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VAHNI CAPILDEO

UNDRAINING SEA



Undraining Sea

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PRAISE FOR UNDRAINING SEA:

Vahni Capildeo, to her credit, clearly doesn't give a fig about fashion or prestige. Her poetry is utterly divorced from that unfortunately prevalent tendency to write poems where the words give way to an (imagined) applauding audience at the next prestigious poetry awards. Her poetry is sassy, sometimes scary; dark, certainly, but there's light there, too, even sweetness, and much humour; complex, even virtuosic, though she can be simple, in her own unique way. She's one of the best around, and I applaud her.

David Miller

If Capildeo keeps writing like this, then we other poor scribes will mass to break her cunning nails and delicious bones, pull out her unique glimmering teeth and pluck out her sincere and breathtaking heart long before we dare touch her sensual Gnostic tongue.

Brian Catling

So much of the world has been rendered familiar by the industries of interpretation (including the literary) that it takes a genius to recover its real intransigence. It is like being brought up hard against an unmoveable rock amidst all the torrents of counterfeited poetry when you catch hold of any poem by Capildeo.

Rod Mengham

PRAISE FOR UNRAINING SEA:

Vahni Capildeo's profoundly intelligent poems are original in a very unusual way. They are modern, but composed without fear of traditional subjects or language. Every topic springs to life, in a way that is both disturbing and beautiful. These are life-enhancing poems that stay with you long after you have closed the book.

Bernard O'Donoghue

UNDRAINING SEA
by Vahni Capildeo



for David Groiser

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

No Traveller Returns (Salt, 2003)

Person Animal Figure (Landfill, 2005)

Dark and Unaccustomed Words (Forthcoming, Egg Box, 2010)



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POSSIBLE BOX

For nine nights and days a bronze anvil might fall from heaven, and on the tenth reach the earth; and for nine nights and days a bronze anvil might fall from earth, and on the tenth reach Tartarus. Round it a brazen barrier is driven, and darkness is spread about its neck in three layers, while above it grow the roots of the earth and of the undraining sea.

Hesiod

A BOOK OF HOURS: FROM AIDONEUS TO ZEUS

22.30 h.

The dilemma of the people who are unaware that it is night. They have something to say to themselves: some kind of question.

The steps taken by the people who wish to begin to be aware that it is night.

Pyjamas: put them on and move about in them. That unaccustomed feeling of breath: the body has that, not tied in at the waist as it is during the day. The shoulders collapse with gratitude.

So: the feeling of relief: is that the reminder of night? No: self-forgetting, that is gradual; relief is no constant reminder of night.

You cannot go outside.

Think, then, of taking the lights off.

Toe nudges towards switch, the black plastic ridges of switch discreet on the floor, spade-shaped foot, barely calloused.

Still from the street the amber glow, a terrace of houses stuck together by the sounds of putting-away. The day is being put away.

Honey! Is that night?

It's not right.

The steps retraced by the people who put the lights back on because it is no use that it is night.

Think, then, of those places where there are no lights. No lights, nothing at all; and the sounds, they do not sound as if they can be put away, this is it, this night, territorial absolute, it is not the brief interval before day advancing.

No! They don't count. It's as if they exist in a time slip – those places; they're as good as –

The dilemma of the people who

06.25 h.

Since there has been no other colour but violet, is that what to call the mist that neither rises nor folds above the flood meadow?

Since there is no other colour but violet, do we make that the way to detect the new tips to branches that winter has bared so that trees stand static, recalling what's too deep in flesh – our electrified nerves?

Given the mind's first confusion each day – since reminders of ourselves unseen throw us off – so far as those filaments make us uneasy, how is it possible that anything strikes us as other than violet – the colour the sun seems to impose between our eyes and the effort to see – And the ordinary craving to look has nowhere to go that is not to and from what seem like strong lights, so every experience, one after another, intensifies into a temporary unspectacular individual blindness.

08.43 h.

A mile away there is a library where tourists have not yet queued up and on the faces of the people soon to be readers it is not the morning or the morning after, it is the daze of the night before. In the library from which readers were unseated the night before, the desks with nothing on them are looking their best. The computers are still running their virus checks. Satsuma peel shucked off healthwise in the gutter corresponds to something tingeing the viewer's blood or the sky.

The commuters who unsettle the fringes of the city have become so many and stopped so long that theirs is the primary hand creating its soundscape. They start with a roar. They Hoover up the oxygen from the tremulous air. How they go and stay – how they multiply! The voices they leave behind them are identical and female, much too strong for the narrowness of the brick corridors formed by terrace housing that yearns towards the park. There is no change in what the voices keep calling or how they give voice, only in the names of children that they call. Laura ... Kerry ... Nigel ... Paul ... The soundscape of the street is a rolling one, and whether it is humanly restful or unrestful depends on how attached the hearer's head remains to the axle of pushchair wheels.

The one person who has decided to take a sickie, and though alone has begun to behave as if he's ill, is lying upstairs in just such a narrow house in just such a brick-faced road that leads most directly to, oh, to the park. The outside walls and the soundscape slapping up against them mean nothing to him, for this day he will be unsupervised, and he means to wallow. He wriggles his toes inside the quilt that he thinks of as sky-coloured, by which he means blue, not tangerine. His hand floats like a hand in a fever towards the telephone, at the infinite-seeming ends of which everyone will be otherwise engaged, earning, meandering, or tending. He draws his hand back and thinks: a whole

day of doing just nothing. Cracks that have been there a while appear as new in the ceiling.

Hell. At the corner of his eye, over the edge of his book, half hidden by the bedroom door (left ajar, opening inwards) – that was something. What something? He scolds himself for not settling down, and settles down, but what with the placement of his futon mattress on the floor he suddenly is aware that twenty centimetres below him (that is all there is between floors in his kind of housing) there is a big drop through which bodies could fall more than the height of an average tall man like himself. This is morbid, and he is not sick; but his gullet is telling him it is wet and his toes inform him they are cold.

Again. A cookie-cutter round of darkness. He won't pretend that it is the kind of shadow the mind conjures up from scarred corneas and neurological promptings. He knows it is not A Presence (that was his ex's term for them; his ex had been appallingly well Presented). He knows he has seen something when he has seen something.

In a split second, knowing that he is trying to tell and not just telling, knowing trying is no use, he informs himself that what is was, was the edge of a housebreaker's overcoat. That goblin angle. His mind must have shaped it into something that it was not, since he's imperfectly deprogrammed from an awareness of Presences picked up from his ex.

Ignoring the snouted curve he knows he saw, he looks again, determined to outstare, resolved to discover. For housebreakers are likely to be pervs, especially in a nice but not first class area like this, and he must not be found in bed, clad in nothing but sky-coloured duvet. He must spring up and defend himself. That cookie-cutter darkness!

So in a split second, he turns and sees

it

just

as

it

was

before.

The little face, peering.

It is away in a whisk. In a trice there is nothing to look at. Where has it gone?

There is no it! It is a he – an intruder!

He gets up to pursue the intruder in whose existence he must

believe. He moves cautiously, as stalking people do, then pushes the door wide and contemplates the carpet track to bathroom, second-bedroom-sliver, and break-your-neck-with-no-pause-for-a-turn-at-the-landing stair.

There is no other space where – He was soon enough – No one could be so quick – Nothing?

He drags himself, bristling, to look in the room that he knows to be empty.

But the little face?

He pushes his way like a man seeking confrontation through the three upstairs rooms of his sole-tenanted house.

Still nothing.

Then, standing in the corridor that lacks any intruder, the man on his day off screams.

He screams

screams realizing he will see it again. Not now. Just again. Any time it likes, sometimes before or after he knows it: the inhuman eye and ear among the files in his office; the thick round of night in between the cheeses in the shop; slicing a glance over the tops of library shelves packed with books seldom touched except to be dusted; that listening stubbornness riding serene as the moon for a moment above public transport vehicles.

It is his demon.

His madness.

That round of felted face.

16.07 h.

When it was cooler than about 28°C she put on a turquoise sweater down the back of which her black hair looked brown. This girl called herself Amber but her name was not quite that. She had spent very little time in the place where she was born. Now she was in a different nation from any that she had lived in before. This one was further south than many but not as far west as some.

