-battered, unlistening savannah

to the farmer with no water, milkless mother,
starving helpless child, orphan riddled with AIDS.

Weren't we all children once? And aren't all
children innocent? What plan, graph or grid
plots such hidden contours, fissures, meridians,
poles and equators of hopes and expectations,
blunt zeroes of time's beginnings, and infinitudes
of space-ends? Is there no constant, to be
grasped, clasped, clung to? Or even glimpsed
or grazed in a moment's fractal shimmerings?

The detached Goddess Ananke pours acid on our eyes
and smiles the far-away smile of a lover, thug
or torturer. Is it life itself that's cruel, since we must
all die anyway, or just human stupidity rips us
in shreds and kills off the innocent, and makes
questions like these imponderable, except in the flashes
that, without announcement and for no apparent reason,
beg, even order us, to get out of time, as if we were
fluff on wind? I wish I could hold the moment and be
held by it, just as my blue butterfly captured my hand
and just as that photograph borrowed a moment's light
to catch its imprint for always, allowing the creature
itself, wholly unharmed, to go about its business free.

(from *The Blue Butterfly*)

Thunderheads

Days spent in the shelter of work
blow apart at dusk:

skirts rustle mimic rain
as shadows bloom across the draw;
a five-ton hammer taps
a crimped leaf; cutterheads
dredge voices through the wall.

Above the Chattanooga
some latent thought unfolds:

heaped clouds detonate
a cauliflower dome,
topographies of doubt,
redoubt, lit by leaders
cloud to ground.

As the first thick drop
clings to thorn, a core
of purple cabbage stirs
Bonny James Campbell
from Cumberland Gap,
pelting river pearls.

Roman Candles

Thoughts these days, fixed on hate,
catch fire from such varied sparks
that while one quietly explodes,
a powder-blue hydrangea mop,
another shouts, *Look out below!*
One repulses, one draws near;
a crowd collects as couples dance.
Distressed, a girl tears loose her sleeve
and hisses, *Keep away from me.*

Love's not always good, and hate
cleans the soul: free of guilt,
a roman candle drowns the stars
and purges night of resonance
(in Rome there is no room for Rome,
a disappointed traveler wrote).
Against love, you fix your thoughts
on flame, our disposition's flag.

Deborah Meadows

Midnight in Our Motivated

Right here, an alternate reading or despair our conditions?
Suggestion of foul play makes us experimental partners tentative

in keeping beat as nationalist pulse that races,
arranged in steps. But then coming down, erratic

words in mold and stale bread, informational or distilled
story, no unturned example, unpermitted dumping

altogether-now when most attacked historically –
At reading, our meter for conditioned signs now bypassed,

valid signature, worked valve, slick-faced
interference, rolled up welcome mats, suspicion –

now that's another story: hopped up percussionists
hum of air tankers on return circuit 'til it's out

emphasizing old taints and favors, impediments
liked for charting counterintuitive voting patterns

believers are no longer pulled inward to its great
or sundown, whichever comes first. A new science,

a sort of confusion using bad foot to drag good
as two ends reach across states' suspension.

Hadn't you hoped for a change adding fire,
telling-knots addressed to mind by hand, but the music

acquired measure runs its blood circuit, what's there
after midnight in our motivated glacial moraine. None.

No software adequate to discern delusion, an error
behind favoring the favored, never happens

yet how little we know of the world's composition
in just societies even in legislative form

or social constraint, those forces holding power of refusal
to natural domination, ill-gotten releases.

Products from agricultural regions compete for last:
feathers drop after double barrier, world becomes wide.

Irresistible volume to pattern desire, define equally
as mystify, knowing deferral works well –

boulder and drag-marks behind the car's embankment.

The means already upon us completes
our education by vanishing, tools stuck with range:

limits embellish mortal compass with blurred sides, so true

* * * *

Gregory O'Brien

Printmaking studio of John Drawbridge, Island Bay, Wellington

in memory, J. D., 1930-2005

If ink were a city then I imagine
canals

needle-boats, these rained-on
and half-remembered evenings

and the island a crushed hat
on a polished bench.

If these lines were
a harbour, then I imagine night

as a great many swimmers
crosshatching the surface—

ink of their hands
hemispheres of their brows.