The picture of herself that Amber liked most showed her in bright North American daylight no brighter than her eyes under the white cowboy hat that she held up with a hand either side of her face, and she looked like she thought she looked every inch the cowgirl, and so, though not a sliver of unlawful wrist or ankle was showing, what

mattered in such photos was Amber's pride in her blue jeans.

There was a sadness in Amber, who loved language but was better at art.

Well in her new nation where she sometimes wore the turquoise sweater that she had imported from somewhere where such garments (trapping the light like dew on brambles or the glint of sharps in grass) are commonly sold rather than made, well here her movements were as strictly regulated as usual (she was sixteen), which was a relief to the local nymphs who were her allowed companions – that such a luxurious exotic creature submitted as if naturally to being checked up on, just like they had to, though she answered to stranger authorities.

So Amber's appearances were heralded and chauffeured, her disappearances belled and controlled.

It was always on the cards that Amber, with her family, would vanish in a big way; and after a period of lingering that must have involved some preparation, they vanished just like that. They may have had international motives.

One day while there was still not much foreshadowing of any colossal future events, Amber let it drop that she loved the wealth of blue in the sky before sunset in this her latest land. This was a peculiar thing for a schoolgirl to say; astonishing, in fact. You could see it on clear evenings between five and six p.m. (Isn't that blue also found in other skies at other times?)

Since then, that blue is Amber.

23.00

Those eyes did it, wide-lidded and sea-dark. I looked into those eyes, but they were so perfectly opaque that any hope of looking into them was dashed and wrongness overspread all my limbs as I realized, first, that I was caught up in looking-at; finally, that I was in the process of being-looked-at, and that there was nothing but night outside and sociability in between.

So my eyes kept to those unreturning eyes while I searched sideways in my mind, not hoping for much, but accustomed to find a corner where I would sprout a pelt and a tail and whiskers and go to sleep. But this time, in what those sea-dark eyes were fixing about me as their due of time, I stayed human and there was no resort.

This is not the last resort, I told myself, no, never the last.

And then, though the wide-lidded, unrelenting eyes still were on my eyes, I could feel that the power of the smile that was trained on me had been baffled and that flint-tinted searchlight was no longer picking me up. What, had the escapee made a break straight up and over the wall?

It didn't hold good that there were doorways (several with doors). It was as if I could be both there and not-there. Even though everything had been made nice – no asterism of glass shattered upon glass marked these windows, no smashed gin bottle spread a milky way to crunch beneath the feet of mortgage-holders – it did not hold.

The look could press on as long as it wanted, taking its time to gather its forces in order to further acts that resembled communication where the most important purpose of communication is silently understood to be reassurance in the face of frailty.

Show us your frailty then! the opaque look beamed.

– A place had lit up: the bleakest room ever. The pine timber walls and floor were splitting. Just now (but never) the boards would let in the night that reigned outside, cold without need of winter. That would be night at a rush, neither attack nor rescue; undraining, and of right. Such a room was exactly to my mind. The bare light bulb hung from a flex. The light this cast was impossible! It ran all through me. This was my imagination.

But the gods have been in process of dissolving me for longer than I can remember. No one in such a place has anything to offer!

This was what I did not say aloud to the looker:

“I will raise such a monument – such a monument – I will build – ”

So filled with light I said nothing; and the rooms of night are forever mine.

WINTER TO WINTER

January

JOLT

The sound of feet started it, the sound of feet
in the night that was becoming morning for the New Year.
Full bodyweight sounded falling on those soles
that bolted like a thief between the bricks that locked in sleep.
Woman alive, who was it?

It was no one that I knew.

The street's head was frantic and so was my heart.
Then the sound of feet swallowed itself where the suburb widens
to common ground, and greens, carrying past swans,
fetching fog over railtracks, freezing out the Thames.
The street was Victorian and single once again.

Our objects are in fugue from ourselves.

Try to draw up the starred glass that chunters glumly down the tides,
or to arrest that phoenix of duplication, the plastic orchid that wilts!

Objects have taken other motives.

First they overcame us, arguing inheritance,
shouldering apartments to a sense of smallness,
in pride of place, drinking deep of Danish oil,
toppling forwards with scarred handles. Now they are swelling to
escape

to some final warehouse by the Isis . . . that would be a reed bed
where we'd find them by their upstretching, their own legs
drawn up like churches, restful and rotten,
their limbs dog-wise at last.

Put me back to bed. Our objects are in flight.

T-shirts scatter stitches as distinct as stars from stripes;
machine finish makes the MADE IN, no matter where the fabric took
its form.

Far away I say,
further than my air miles reach.

Put out the calendar and make a fire.
Your feet are cold and I am flying apart.

February

WINTER

I. Via Porta Romana

This is the thing I will remember forever,
she said – the moon above the European flag,
the flag above the chalk-pale palace,
the calcium-faced palace holding the street
half distant in an unequal embrace;
this is the thing I will remember forever,
walking towards the river into a past midwinter –
she said, forgetting fast.

II. Harewood Estate

The sudden shape of a tree in the water
into which he looked down, not expecting reflection –

He had looked away, not to see,
looked down, away from someone else.
The water having run high with winter
had stopped before it fledged a form of ice.
The sun westered. The woodland blushed
improbably, the woodland burned with liquid
sun, like the idea of strawberries, never good enough
till remembered, like the ripeness of strawberries and wine
in a wedding boat, on a southern river,
a river that cradled the most privileged drinkers,
the bride being toasted by the groom's old flames.

– The momentary shape made him pleased with his migrations.
The sweet anxiety of it all.

III. Transatlantic

The person who is made to listen will fall in love
with people who know how to hear.

The people who know how to hear are people who have
something to tell.

They live to tell it. The listener loves, and listens.

The people who know how to hear, who have something to tell,
tell it to learn to live at a distance from what they
have lived.

The person who has a love for the people who have
something to tell listens, and learns to live in a present that
starts with somebody's past.

They have time to listen. They have all the time in the world.

Like swords crossed on the walls of museums, they
carry the memory of possible sharpness mounted on the
cold of their hearts.

Their understanding of passion is only called into service
as a passionate understanding, as a passion to
understand.

IV. Howl Moor

When the pretend farmer's ill-trained dogs
attack you in your descent of the trackless ridge
while light fails, and where the beastly road
was never Roman, it is banal,
and you never forded a river faster,
speeding like a yogi who's racing against Jesus,

the sponge-coloured mongrel pacing you across the stepping-stones;
it is company, it is civilization,
should you not be thankful, you were almost swallowed
by the snow that lay thirsting on the springless moors.

V. Cherries Out of Season

It mimics fever. At first it dismays
the children of warm climates.
The cold
draws ropes through the fingers; the cold
calls for thermal pulses, makes
the hand aware of how it is made,
not of what it can do; the cold
has it searching for a sense.
In the cold
a sense of life comes to seem
like a triumph; less is enough.
The breath strikes the inward face.
It shivers against the sculpture of the skull.
It tingles with unfamiliarity upon the rim of the skull.
The flesh seems to have come loose.
Each inbreath brings glass
to scope and spike the linings of the skull.
Outbreaths shatter inside.
The skull
harbours sinuses, folds of softness,
delicate like asters, apt to be blackened.

The heart no longer believes
in its vertical labour.
It clamours to stop
this vertical labour.
It wants the relief
of a drop to all fours; to give
the spine and ribs a chance to curve

into a warm ball. The rest would follow.

As we walked
all thoughts were taken from us, except
 frost
frost frost
 frost
as we were walking;
and, over and above that,
s n o w.

Kisses are cherries out of season.
The weather wants to be alone.

March

FORECAST

Ignore it. Set off into weather.

The river is the colour of winter as ever
running faster than we walk and with less effort.

The swans sail curved in on themselves
towards no overhang but the bare brink,
the trees well back in a municipal cluster
affording shelter to railings shut at dusk.
Beneath the gapped rain that hails
a storm elsewhere here blocked by hills,
swans eye themselves, greyed clouds pout
worn out grandstanding to the skies.

There is new efflorescence in the river
blue-green algae causing nothing of its seeming colour.
Notice this. Keep out of the water.
(long jump)

April

AFTER A HYMN TO APHRODITE

I. That Voice Revises Several Languages

“Look at the moon, my love”: that sounds absurd.

Ecco – ecco la luna!

Translators want to stay at home.

Light sifting down like talcum powder. Don't
we think of light and warmth together, cold
rock carries no weight, no, interstellar space
cannot impress us – to my knowledge. And

if we put our skates on? Though unplanned,
each ecstasy's, each hesitation's, trace
does cut some ice, in sharpened progress curved
again by lines on whiteness.

Then skies melt

Et la lune descend . . .

Translators tack an extra room on to the roof.

A lungful of asbestos their reward.

*

Two lion-coloured sentences wrote themselves in my mind
at one of those highly ceremonial times
when so much is involuntary although everything should be willed
that you find yourself hoping not to have spoken.
The thought of them makes me forget how much a line can take.
Forlorn within repeating borders.
They did not scan at all, these sentences!
I cannot place them –
as if there were some empress

whose perhaps greatest desire
was to raise a pillar
in sands outside her empire
where it is believed no city could be buried or built.

II. Put the Girls in Florals

Easter tide
these trees
are showing off their reproductive organs
mostly like a froth and creamy dazzle
all over themselves, unstoppable
(how confusing).

Should someone take a swing at the flowering branches
or lop them dead, perhaps on city orders,
that is and isn't understandable;
but they won't have it as a reason
that these days
these trees
are showing off their reproductive organs,
displaying airy brilliance sheer of fruit.

Strollers who'd designed a track of recollections:
this side, the river; that, the concrete flats,
sense fragrance,
catch themselves re-routed
(something dancing:
a heart).

I can imagine you blossoming with anger
against yourself, face set against impatience;
your love is boundless, not your energy.
It is given that you share this spring:
the raindrop effect, and warmth: another dazzle.
I say
it really is
like that.

May

SEEING LATER

You would not respect the phrase
the weariness of days.
And whoever said it brings
unexpected strengths, that things
seem possible, because
your loss is not their loss
but a chance to prove
a stronger love –
Would you start back to hear them
as a child whose simple joy
in its manufactured toy
wipes off the sweated labour?

Hear then –

This morning you had orange oranges
at breakfast, in the blue bowl, and ate none.
Who can ask for more than this? Three friends:
The King of the Giraffes beside his love,
a river who aspires to be reborn
as a sapphire; one more, half blind, in grey.
Off centre from the skylight, in between,
the seat that no one sat in. There, a cloth
with horses' heads, thought-white on black; a burn
straight through the place the left leg would have shown
had there been a wearer –

seeing you later.

If not now,
then later.

June

ON METAPHOR

Hot words lungs' galaxy of blood funnels, through surgeon-or-murderer-only tunnels, the usually invisible; shoos a comet-tail thicketed with not-yet-histories unwanted up towards air as speech.

Not a word.

O la the mouth closes opens like an idol's in a chant-jewelled epoch confronting conversion, bound to speak to the forbidding preacher who burns to encounter it, as one day recorded as dry as invasion as building description as harvest coronation plague.

Not a second.

Amber light is barking holed up in the gatehouse. Oh! The picture-this walls push on a stage of welcome – sinister, dexter, back, forward, back.

Now will it go away?

Ice for brains. The air has altered. What now? A mineral strip. A calcium tongue about to burn to ash.

Who arrives late into night, and with a load of bitterness, asking to find lightness, needing neither black nor green; who stepped ashore, heels like a fisherman's slipper salted and scalded in mud; who stood down when welcomes were being chosen; who stands foot forwards between split planks – tell them, come sit in the garden. Tell them the fence is mended and the neighbours

permanent. Say listen forget for a space the noises, continually
the noises jobbing to their halts.

What else can they ask, warmed with the smell of
petrol and roses? What can they be asking, shown the night a
safe tiger in chromium and jet? What more can they ask?

It is starting to sound religious: that things may be like
nothing other than themselves. So beer is like beer? And cabbage
roses, cabbage roses. If once you take it on, it makes itself come
true: perfect correspondence, and the mind stops there: like –
like a dream that peels its skin off to strand you burning in a
landscape – do you call that awake? – of blank sheets.

Corpse in the garden! not of earth – long fingers a min-
eral deposit, body the haft of a six-foot key, incisors pointing
past the geraniums, jaw's galley, sea-washed bright as snails.

Blame. Blame our imaginations. Wee beasts – we
overfed them. Fantastic now and sleeked, hear how they've
grown since – that pounding their scutate hooves on the cliff-
road, trading in sea for scene.

I say they brought this.

And how – the thunderheads? Why at a gallop. What
massed them? Taking the shape of clouds, but drawing, drawing
– arrogating some of the pull of the moon.

Watch that tideline – the salt shore not recovered.

Inland the flotsam, and also up there where it should be
protected, the pressed shells paths between picket fences.

There is no more letting them out.

July

BLOOD TO LIGHT: A PERFORMANCE FOR ONE MUSICIAN AND TWO VOICES

The verb to be is irregular in many languages. Children broke it up; traders fought with it; neighbouring villages burnt each other with it by mistake; men and women loved because of it, in spite of it; invaders made it their game.

They made of it what they would.

Haaaaiii. Essere. Est. Est . . .

Infinitive, to be. It finished changing
as we finished learning.

*Fosse. Fuése. Fuera. Demeure,
il faut choisir. . .*

Continuing changing, that goes without saying.

“I – AM – the beaker not yet broken, still brimming,
the beaker of clear water, the beaker of soft water
that Virginia Woolf carried across the lawn,
that Virginia Woolf spilled like a thought in conversation,
like a thought of the future, like her thought in the river”.

“I – AM – the lacework man, I can breathe,
since they cut holes in me, cross-wise, silver-piping,
my trunk is a case for some cruel musician
to pick up like a god and play like Chopin,
piano piano, like stardust pearling out of myself”.

Highly irregular. It conjugates the babble of the first passage
after birth, birth the passage from sound into light, this the *Ist. . .*

passage into speech in the manufactured world, the world that has touched on sight. To be. It gives form to the forced meeting of strangers. It is the geography of chance, it is, it is, would you say, the genealogy – of – a scream.

“I AM the transparency attained through fire.
Roses and lilies are really the only
flowers that name us; their flow of power
runs in our veins, whose redness has,
occasionally, suddenly, opened before them”.

That was the beginning. It played in the beginning.
It became so tame that it started wars.

*Soit. Siamo
stati. So it
was, so it is,
skal vera,
skal vera,
sará.*

How to describe it? When it was not always like this?
At the time

*Est. Est. Est. . .
Shall, shall, shall. . .*

it seemed safe. The sun fooled me into looking
straight at him. It was late November. That’s why I don’t
see you. He was dressed up like the moon,
like somebody’s daughter – his face dazzled.
The sun slashed me. Cover your eyes!

“I AM Cleopatra. Because I am crazy.
Because becoming Cleopatra is usual.
Too much makeup, men off whoreships.
Monstrous to most people, marvellous to my poor self.
Sideways I vanish like a serpent, like news”.

You want to hear things that will be bitter to you? Like the coolie boy who drank a potent weedkiller locally known as ‘Indian Love Juice’, an export from the First World where it is banned? Listen to his words, risen from the rice fields: “If Romeo could do it, who is me?”

*Estar. . .
To be, if
temporarily. . .
Estar. . .*

“I AM a language learner, I can listen but I cannot speak –
Among voices that scud like birds arcing arcing,
signing the blue with sounds that could be tranquil,
if there’s one that encloses fire, that’s where I’ll take direction.
For even in my sleep, all I know is burning”.

“Would I be the hunter who is happy to go after hidden creatures,
but if they turn towards him, he turns away in disgust.
Would I be the prisoner who scorns the pigeon he’s been taming,
because it comes to him, when it could fly away.
Is my love the burning globe, whose blue is shrill with metal?”

“IT SHALL HAVE BEEN a sense of existing,
a time for individuals, a time without choices,
a time with the freedom to be terrified of questions,
where the faces of death are more faces unlike ours,
where the pictures of our dying are more polished than this speech”.

“WOULD THERE BE a way to take up
the art of recognition as the first way to look?
People who are caught up in the pursuit of loving,
they hurry after the present, that is hardly realistic.
Who can stop over dust like light, not harden as gold”.

Love is internazionale.