Your seaward house--
the intelligence

of its windows, doors
in morning light--

we row the long boat of memory
out past forgetfulness, the island

a folded paper hat
you wear

into the brightness
of each day

as it breaks, these quietly voiced
and barely registered mornings

in the next room
the night room now

down the long corridor
of your eye.

Zoë Skoulding

The Baths of Amnesia

Cool sulphur soaks the poison

out of bones

a body modified

by lead

wine

the poisoning of time

which makes it money

the coins of time

sunk

in copper verdigris

a ripple of light

refracted on the ceiling

voices float

am I at sea here

I swim

away from myself

talk politics or cellulite

just off the ring road

an inner space slathered in nut oil

for leisure read hypochondria

retreat

to the turquoise edge

of tonic and loss

I could dissolve

the ear submerged

we held our noses to drink the stuff

blood pulsing in the head

the crackle of

the nervous system

bones

in heavy water

footfalls
&
fragments

I'll sweep the pine grove
By the harbour of Mitsu
Of Otomo,
And then stand and wait for you –
Quickly return, my lord!

[Yamanoue no Okura]¹

. . . and the physical ear is too hard of hearing to discover
eternity's repetition.

[Kierkegaard]²

it
starts
with
the
image
of
a
rake
drawling

the distant grate
behind
the skulking speed of light
over
whelmed

the sparrow hawk
which the child thought
might be the falcon that lived in his garden

the
summer
holiday
in
france
which
he
confused
with
greek
cake

pastry
in
the
pâtisserie
orange
essence

the smell of lilac
woven
around

piano
sustained

the hollow tapping of wood

the single chorus of night
descending
decibel
by
decibel

the image
of
a rake drawling
behind that grate
of
light

fragment 2

*Through the jet-black night
The moon no longer sails the sky;
Its dark eclipse is bitter with regret.*

[Kakinomoto no Asomi Hitomaro]³

memories of pleasure counter sunk –
mould on the rind –
the varnish of light on an empty beach –

verbatim accounts of pillow talk
 wedged between lovers
 on several different occasions

those many
reflections of sex on festivals –
respect for the law
& other ethical considerations stretched to no obvious advantage

word-splintered-mantras
like the gift of salt
& the prophecy of cards removed –

tunnels leading into spindles of earth –

the callipers of god
and the skin of the child grown old from hunger –

repetition of questions
 & fraudulent answers honed to perfection –

the fist of a generation
blights the angle of redemption –
the circumference of the hand
carved into the portal of a gate –
the grin of the gable
the mask chased into led

fragment 4

Have a care for your health, my brother!

[Ishikawa no Iratsume]⁴

ramifications of greed –

bliss –

shards of starlight streaking the heavens –

corolla hemina hemlock & call –

cassiopeia the goddess of poetry –

saturns dissent from the orthodox doxology –

the memory of exile and the illusion of sacrifice –

children stood under the sarsenet gaze

the burning tower and the hangmans cord –

crown of babylon and babylonian whore –

the school of night dissolved –

neptunes wing –

the fast flowing stream

the fission of energy revealed –

mountains removed –

ishikawas song lost in the valley

the sacred dance at midnight

the fragile surface of clouds

the slow leaking of light

fragment 7

If their words should hurt,
Come with me to the stone fort
On Mount Hatsuse;
Let us hide together there –
Do not pine, my love.

[folk song]⁵

the last remnants of stone
& the single error of concordance –

the table by the bed
adjacent to the desk that was broken –

the blood stained carpet
& the fragments of glass –

lost the gifts of anger
and the curse of his love –

corbels of death etched out of mud –

white
granules of pearl –
mirrors –

the curtain drawn
by the gaze of her eye described –

the taint of an epithet –
milk carved into ink

Notes

¹ Edwin Cranston, *A Waka Anthology. Volume 1: The Gem-Glistening Cup*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1993, p. 366

² *Works of Love*, edited & translated by Howard V. & Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995, p.385

³ Cranston, op. cit. page 210 ⁴ *ibid.* page 533 ⁵ *ibid.* page 132

Sandra Tappenden

Bells

Patterns are transported across the river
in complicated ripples, like the river
on a windy day of confused reflections.

I know someone is pulling a rope
attached to a promise. I know
my heart is in the right place.

It's just the way they come to my ear,
one second hidden in cloud, the next,
take care, take care. Do I ever.