*Uh huh? Go tell that
to the Marines.*

August

NORTH

The sun has been revised. So the cold fades
about bewilderment upon the wing.
The track from Arctic to Antarctic glides
into this estuary. They'll stay too long:
the migrant tern, on fire for ice, can't rate
this air they clap and suffer – for such heat
belongs to earliness, heat can't belong –
They cope as if they had not been caught out,
defend the stalling of their powerful young.
And flight becomes a lingering estate.

Take back that sky. There's something you forgot.
You left your looks behind, or threw them out:
those settler-invader lights that lock
a pulsar in each centred mine, no heart
and not sapphire. You were for the dark,
dark through and through, not to be found until
abandoned. Light casts milk on seas that numb,
I'd call it perfect, still – how Iceland's hills
act like your eye-bones. Here your cover's gone.
For night is you playing invisible.

I saw you running softly, swept with rain,
and dipped my neck. That is the proudest place.
When dogs first suffer human touch, the nape
retains its wildness longest, drops at last.
The owners don't know how much they have won.
Rain offers softness, seen through panes like these,
a fight of shadow sticks, a fleece embrace.
I thought I could go out. We would not meet.

At once my running feet begin to sink in place,
their shoes' thin canvas soaked, words misconceived as grass.

Nine thousand memories, one for every mile
and back again, and the same over, race
to summon to these eyes a double Nile
in pressure under leisure, snub that face,
the soft copy of a crocodile.

That's distance sounding like a present. I've
false intervals of time, to like you less –
time taken off my hands, given as if
I lived routinely by your foreignness:
Nine thousand guesses that come true as love.

You love them all: the strangers, and the dead:
yours to come home to, in the night, alone.
Work said this nowhere. You know saying stayed
between the I and air: heat sheathed in cold:
a sunset fell of courtesy: no saying fades . . .
You . . . give the time to claim forbidden words,
the ones marked SAFEST WRITTEN, LOVE, and DEATH.
Speak, our times fuse, make these the usual words.
We have no sure address for happiness.
What then? Just this: now, here, glad. You. That sheerness holds.

September

IRON AGE, STONE WORDS

If we'd grown barley,
We'd have had to mill it.
So we grew blades.

The grass is species rich...

They built their houses
And crypts built like houses.
Hills drank up their houses,
As did perfect sand.

kale, linseed, mustard seed, attractive to bird life.

They cut us to ladders,
Push down, pull down, fall down,
Feeding the earth.

Many of the skeletons are disarticulated,

Foot-shelves, scale-coloured,
Hang moisture for weather,
Seeping to earth.

We think they practised excarnation...

We grow over darkness
That's ill to imagine
Rounded in earth.

the exposure of corpses to scavengers and air.

If we flipped, bone fields,
Live ones could visit.
So we turf blades.

*A deep freeze, an execution chamber – nobody knows,
so it can be what you like.*

It is too cold for wheat here now.

Have a cheerful day at the tombs.

They build their houses
On mounds closed on houses
From rubble from houses
Left half to stand.

Broch.

Red sand, lead-silver,
The timed sea upon us,
And no human witness:
Then we shall have passed.

October

TASTEFUL MODERN CONVERSION, SITUATED ON A QUIET ROAD

The main rooms have been knocked through for better entertainment.
They bend like a dried bean painted on to a white counter.
Like a clinical diagram of something human and internal.
Everyone who lives here learns to step around a dent.

But Julia dances with Julia,
Comes up short where is no wall.

In the open-plan kitchen, she switches on the wrong burner.
Should she notice it stays cold, the cold steel salt and water.
Why her sleeve smells scorching, that she does wonder.
Say it, she should change, leaving behind velvet and mauve.

But Julia dances with Julia,
Humming with her usual sound.

What made the builder proudest was the way he'd done the attic.
The servants' sleeping alcove allows for something ornamental.
The new layout is his own, but he thanks those old Victorians.
You could live and work in these dimensions and never want to walk
downstairs.

There Julia dances with Julia,
Heeling value into brick

November

RIVER

November shall have been a sombre month
like breath fetched from the navel of the earth
to say a word of ending. November
shall be a solemn month, recipient
of sides dashed down by rainfall, human turf.
The grass lashes. Flames ascend. The ash bed
a patch beneath god-eyebrow sky collects
a lifetime like the water's look. This month
nods its face downwards. This was November.
Someone has died. Who hardly knows this.

December

WATER

I. Cold Hands

There is a moment when
the water seems as if it might be warm.
Quick
wash your face
in the illusion

II. The Atlantic. Like

Putting a handspan square of glass
flat on the sea, thinking I see
something. That's the sky.

Calling the colour roaring grey
heard in December, when the tide
discourages. That's a lie

III. Opalescent, Crystalline, Amethyst. And Dark

The sea is.

In my mind I never left you.

The sea
is.

Place-holder, holder of a place:

The sea

Who can hold to this? A causeway.

is.

Essential ground for memory.

Twig-runes dust the shore with bird-tracks.

And the wind

IV. Changes

Swans and rain and swans in rain

Swans and rain

Swans again

January

NORTH

“It doesn’t feel like minus eight.” “It feels more like zero.” The violet – the pink – the ice! “You’re living on the moon.” “Of course.” “With Marilyn Monroe.” “In Reykjavík.” (Forgot to say this light makes distance close). Give me musical accompaniment, perhaps I shall reply – let the flute double the violins, the oboes follow the flute – then a lapse for half a step, a second’s silence – These streets, they’re spinning Christmas salt to glass.

A quelled thing not a quiet thing – She laughed. At first that was enough: that she should laugh; assured sounds, not a sure sound – how she laughed! A shine that played on warmth for brightness – Laugh too, caught up and fraught with laughter’s past. Imaginary conversations: this is most unlike any scenario for us – no, even when I tell you “This is most unlike –”. You know. Our full stops flow for uncut cheese; red rind; a knife that missed.

“In this year was the great mortality of birds,” they noted in the chronicle. If all kinds of winged things fell from the sky, would quietness be more remarkable for happening by flashes? Just today, today you are, are beautiful. Don’t wish for more: to look like this again: why choose to be some history? Can you fix this list:

what influences and what can be used?
Different as kissing is from being kissed.

Now no phrase added to the fact that is
is marvellous, now lifelong poets rear
up from their stanzas, clapping face to voice –
Who should be desperate to be sincere?
No doorstep space for images. Dismissed
those neurochemical upsets, that swear
by daytime darkness, fired skin; those eyes,
that slip like sweated glass; those words, that fear
too much to change, and only change: I hide
in you from you, found out in every where.

His childhood: Swiss, Icelandic: had high peaks,
unhuman views. And so his spirit lifts
in any landscape that's volcanic. Steeps
are his necessity: whatever slips
into less comfortable reaches.
The last place that he brought us on this trip
shone: wind-resistant candles: red and gold
dotting the graves where country people keep
each Christmas Eve among their green-crossed dead.
But we'll spend time like glaciers, dear shape.

February

VALENTINE

Who'd try to tell the fish: it does not matter
about the air, but being hauled to light –
that's memorable, new work for gills, that spatter
reddens silence, reddens red, reels in delight,
would you look at that, fished out of water.
Slow as the couples walking age in hand
between the blues and leaves, they steered this boat,
thinking their course by high points on the land.
The snap. The angler's curse. The snarl. The engine caught.
The line cast further out than he had planned.

FOR A SPACE

HAZARDOUS SHELVES, DEEP WATERS

“[...] The sea, though in hot countries it is considered by those who live, like Sannazarius, upon the coast, as a place of pleasure and diversion, has notwithstanding much less variety than the land, and therefore will be sooner exhausted by a descriptive writer. When he has once shewn the sun rising or setting upon it, curled its waters with the vernal breeze, rolled the waves in gentle succession to the shore, and enumerated the fish sporting in the shallows, he has nothing remaining but what is common to all other poetry, the complaint of a nymph for a drowned lover, or the indignation of a fisher that his oysters are refused, and Mycon’s accepted.

Another obstacle to the general reception of this kind of poetry, is the ignorance of maritime pleasures, in which the greater part of mankind must always live. To all the inland inhabitants of every region, the sea is only known as an immense diffusion of waters, over which men pass from one country to another, and in which life is frequently lost. They have, therefore, no opportunity of tracing, in their own thoughts, the descriptions of winding shores, and calm bays, nor can look on the poem in which they are mentioned, with other sensations, than on a sea-chart, or the metrical geography of Dionysius.