All this knowledge of being in debt
they carry over; the explicable grief
their airborne phalanxes even up.

Blame

The calendar, sticky tape, sea shells, public transport:

Naivete is forgivable when both parties
are unaware they're innocent,
sleep being no kind of excuse.
The taste on my tongue
belongs to a better liar.

The state of emergency we're living under:

Appetite is for the rich and vapid,
who want to discuss French windows
while the frail hang on to anything.
I am not your woman, although
I'd still like to finish the dark chocolate.

Waves, Baudelaire, my music teacher:

History is a war, or what we dared
feed each other. O yesterday
I had forgotten kissing this
shadow; my compromised heart,
£2.99 in Woolworths.

The constantly uncapturable:

Tenuous moral concepts depend upon
where anyone stands. It's easier
to lay down, groovy-single,
playing the same track
over and over.

Carolyn van Langenberg

Four movements in love minor

Sydney, 1999

(Newtown, March)

. . . and then they sallied forth;
their passionate journey travelled through
gritty streets amazed with studded girls
black lips stretched up dazzling smiles,
thinness squirmed alongside pierced, bald
boys decked out in leathery black;
swept passed a crush of perfumed women
and paunched men outside the Peasants Feast,
a cosy spot and aromatically surprising;
came at the supermarket, forged down aisles
to the fridge, the dairy cold under neon bars
at the far back wall; swung, full tilt, grasped
milk — one plastic two litre bottle — and lurched
towards the check-out, hip against the counter,
paused, a berthing moment spent —
palm flat, coins fingered. The fist
shoved down his jeans pocket dug up more.

Launched again, soft lipped life riding high
on a bent man's shoulders, the Dad a cruise ship
splicing waves massed humanity makes of itself,
red fist closed over pink, bare feet curled
under his hirsute chin, neck braced
by kimbies — plastic taped at infant hips
tucked up thick hair strung at the nape
of the double-headed craft *commedia dell'arte*
underplayed. This vessel's quest is both noble
and banal. The baby masthead swayed
with the rhythmic stride — eyelids dropped,
lashes flickered, fingers, flittering, stirred
air and, surely safe, love's best love
clasped wonderment,
and then

and then . . .

(Glebe, June)

where streets criss

cross

sun's

light

a man a woman swung their dancing glances at
the skirling shriek of Gypsy violins and
the roar of bus and truck and struck a pose
parallel to the post that holds up traffic lights
and warning signs high above her soft skin, grey curls
and dumpy fat and fluttering hands.
His skin lined, his hair grey, his neck scrawny,
he bent his face, her face scooped his
beyond the edge of summer days
their love benign, beloved their love
when leaves flit

shadows on the path ...

(Forest Lodge, September)

early morning

close to the city

crossed silence

a call

white jade

belled

woke a nestling stunned to hear

stillness

evaporating,

surprise a note scrawled above its jerking head.

Dew green escaped rapid dawn advancing blue

striated bluesome,

egg white clouds whisked

this is a minor movement for

chirruping and warbling and someone's snoring

to-whit! to-whit!

scuppered dreams afloat

inspiration dreamt

above a blue pot

tea purled into a perfect cup

cupped steam ablaze

suzie blackeyed

unambiguous gold

at the window shimmering

on a builder's rusted skip stacked with smashed chairs
garden waste roofing iron bent pipes
sat the big mac supreme icon
not what you might expect by dawnlight . . .

(Annandale, December)

under buffeted trees, triangled notes of magpies
called throughout an orange landscape, and then on Booth
a solemn boy marched beside his mother's thigh —
her long fingers spooned a willess head, her face mirrored adoration,
her baby's hand swayed with the rhythm of her walking —
and the stern boy grasped the little fist.
His obligation big, he said: She's mine!
Faith and trust her course, his mother reeled
a simple skiff accommodating two serene
madonna in blue jeans wisely tacking round the corner
and into the next century...

Coda

spread with hands the breadth of yearning
singing light rippling down my neck
self-absorption and dried roses use my heart
bright alive with skin breathing poems
thumbed brittle edges fractured blue dismay
I dropped on pages simplest things
directly out of love.