This defect Sannazarius was hindered from perceiving, by writing in a learned language to readers generally acquainted with the works of nature; but if he had made his attempt in any vulgar tongue, he would soon have discovered how vainly he had endeavoured to make that loved, which was not understood.”

”So absolute the deep”

“the lash and hiss of water”

“Hard to salute each other, harder to describe each other, and hardest to look at each other at our destination.”

“And you,
 could you have played a nocturne
using a drainpipe for a flute?”

“What we call wings the birds can give no name.”

“[...] What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes.”

“And what in dreams we do in life we attempt.”

OSLO READINGS

To step forward into summer, you have to step back into winter. In the England you left were crocuses on the verge of decadence, broken open fat and purple, as decorated Easter eggs should but don't.

Oslo. Here is the road sweeping up and down from the focal point of the royal palace; here, chunks of ice swept like a litter of leaves around trees' bases, ice that will not melt on the sunny kerbs, unpacked like styrofoam from the sides of boxes; and here, blankets on chairs in pavement cafés, for draping this city of balcony-builders, wrought iron optimists always about to emerge from the dark of the year.

The crocuses in Oslo have emerged, but barely, shavings of pale purple scraped into spirals, lying at ankle height. For you they are a retrospective of the season that England, hot and moist, has just cast off.

Easter. Let us glory in the dragon's egg that sits in the window of Pascal's, a maze for the eye that slithers into green (unnatural spring!). Walking past one of the top five pâtisseries worldwide as rated by the French, yes it's located in Oslo, let us glory in the egg of metamorphic rock, limestone pressed to crack its cells becoming marble. So on the way to the free museum of Viking ship discoveries, let us glory in the egg that resides like a volcano, a shape of holding-in resplendent in the company of the one intact destroyer: fire.

You will feel the heat, when you travel south to England. The sun, English-silvered, nonetheless will beat into your clothing. Hoodie and cardie, fleece and wool, will not have stopped searching out the chill on your back-to-back street. Forget them. You'll promenade, looking well hard, outstripping the normal progress of seasons. This trip sets on an accelerated summer. How could you bear yourself enough?

Scandinavia.

The average height of things is tall.

I had a little nut-tree and nothing would it bear
But a silver nutmeg and a golden pear . . .

Night in Nils-Juels-Gata: eight p.m. is late at night, in
baby time.

There are baby citizens visible throughout Oslo, as in much
of the rest of 'western' civilization there are babies behind closed
doors. Count them: the parking places for prams in the National
Gallery; the baby café with play mats and tables, cappuccinos and fruit
purée; posters galore for the Pirate School, a useful occupation for the
young during the parents' working day.

And in the park, the park with the paths with variable snow
(hand-deep, thigh-deep, skimming the sole); in that park where branch-
es are pushed aside to reveal an old man in a sleeveless vest speeding
across a frozen lake; that park, the one with the total winter vista such
that the thought of humanity finds itself almost lost two turns from a
bench – what they call a park is a piece of hill ringed off, solitary
almost, but among the pines occasional memorials of previous settle-
ments, signs posting up the exact number of their long-perished cows,
sheep, pigs – there you witnessed the visitation.

Two skiers in red, girl companions – with – what was that,
scudding down the snow behind them? Riding the snow like boats rid-
ing the clouds, toddlers' sleds attached to the skis, visors tinted against
spring glare. In each sled a toddler, burbling fast in the mother's wake,
trailing mittens in degree-zero surf.

Yarn . . . yarn . . . yarn. Yarn.

Another set of glass cases.

Here are the finds from the Viking ships. They present a face
like a lump of clay. These treasures like fossilized golf balls were end-
lessly useful: they were yarn. The tight and careful winding of long ago
is barely discernible but as something hoarded, and now hoarded again:
good stuff, yarn, you cannot ever have too much of it.

Now this – what is it? No. Who – when – where – how?

PEACOCK FEATHERS: a mucky cube.

See the cinematic Viking, grabbing a handful from a whole
roast bird served (feathers stuck back in for presentation purposes) at
an imperial feast in Miklagarðr – Constantinople?

See the bawling brute in a foreign market, jerking a live bird (dull with fright and lack of grain) at the end of a string, pleased and guttural since he has struck a bargain for something so valuable, so rare.

See the trader-and-raider, sorry for bloodshed, offering a fistful of silver for a bunch of feathers already dishevelled and several rivers distant from their bird. He would have been willing to pay more than that; he does not know why, but he must have them. The look of the thing makes him glad and shy. He marvels. Dreams took shelter from the storms of steel, dreams; encamped themselves behind his idealizing killer eyes. Like the modern soldier who has survived, not intact, but intense, to raise doves or mow the lawn, your Viking would defend with every cruelty this crumb, this corner, this pocket bouquet of compacted plumes, for they are long away and nevermore, they are beyond the bounds, pure, happiness.

Under the ashen museum lighting you squint through the glass. You read the label. Peacock feathers. A green glisten washes over the chewed plasticine cube.

Can you anticipate a surprise? There will be lilies when you get back to England. They cup colour in a way that oppresses, like wine glasses designed to be a little too big – hold that drop too much – intoxicate more, and more quickly.

Blood is seeping around the bruised bone of your friend's mending wrist that broke his fall when he was skiing.

This is meantime. This is holiday. The hospital was good.

The King of Spain's daughter came to visit me . . .

Washed-out and feral in daylight hours, she poises herself at the brink of night. The young mother's voice bubbles up behind the closed door, song after song, source of lullabies. It is like being the guest of a holy well covered over from tourists: you feel purified, and a little ashamed. You draw your door shut upon such active love, and sit with your work, lacking speech.

Streetlit on the walls of your temporary room are images stuck there by your Oslo friends: trolls and scissors; cross-hatched women in folkloristic linen; Mount Fuji; a pyramid wave; a great rec-

tangle that is the political map of the world as it must have been quite recently.

The words on the page no longer stand for meanings. It is an ink museum, a resistant sculpture park, a thicket of trees where the eye gets lost holding on to wrought iron fences. Each railing is barbed with a spear point. A vision of authority, the words stand out, separate, deadly, fine, archaic.

But the sounds, the sights and sounds, there must be an unbroken connection?

Rounds and stops glisten quietly up. Your tongue flattens into a bowl. Your tongue hauls itself up against your teeth. Air forces an escape, heat and moisture whooshing over your palate. Your lips are at a loss.

The sounds are individual. This makes no sense at all.

For how long have you been hissing and swaying gently, hypnotized in the park of wild letters? Your mouth transforms into plums, trapezes, safety razors, trying to hang a curtain of flesh between your breath and the magician's-mirror printed page.

It is springtime in Oslo. You have forgotten how to read. Go home.

FROM FIRST TO LAST HIS BOOKS, THAT STARTED THIN,
GREW LESS, AND I'D PUT MYSELF IN DEBT TO BUY
ALL FOUR OR FIVE OF THEM

Fame came to him at an age
when already long begun
was his way of moving off.
He wanted less of the words –
they were fewer, though not thought
pure; denser, pocked key-heads through
paper, as if resistless.
The most was, “I saw something”.
Like ending a letter “Love”,
he wrote, as if to people.
He was a generous man.

DISAPPEARING PEOPLE

When he saw her walking
he knelt down to the pavement
and bending, with his nails and fists
tugged at a stone the shape of a fish
so she could step smoothly;
and she did, without looking.

At the foot of a statue
blessed with lions and pigeons
she changed direction; then he dug
into his shoulder blades to find an arch
to hold back the sun for her.

But the winding road took her.
The winding road took her
where – like piano hammers
that rise and strike in accord with the keys
whose black-and-white sound is produced out of sight –
people fall into action,
play a violent rumour.
She fiddled, half crying.
The lock would not open.
For a quarter-hour plants increased
far above. She no longer sensed
the meaning of talking;
and the catch kept on sliding.

When she'd finished climbing,
six centuries hemmed her.

Careless how her eyes added up,
raising her voice, she flung a demand.
But it shivered back against her.
For the figure she spoke to
lay fast, without turning.