Law of Gravity

I prefer walks with a decided destination, and I fear the scrutiny of reunions, so each turn of a corner presented an ambivalent moment. Crossing a market square, I encountered a juggler, a lanky, youngish man with a baseball cap upturned on the cobblestones and holding enough silver to buy a pint. He began with oranges, but as a crowd trickled around, he switched to bowling pins. Their arcs made a more entrancing show, and their apparent weight suggested greater skill. Tourists, bypassing executives, idle teenagers, and me, we all waited, as another and another pin were added, for the collapse that always seemed imminent. But he knew what we wanted. With six pins twirling in a blurred oval, he halted them one by one until none were aloft, none dropped. The next corner I took appeared less formidable than those heretofore, and the next I have never, will never take.

Inheritance

What will we name our ancestors? The christening is tomorrow; a bespoke gown hangs in the closet. Their self-chosen names lie as loosely on their bones as the dresses and suits they were buried in. They can hardly balk, but it is not their mouths we fear. Do you see my son there, six months old? He learns as he watches. Even now he is considering what he can call me.

Stone Fragment

break O
pen

brake

beside the stones
break on the rocks

stone breaker
the rhythmic pound
ing pound
ing pound

chippings crunched
under the march
ing feet march
ing feet
'herpath'

line break
white space

never a white space in nature
lone stone in a windswept moor

teems buzzard circled
lark-staccato
kestrel eyeing
the hopping grasses

Godley Court

Senility is attuned to the day's inflections
outside evening's white gulls roll on endless blue
inside: sounds are askew : *memory constant television.*

Alert, we say: details configure a familiarity; so the line goes on... we say
the thing-in-itself : of-itself, the duplicitous mind stalks pure
conversation: stop (she whispers) listen, everything talks.

Spiritual Letters (Series 4, #8)

You took me to a terrace overlooking the harbour, the sky darkening with rain clouds. On the doors were carvings of various figures, the faces scratched out. I sat down at a table and ordered a small abstract painting and an omelette. If I learned more of the language, I thought, I could order something different next time. – Don't gesticulate so much, he said as we stood in the parking lot; you might be mistaken for a gang member and get shot by a rival gang. The sign in the library read: Keep the Door Close at All Times. Shelves stacked with books, recordings, boxes of manuscripts. – Oh, she was really sweet, you said, but she was always drunk. Hanging from a board outside the station: a Missing poster, the image so weather-damaged as to be useless. He became convinced that his psychotherapist was a witch; however, she was clearly appalled when he told her. They found numerous shards of black porcelain bowls, some bearing inscriptions. An oil lamp the only light. *The house, he'd written, suffers on a journey.*

Anne Blonstein

grave pour l'humain

just slowly. planet proofs of earthworms. a remodelling. spirals. green capacity and gyral function. their simple pageant of access and reject

with an apology. come back to
the cloudlight

and the wasteproduct that yleno breathes. holy rose in the cloisters of a monastery. mess of riches. not an aesthetic protection. holy rose that once climbed the walls of ethiopian churches

and pinksilver-petaled their graves. fallen notices. their thereness for thought. in all its rests. shiver of whether and evolution. appalled velocity of dreams. deep roaring

*in the seed an embryo
cooled by the shadow
of a treesparrow*

*nineteen leaves turn more smoothly
than nocturnal telescopes*

things arranged on a porous recollection. things else to coloured. the strangeness of strangeness. featherfalling moment to develop a simultaneously phaneric and cryptic research almost unlike the representations. and may she refresh the overheated with the sparrow's shadow "Femme hantée par le passage de l'oiseau libellule présage des mauvaises nouvelles"

retreating from the heavy to a hum. her ringless hands. the to becoming an and. possibly yleno's metabolism. workwomanly selection of sequences

her riddling hands. aged by accumulation
recalled hands dispensing a hypopathic mixture. no binomial no graft
no illusions. in europe. crossing a past and the immediate present
for a continuous intermittence

the silence of a room. an alteration
of generations. missing letters she cannot answer. but finds a use for
line ashes

somewhat lamellar and latent. her day ghosts blow out the light
in knowledge. she fixes departures. dispersing arrivals (a whisper
of stinging flesh. tenderness slipped on lips). more departures
than meetings. across these inner winds. appropriatively
and apologetically with an analogy also. caring to the sea. see not
the end. but the storms. brewing an axology. they will loose. the
acting edge to kiss and buffer living “Femmes au bord du lac à
la surface irisée par le passage d’un cygne”