As egrets fly over
reclaimed land in a whiteness
more plangent than the mangrove salt
crusting their wings,

just so was the gate
less wrought than what lay there,
arms fronting the ceiling.

But she shouted to it,

I am missing a layer.

You know how it has gone.

Where is the skin that pasted my bones?

*My breastbone is pulsing
with my breath palpitating.*

By my life! Give me cover!

What amends for no surface?

I keep down to a walking pace.

Still it goes surging, spilling out, life:

I need to close it,

what you took without moving.

When a sculptor, dying,
leaves abandoned, confounded,
half-made in marble, human grain,
even those prisoned bodies relate
more than was forthcoming
from under this linen.

Then it stirred, more slowly
than someone feeling drawn to
make friends with someone they resent
makes an occasion for getting vexed.
The sheets like milk thickened.
And it said,

Yes, you beauty.

Just don't make this about me.

*You get too far into your work,
then turn around with a tragic look
to see who still loves you.*

You should try being lonely.

I won't exchange stories.

You lose so much from people.

*Seen from within fleece rings of clouds,
shadows of mountains deepen to blue.*

*I will not get over
what you guess at and worry.
You won't make me ask you
to get out. If you want to . . .
you go. I've said more than I want,
you're pushing fire, I'm not sure it's right.
You're almost as bad as
when your skin had not opened.*

The night she went into
boxed the city in velvet:
the Hunter sewn onto the sky;
rose and pistachio buildings foiled.
The rich were out strolling.
The poor, costumed as statues,
made a plea of slow motion
but, hurriedly springing, would break
attitude, taking coins, giving thanks.
Where the law insisted
(but the river went shrugging
like snakes between gigantic heels)
bridges emerged, and cavities filled
the middle of towers.
Every turn became civil.
The form of the city
made it hard to realize that
worlds may exist without a frame
made to the measure of man. No escape
for harmony's conscripts,
neither random nor single.

City bridged by gestures,
streets that frame us as symbols,
granting a light too great to adopt,
city that drowns each given heart,
a spring of tears with it,
stone aflower with strangers!

And, petal by petal,
the night-lights of apartments

descending tremble to a glow
mirrored as columns, innocent how
they join, draw black water
into amber reflection.

*

Now she – his beginning
is where she finds his limit,
voiced thing of light she strives to reach,
showing beyond beyond her reach,
hers, spirit's dreamed boundary –

Don't say it so clearly!

Unlike speakers who look for
new forms to put words in to make
sense out of visions forced to escape
dialogue, he fell back
on timeworn words, time-honoured.

There's nothing beyond words.

You can always be clearer.

So shame becomes both vain and false.

*Too self-regarding, it has no place
in the face of this living.*

Work deserves to be needed.

Is this too complicated?

Forgiveness, when our concepts
slide towards slickness, seeking repair,
slipping the rope of heart-ridden air
where language crests, hopeless –
to be true, he should stay there:
restricted to breakage
of images that penned them.

She even put the air to blame,
when (as was right) it worked around him,
piece of brightness surrounded
by good humour, half-savaged.

See courteous sounds shiver,

*as words, when air has frozen,
spoken, disperse on iced-up breath.
Unspoken instead against the mouth
they would have displaced winter.
For the place of kissing
permits the supreme act
of interpretation –
obscure salutation, lucid exchange –
all forms fall short of.*

*So love would make
more than reparation:
unfinishing delight.
Through that thought, rest truly.
At best they could have left there,
not practised praising.*

*Thermals rise
warm through cool levels. Stress in one phrase,
imperfectly levelled, may unshutter love wholly.*

*The purest convention,
empty words, best can bear it
when content must surpass the use
intellect claims for analysis.
This surpassing content –
love – is that recognition?*

*There was a questionnaire
that began with a statement:
Your ideal object's clothing hangs
badly. You must account for two things,
perhaps more, and others,
before we will clear you
to cross our borders.*

*If you take it for granted
that local variants exist
in the experience of air, how best
would you, briefly, describe it?*

*Second, can you answer
(not compare or contrast)*

*what basic opposition
should hold between a pair that seems
similar as a skeleton leaf
seems to crumpled paper's
rose-shapes littered with letters,
when both let light through them?*

She was tired and panicked.
Someone had stolen the cheap bag
containing her documents. In her hand
three sets of house keys, unlabelled.
Her women's clothes had no pockets.
She couldn't pay for
so much as one cup of coffee.
These evenings closed early and cold.
Walking too fast, she had to pretend,
in muddle-through England,
to be making an effort
like a free choice, unguided.
She made it to the station.
A silver-haired man walking past
as if on business, hissed *Fuck your breasts*.
She moved away quickly.
The lech stared at her kindly.
Not fear. Not anger.
Disgust crawled her fingertips.
Cold blasted through her cotton dress,
handsewn too far away.
She went along again, harassed,
through streets patched blue and amber.
A man like an index.
A woman, not a flower.
There was a questionnaire that asked
nothing on earth and all the rest.
A man like a lily.
A woman like a city.
Clever people are drinking
and, watching their anger

over wineglasses, say what they do,
each to their own, the bottle eyed up.
They name far-flung lovers.
Their failing mouths grudge full bladders.

So she sat there frozen
and still simply bewildered.
The thing not to be called a soul
cringing within her – such ugliness hurled
at random, no reason,
an attack on aloneness.
She'd become a member
of the waiting classes
attached to winter's cold. Half-seen,
how it increased, populated the street,
cold winter's mist forming,
going slower but surer.

*

She is like a knife blade
that has been too much sharpened:
less like metal, more like a leaf;
so apt for use, so used to be keen –
it can no longer cut
without risk of breaking.
She cannot stop seeing
his real presence as memory.
Half face-to-face, the mind's eye looks.
Floor swishes to fire underfoot
and bends (piece of brightness)
the way he is going.

Is love time's destroyer;
love's essence, recognition?
An empty space grazes his side,
large as success; another beside
her. Light pumps out from them,
light, flame one stage purer.

There was a questionnaire
that began: *What appearance
does fire have, where you were born?
How do you hold someone in your arms
and yet not touch them? or,
How to smell shifting weather?*

Tearing my eyes on them,
locked in to their image,
I looked far and began to write,
hoping to answer the things of my mind
so their hearts could open
and open unexamined.
To tell about fire . . .

Dawn's cloth, cut out to try on,
slides light along the Northern Range,
pins pricking seams of sunrise that graze
the iron-pink mountains
that start showing their temper.
Like Indian cotton,
so fragile in its brilliance,
dawn's gentle colours are not fixed,
readily bleeding, lost in the wash.
The mountains stay pink with
their own ore and where forests,
being slashed, come down burning.
Helicopters go raiding.
Man traps, built like they were for slaves,
guard marijuana planters' estates.
Young government forces
stand round bonfires, smiling
at the weed they set burning.
It goes with the territory.
The godly tree, flame Immortelle,
rare, yes endangered, shoots so tall
one makes up for thousands.
Promethean mountains?
Home to poor planters,

rich land scratched out given
perennially to drugs, that stun
those who must grow them for export; that stunt
the growth of the country
that depends on bad money.

He is like a grotto
built from imported coral.
The blocks look porous. They are rough.
Animal-ocean stuff too close up
yields notions, not natures,
being dragged from lost totals.

Some people look hungry
even when well looked after.
Is so they stop. Their faces set,
calamitous in their innocence,
speaking weakened by anger
that is strength to the lonely.

If she tries re-creating
some past and some present,
it is a form of gratitude,
shaken out from the aptitude
for joy: not desire,
but light, light through all living,
such superabundance,
beyond likely resources.
A future – that's not in their gift:
infinities more of work than faith,
time grown consequential,
a sense of consequences.

PERSON ANIMAL FIGURE

The animal who knocks and patters lives in the next room. It is visible only behind the curtains and only from the street. Then it appears as a stripe of dark blue. This animal moves quickly in a restricted space. It has a fondness for chimney pots. It inquires about fireplaces. When it mourns, it becomes the length of a Victorian flue. Having a capacity to whistle that it does not exercise, it brings instead a small breeze to accompany it. The creature may be found as a warmth between the legs of walnut tables. It cabins itself in stationery boxes. It strides hopefully through a room with one door. Such an animal begins work before dawn. Its hours of rest may be known by a gentle swooshing sound. It is unwise to open the door to the next room. The animal at work has a sideways bite that leaves a whorled graze like a conch shell in the small of the interruptor's calf. Through the keyhole it may be observed that the animal who knocks and patters has invisible feet.