three cards later

somewhat liberated and lustred. imaging. the fragile question
retreating from the heavy. politudes learned by the heart. tenderness
stilled in spilling. a sexual pageant of archaean and recent
imbalances. sourced and multiplied but left to a discretion
the introduction of frills. a floating. an outcasting. caressing a petal
yleno loosens a bare expectation

disordered dishevelled appearing
to all. sounds of several. the to becoming an and. important
murking the measures. in transexts. their slowly digest to the letter
her mistery

nell or resentment. assuming
the second place and third. from a conversation weeding in the pixels
clarity of murdering awareness

nell or racination. good profile for recalling
just ambiguously. fingers twisting the fringes of finality. to forego

a

O

they visit feelings together freedom to approach or reproach
the petals expand and translate the colour of absence

the accumulation of time they visit
deplacements together the petals expand and translate the colours
of absents a tea cup falls to the floor but does not break
a diversification good profile for the living pencil their words
digested provisionally mirrors on the walls of tomorrow reflect
the injured titles "Femme rêvant de l'évasion"

"Femme hantée par . . ." Title of painting by Joan Miró, 1938.

"Femmes au bord . . ." Title of painting by Joan Miró, 14 May 1941.

"Femme rêvant de . . ." Title of painting by Joan Miró, 1945.

Robert Sheppard

from September 12

I

Immensity's blade rushes the wind and
grieves a full deck of bad luck

A managed democracy dances in tune
to a spread-cleft litany, as the Queen's English
warbler, toned to death, unstrews his truth

The blind justice hangs his slogan. Stop.
Burgeon a burden for the chant laureate
entuning and consuming his own genius. The comedy
terrorist brags his mince as roast beef

No peace fries up on a multiple mind grill,
dithering states in desperate times: the sandy
trap-door promise of paradise rusted by frost.
The biggest part of self weakens its softest
option: its cast out old iron alibi song

2

Steam from the nostrils of the talking engine,
Nervous sweat, stain your place in history.
I myself believe no matter anti-voiced

A crowd's pellicle riddled with restraint as
bulldozers cut deep veins in the sand.
Veiled bodies are piled in, no happy hour for
a last prayer, no compensatory *homaranismo*

I'll buy it, the testimony of the dead, the
imageless human cost: dark stars aloft
and dirty bombs below. I pay with portions

of myself billed in flickering slices. Gifting
the price, a real pain I say: 'As

soon as I write I I am gone (I am not) I
say (to 'my' self): "*Make yourself scarce*

3

Each creaking oak beam evokes catastrophe
the erotics of raw terror the frisson that
talking will make it happen, acknowledged pain
dispensed at each doorstep. An

index made in just being Britain
invokes threat itself its wincing
nomination held hostage by
shutting our eyes or gnawing
the dry grains of near-certainty

Lips sealed our mouths threaded for
easy snoop and sniper

Our heritage conscience cools the
pre-judgement of history's closure
a hissing that stripes the swart tarmac

4

Cream light drips
through a moist
sky. Somewhere above the
clouds airliners with
the wrong tickets are

eased out of the
story. Mute pictures

of misery provoke dream
helicopters hovering over
the 'problem', unable to land

*Breaking into my
neighbour's house to silence
his burglar alarm I
intervene in history*

5

Whose body crackles with self-quotation, tape-
loop requiem to which it loosens its step?

Your own secret department shuffles your
script, an Unconscious as collective as
responsibility. Or guilt. It's drift. No sifted
evidence while group-think shifts to shafting

Enough! Statutes selve up the sovereign
vote of little appeal, tagging new
lags, to purify the tribunals of the tribe!

Sense a Bright's light relief now an animated chip
of multi-kulti mufti moons across Baghdad as
rapid-eye as a dream of prime-ministerial photo-op:
a fantail of microphones lays his fantastic egg, and
blitzed martyr-bits pile up in paradise, next door

6

Frost-sharpened sunlight burns
the skin. Between the staves of vapour-

trails a sprinkle of the promised sand sings *I*
met a traveller from a sleeping cell

Capital stampedes its gushing ruts, desires
the eye's friendless fire on flesh in gloom
moving in tune to propulsive gash and gown

The aesthete of barbed-wire corsets plumes
an incendiary flâneur, blown in premature
invagination. Bodies fill with his self-less throttle,
humming on the radioactive breeze
for phantasmal reward sold as debt

The figure in the doorway is bled away
by policed light that invades the portal

Setting Out

I.