The animal who kisses persistently is much to be avoided. The more it is avoided, the more it comes back. It will seek out its prey in the middle of dreams about castles in nowhere, and make its catch before the staircase in the upper servants' hall. This animal is known to feel like a peach that has been rained on. It carpets itself and plasters itself but insists that it does not cling. The degree of wildness that characterizes this animal has yet to be ascertained. It announces itself with popping sounds like a champagne bottle being opened on the roof. To determine the whereabouts of this animal, it is advised to make a fresh cup of tea and leave it lying about as if forgotten. With a loud slurp the top of the tea will be taken off. A second slurp, if permitted – and it seldom can be avoided – will put away half the cup. That is the way that the animal who kisses persistently strengthens itself in preparation for the attack.

The animal who has a leaf in its mouth is not to be comforted. It chews on the leaf to keep bitterness fuzzing its geranium tongue. It believes itself to be under siege from internal parasites. It chews the leaf, and chews the leaf, in no real hope of a cure. It chews, yet never gets further than the stem. Believing itself forlorn, it shuns embraces. It shines bright gold with misery. Forgiveness is beside the point; this animal seeks justice. It demonstrates extreme patience while remaining

uncondemned by the world. It is willing to wait for condemnation. If told its faults, it stiffens its back and walks on, chewing. It knows itself beyond improvement, so will not hear of its faults. It tries to get it right. It is never enough. It behaves as if wedded to a leaf the shape of a centaur's arrow. Such an animal makes a very faithful companion for those not seeking a pet. The animal who has a leaf in its mouth will stretch itself and vomit over one's feet, thereby getting rid of the leaf while making its one sure demonstration of trust.

The animal who feeds is ashamed of itself, for it keeps on feeding. The way to make it less ashamed is to offer it more food. Even then its dumb look will signal not gratitude but shame. Is there a recommended daily base diet for this bad beast? Much. Tablespoons of honey are an important supplement in colder months. It will be immensely cheered, and quite uncontrollable, if it is not left to feed alone. However, communal feeding will eventually cause it to become shamed, and thin. The remedy is simple: it consists in the offer of more food, which must be made as if it is the feeder who still experiences hunger. The animal will force a share upon the feeder, who must accept, as these animals are prone to eat themselves if refused. So required to eat by way of encouraging the animal, the feeder risks growing fat. The thin feeding animal can be persuaded to accept the lion's share under the guise of leftovers. The animal who feeds likes being sent on walks; otherwise it requires little care, and will sleep in bliss under a bare hundred-watt bulb.

The animal who sleeps, sleeps. Streaming and growling, conscienceless it sleeps. It dreams of being a fleet of animals running in perfect time with other, smaller animals running underneath it; and how all of them roll. Presenting an unsuspecting massiness, it radiates heat so night hours melt. The watcher of this animal had better beware. The animal who sleeps is most active in its sleep, and its lion-limbs are great with pinning force.

I am the person who buys stamps with the Queen's head on them because this is England isn't her profile fine was it really as fine as that yes people who remember the nineteen fifties say it was as fine as that or I wonder I suppose if people who rule have to have the right kinds of heads for stamps and coins why a letter because if your family lives far away they are in a

different time zone I do not mean hours they are not modern you know people in different time zones they buy Heinz and have cell phones but they love at long distance and hold on to bits of paper shuffled their way over the years nice to be remembered by them it's like living in the past that's why it doesn't matter so much about those places they are now but you see they really are the past anyway we're all right

though

Being the person who buys stamps I am the person who stands up among the special offers why is the queue so long does that girl at the cash desk not know how to pack things or is it that she can't well you know perhaps she hasn't been here long in this country I mean you watch her children will go to the university here her children well I don't know they always look young she might be sixteen she might be thirty-five it is important to smile at her I'm sure it makes a difference if people speak hello lovely weather who really buys ylang ylang and tangerine shampoo three for the price of two save the stickers for a free two-day break in Tunisia not that I say that no she has this job but doesn't really speak speak English or to me anyway they're all right

though

Being the person who stands up among the special offers I am the person who stands up beneath the magazines cars which cars and houses too no I do not do houses the poor people who have to decorate houses for a living and cannot turn around and say well I'm going to do something else be an artist or a lawyer or a chef in a Scottish hotel not like us we could all do those things so it is important I mean to give these people work hire them they do better out of it than we do you know they do their own houses no labour costs and have you seen their cars no I don't mind if I had a body like hers I'd have my boobs out too and yellow hot pants who knows that's why it's in the top row just a bit of fun better than covering it up there's freedom for you probably not even hers digitally enhanced nothing to be embarrassed about a flash of bosom on the shelf or on the

street in the summer have you seen the Germans I mean in Germany have you been to Denmark well well that's all right

though

Being the person who stands up beneath the magazines I am the person who is angry with feminists for putting it into my head that people think the magazines have something to do with all women which means with women like me what a load of rubbish ask anyone right here right now they would all say no they would think you were mad nobody thinks about my body when I talk when I walk across the park at night with my shopping of course you can't be afraid I'm sure I'm just as good as invisible perfectly safe and there is good money in it for the girls they all want to do it it's the glamour where's the glamour have I been deprived of my right to glamour it's quite nice when strange men call you darling men mean well a lot of the time everybody means well really most of the time we're all right

though

Being the person who is angry with feminists now I am the person who feels as if there are mouths all over me no I don't mean like that nothing nasty I mean my own mouths that is mouths that are me big ones like liver and pink ones like shells carmine rosebuds crimson geisha pouts cowgirl slashes like a whipscar tanning a face the mouths are rustling beneath my coat soft soft like a cushion if I fell over but anybody could shove anything in them and if I fell over not sanitary at all none of the mouths is old we can take care of ourselves a body composed entirely of roses of flesh so when the young men by the new flats not very nice flats cut across and across me for fun when I'm walking my mouths quiver because they know they've been seen through my clothes what nonsense they'd do that to anyone wouldn't they this story surprised my husband why because he's six feet tall not because he's a man he walks straight forward eyes front and quite mouthless through just the same places it's how you hold yourself why don't I try that's a good reason for heels they give you authority I'm all right

The animal who is perfect in its ways is composed of hiding places. Its limbs enfold nooks where shadowy creatures mutter their way to rest. It has no line but a lift to it. When a ball is beaten towards it, the animal who is perfect in its ways grows to an expanse of gold and disappears in a column of silver; its contacts with objects are made like questions that are glad, unsurprised.

The animal who is perfect in its utterance talks equably in its sleep. It roars, it growls, it digs, it howls, it rawls. The animal who is perfect in its utterance gives voice undisturbed to hunger like caves.

The animal who is perfect in its gazing is neither yellow nor blue, neither black nor silver. It is quick as a mirror and transparent as pools. Whatever it sees splashes outwards. It takes in all things in their constant stir. The animal who is perfect in its gazing leaves the onlooker sidestepped and drenched.

The animal who is perfect in its things owns nothing that it does not approach nose first. It has names for imaginary dwellings and seems to forget where it lives. In its mind it carries a tree with bark white as the Himalayas. The animal who is perfect in its things puts itself where it happens to be.

The animal who is perfect is the animal who is perfect who is ongoing who is a tending animal not often mindful of itself, but then it is.

I have been talking to the wrong people they make me guilty about everything! what can I do! Let me say that I have enjoyed being a tourist and meeting all those people with alternative lives you find quite a lot of them up in Yorkshire remember the girl in Hebden Bridge who was dressed like a stage hand in black and laughed like a student but was a waitress and served us homemade pumpkin cake in that old café which was not properly converted really the bathroom was just like a bathroom in an old-fashioned house rather nice for a change but what a waste of space don't you think they could have put in at least five more tables by knocking some walls through but it was sweet to put out wooden blocks on the window sill for customers to play with I never could build things so I built a church that is easy two arms and something sticking up actually that girl was

rather forward bringing the cake she toppled the church on purpose and I tried to build something else but couldn't think what there are so many pagans these days people are friendlier up North and the cake was good.