Clean clearwater sand
out beyond the rubble and shore-wrack

a thin stream
cutting its own bed as you diverted it
tiny sharp grains
on inside bends,
forking across plains

half a centimetre
in unmarked sand.

I asked my fader what the well was
that made a deep hollow gurgling in the sand
he picked me up and
under the thick mossy planks
an infinity of water
rushing under the beach to the sea.

II.

Pregnate
a hollow in the sands where the wispy
harsh grass

dusk gathered
a grey silent
depth over everything.

Sweaty summer night,
light taking years to fade

parents
out

III.

A hedge, all round,
with great trees. Ridges,
with the earth muddied from the watering and then dried,
splashes like clay,
with the green plants pushing out of it.
The hedge, and outside the great plain.

Across the rice-plain the raised road.

Looking down through the trees by the road,
the turn of the furrow, the man on the tractor
to far out on the plain, turns
and returns unendingly.

IV.

Amber mound,
frizz black, light
limbs displayed.

Bang the gong of
her delight.

In the green dawn
the thick tome in many tongues,
the pigeons.

V.

Silence, the
odour of clean sanitary arrangements,
the train-cries.

Pissing the piss of loneliness, the old
ripe brewery-smell through the window.

Silent student of the ways of men,
in bars, gazing at smoke-furred plyboard,
listening.

A weaseled little office-worker, ill-shaven, grey,
feet planted apart
mouth set in a sort of twisted irony
fatigue his alibi.

VI.

And so he tried to please them who despised each other,
his smiling white faces hither and thither
wet bat-wings against this rock, that wall

★

The sedge bowed down towards the sun
with the snow on it,
the sun melting it off
and breaking down the cells slowly.

★

The mountainside fierce with cherryblossoms
and the ground already flecked with them

the day already
rife with excuses

VII.

The rains have come and the river is full, and the souls of all the
little dead fishes carried down to dissolve in the great sea.

Dredging in the well
the wet fibres of leaf
droop over the fingers,

black fluid
descending to
black fluid.

Old glitter of darkness;
empty;
gaze.

Bang her gong.
He'll find the courage of his caution,
I wouldn't be in her shoes. Twenty years!

I wouldn't be in her shoes.

VIII.

Dim & green, with the damp air emanating

only the two troglodytes working at the low edge of the forest,
Mr and Mrs M. loading their small truck,
driving each other to the end in the dim air

and a bright rocket silver-yellow heavenwards,
airliner up in the last day there.

IX.

An eddy, a tumour
accreted round one's life as merely irritant

which dispersed, things to go on as they were.

I leak frequently
it interrupts my nights

A small mountain hut
in which to fade
(with peculiar inscriptions
in charcoal).

from The Herebefore

i

you are the legend of Hob's Moat
A castle is all boundary.
Here, only the dry moat remains.
A square of dug out earth. The oaks
Have seeded wildly so the notice
Warning against defacement excludes trees.
A grandmother is a legend protected
By moat and motte. How shall we keep you?

iii

who calls you

Endpaper, Scissorsmile, Leatherface,
Filetongue, Veinlady, Spiderheart,
Shadowmother, Otherwhichway,
Theonewhotoldmenotto
Say Again

Greeter, Grider, Grattern, Grusset, Grone,
Groid, Grutter, Gretaphor, Grite,
Gramiscary, Grimmortal, Grash,
Greccesary, Greath,
Say Again

Bedstemoder, Grootmoeder, Oma,
Nagyanya, Großmutter, Avó,
Abuela, Grandmère, Nonna,
Farmor, Mormor, Aana,
Say Again

Greymother, Bloodholder, Winesmile,
Historyshell, Heartroot, Anyway,

Pasteye, Womanbook, Doneitall,
Theonewhotoldmewhatto
Say Again

v
your grandchildren may die before you

Out of an almost empty bottle of Lips
varnish will inch up your nails
which need to be cut by a chiropodist

through their bumps, thick as tabletops.
Side-hairs on the brush will spit
red. He won't be bothered by that,

and won't notice, as he runs to the pool,
a rusted bolt. It will cut his sole
let in staphylococcus aureus.

The following year, it will be cold. In the morning,
light from the blind borders will diffuse
through your room, scattered, but not directly.

Evenly iced air. You will say,
'Some are January. Their evenings come
early.' Like the time on a train ride

you realise another one is missing
when the sparkling legs of rail step out
behind the carriages on chocks. Passengers

call home, shrug. Outside, ragwort
hangs its many heads, winched by chlorophyll.
Screws and nails are piled between the sleepers.

You are braked not scotched. A broadsheet snaps.
You write: Have you dropped off the earth?
His mother sends a Christmas card, explaining.

vii

now you know why thikes fall silent

You suspect thikes know they will die
because of their behaviour toward the dying.
The legendary chattering stops.

The bright yellow fur (a thike is the colour
and size of Yellow Pages) looks
as if combed. The dying thike

is carried on the backs of grandchildren
down the deep, dry moat and up
the near-vertical other side

into the ring of rowan trees.
Surrounded by hellebores, the carriers
crouch, (some small as paperbacks).

The noise of gabbling after death
has misled many to look for language.
The thrill is in sighting untagged mourners.

John Levy

Occasionally a poet's name makes a certain

amount of sense (Pound, Spicer). But
Levy? An amount taxed? Troops
mustered? Except

my family pronounces it to rhyme with TV,
not bevy, so that puts Levy
into the enormous

Meaningless Name School of Poets, with

Lorine Niedecker a nearby neighbor
on one side and Kenward
Elmslie going the other way though he

has the distinction of argu-
ably
having a meaningless first

and last as if he himself were hurtling syllables
“thanks to a blessed motor disturbance in the Heavens”

Audience for My Poetry

Audience sounds
plural. For my stuff audience

sounds more like it. When I read
my poems out among trees

the roots may listen too. Inside
the tree the rings

look as if from an inner
bell, spreading out

into the single trunk
listening. And then there's the sky,

the audience the tree grows towards, unheard.
An audience that applauds with

no hands. That's the sound of no hands
clapping.

The Alchemist

In the heavy robes, embroidered brightness,
clouds

Exquisite tapestry, perfumed

Hibiscus reds deep in greenery

Mountain scenery, water

Falling

Stitched into the cape

I stare and stare, remembering songbird notes

A caged crane released

Sleepy dusk

Spring

A vaulted chamber echoing rain

To Secretary Liu

In those times your army, old hands every one

Made roads to march down

Singing soldier songs

In March, in driving rain

Fording Fenchuan River

Or by the Junshui

With June's countryside in flower

Times change, from horizon to horizon

Land won with spears is walled

Dusty farms, no curfews now

People talking past midnight

Old battlefields grassed over
The guests snoozing drunk on the lawn

I set aside my writing materials as verses appear
From nowhere

The characters rise off the parchments

Bright fish
Surfacing
Scattered images on water

Letter to a Friend

What good is city life without companions
Even on back roads we look for friends

Days go by

My dress of best brocade gone for cash

The mirror silver fogs
So delicate, I open its case
Seeing across my face my hair falling tangled

Musky incense coils from the dish
Its carved shape seems to change each time I look

It must be spring
All the love notes young men leave
Asking me to hurry
In the alcoves setting portraits of other beauties
But it's me they wait for

The willows leaning to this new philosophy

The plum's tight
Tight buds

Poem for Zian

All the wine in the world
And still this sadness, not finding a way
To break a hundred knots of distance
Between us

The rarest flower disappears, returning in spring

The boats of travellers
Catch in willows east and west

So many shapes in passing clouds

Affection is a river
Everything with it
Moving

I want someone who loves me for myself

It's too lonely here in Jade Tower
My face in the wine pot

Letter from the Province

I live idle days, writing poems
Looking towards Wangwu Mountains
Thinking of our time there

I let my horse follow the water course, east
West
Confusing north with south

I was thinking of our nights together
A rainy time of shared feasts

And then as flowers emerged on the branches
I climbed the stairs alone

Later your return, so sudden I couldn't speak
I was so happy

Our little house in the alley
So cosy

Now Xiangru's lute has lost its strings

Swallows mate and separate

As autumn comes, remember me
Remember
The Yellow River

The reasons for visiting