Yes!

I still feel so guilty about everything! what can I do! Let me say that if I write transcriptions of life as it happens to me this is not out of nervousness I am sure I'm authentic I am not bearing witness to the fact that I feel real how to feel real forget about the cameras it's perfectly natural to pick up the phone stay in touch darling is it fair to write anything an intelligent twelve year old could not understand I'm sure I know many of those and twelve was the age when an ancient boy could go out in ships being a Viking yes twelve is the yardstick there is this man whose lyrics I admire he tells me I've never met him of course about the fall of leaves and the train or the plane and the look of the Channel and who was buried somewhere oh this is beautiful and his grandmother this is deep this is true and in translation this is lucid exact without any grand vague philosophical baggage dammit I'm a person I will make a claim I like to read read books on the London Underground it's very spi-spiritual if you don't mind my using that word.

Yes!

I feel less guilty when woman mountaineers appear on T.V. because they remind me that they are the few now I can relax I'm not expected! what can I do! Let me say that the supermarket is something to celebrate just look at it orange pink green brown purple who says you can't have bright colours in England they say it's because it doesn't look good with our light well there's no daylight in these aisles so how it glows shall I have strawberries for Christmas mangoes in Grantchester bananas in Haworth think of those apples winging their way from New Zealand burn burn burn those air miles and you black billion year fossil fuels burn burn yeah I smell an oven nobody would think it's cold outside seeing those coconuts those olives think of all those hands harvesting in lovely warm countries there's

progress for you big spills of sunshine on bare feet and funny hats isn't it wonderful it's like the whole world ends up in here green and succulent fruits of the future dream no more we've arrived you could get shut in here at night and never miss a thing miso soup toothbrush Disney DVD oh what a lovely fleece they say they put out smells to entice us to buy things but no maybe I'm naïve I just stand here and sniff innocent pleasure snorting up the aromas of baguettes and roast chicken holly-ivy puddings then move on unperturbed and just buy my simple salmon they feed salmon pellets now isn't that clever some people say the pellets have stuff in that attacks people's brains I'm sure that can't be true they just don't like commercial success well tough titties fish is for everyone at last always Christmas and never winter that's what it is.

Yes!

I am sure I shouldn't hate myself for feeling guilty! what can I do! Let me say it was a struggle to give up punctuation but we all have to make sacrifices not everybody has such a lot of punctuation these days better not have any just to be quite fair but there are some things I can't quite give up it's wicked I know it's the apostrophes that get me I could never resist a well-placed apostrophe dinky things when you come to think about it wriggling there like the fish and the hook all in one sometimes I wake up with such a craving for a semicolon they say those are the worst bring you to a halt sooner than anything else and abolish your vitals like a dissolving fire so I just remind myself you've got to talk to people at work today no punctuation at all till after six p.m. then you can put your feet up and snuggle on the sofa in an Argos fleece throw with a mug of hot chocolate and a dash or so as a little pressie to yourself and watch The Bill is it wrong to wish sometimes I wish I were back in Europe it was grand that summer over there I would get up with a real thirst hold off till about ten in the morning then sit in that café in the cool with a tall glass of fizzing vitamins and brilliant punctuation there were real people from Europe at that café and you know what they had been at it since breakfast as far as I could tell big dignified people happy as children with crystal and stoneware brackets and suspensions properly

placed you could see how they liked it they thought the rules were fun though I am sure they must have had their sacrifices somewhere just like us yet the funny old things weren't self-conscious at all go figure.

Yes!

I know what makes me feel guilty! Let me say that everyone needs to confront their fears. And you will need a lot of punctuation to do that. I have not confronted my fears, though I should. It is something that anyone can do without having to leave the house. In fact, it is advisable not to leave the house. The neighbourhood isn't what it was; if you start talking to any of those strangers, you won't have the energy to confront your fears. In fact, I must confront my fears at home. In fact, home is the only place where anyone truly confronts their fears – isn't it? Let's see. The lace curtains, net curtains, Venetian blinds, roller blinds, Roman blinds, wooden shutters, plate glass, cardboard sheets, Velux windows, window locks, cat flap and blackout fabric have been taken care of. The brass letterflap is a point of weakness, but what can one do? It is a period detail and cannot be removed without altering the character of this desirable midterrace Edwardian property with parking space and courtyard garden which used to house a family of nine in three rooms including Bill a broadshouldered factory worker who had sausages twice a week to his tea as a treat comprising most of his weekly meat and who spat into the cast iron fireplace at which he could warm one and a half of his size nine feet original tiles remain in a pattern of pink roses on a white ground. The punctuation went there. I have double-bolted, deadlocked, Yale locked, chained, wired, and alarmed the door. You will find nothing beneath the flowerpot and the door opens straight on to the pavement by the parking space so there is no risk of an outside doormat. I am very lucky. It is complacent to wish that everyone was so lucky, but sometimes I do, especially when listening to the radio after going to bed. It stays on till morning. Confronting my fears, I have balanced flour to fall on the head of anyone who opens the front door, and dragged a genuine burr walnut ladies' kneehole writing desk very good condition slight scratches to the legs secret drawer original lock

and key has to be seen to be appreciated against the back door. Possessions are a wonderful comfort. They fill up the pauses like nothing on earth. I have strung a line of tin cans across the doorway that will jangle if anyone comes in. I have never mended the creaking tread in the stairs, fifth from the bottom, which is fair warning time. Now I am sure that I am alone. I shall begin to confront my fears.

What animal? Does it learn like a child at night, listening to its own screaming?

What animal? Does it wait for a bowl of milk, or stalk off, toothed and self-feeding?

What animal? Can it know itself owned by those animals smaller than itself?

What animal? Can it own those animals when it is smaller than anything else?

What animal?

I fear I do not have good taste at home good taste was more everybody stopped somewhere but up to a point whether it was gold and pink china custom-tailored jackets children's school certificates nests of tables thickness of mascara days on a European tour or barbaric jewellery from Great-Great-Grandma's first marriage to an East India Company man up to some not easily definable point it was more now these days I cannot tell at all only the people behind the counters in banks and dress shops talk to me as if I were poor but the poor eye me like loose change and I never wore such expensive shoes with polyester socks before the first time I saw a Christmas tree decorated in beige was three years ago is it wrong to like ribbons well perhaps in London naturally.

I would fear the void but I should have outgrown that it is like keeping books about dragons in the bookcase instead of a box under the bed it is like pressing blue flowers in dictionaries of languages you have forgotten but that you read poetry in once

thinking of someone who was not with you and who now might be anywhere the void returns to good taste that turns on subtlety subtlety is a form of nothing in a room furnished white on white who dares even put down newspapers little differences say between chenille and linen textures make the wide spectrum eyeball lighted day.

I should be afraid of feeling that we have been here before for example with a person who seems overwhelmingly nice how to explain that affinity the delight with which I see them they are unaware of that though also pleased it is a little bit crazy like the young man in the park alone in a corner flying a crimson kite how he pulled and folded his knees to run and the red thing coursed above him flying the flag of his own blood that he followed like a dancer masterful and helpless between the disciplines of gravity and the stage that is just the ground floor of his excellently ordered air whoever lurks in the shrubbery to watch him sees themselves instead as a child waving to aeroplanes in the days or the pages of childhood when every sign in the sky lifted us without fear fear we kept for indoors.

I have a fear of clouds through a window as a child I thought I played with clouds there was that day a storm was coming so I ran around the house racing the yellow edge of thunder and the clouds boiled thick this was good then at bath-time in the foam I thought of holidays double-decker aeroplanes moving through the cumulus those moments were somehow not true wet grey too permeable then then ah then above the clouds the solid dazzling marble couches for reclining gods that I was in love with yes with all of them Greek ones until the day alone at home ah this is good I thought a grown woman with a day off to look out the window and there they were the scientific clouds freezing freezing crystallizations sparkle evaporated solidity no more how cold the winds and how treacherous my eyes that made them shapely I never could survive clouds not being among them now the look of the sky turns me cold in between my fat and my skin oh so I shiver in layers of human fear hide the window.

I shall not call it fear what happened then to colour it was in a country in the north the apartment was honey with pine the sky

a series of vanishing acts we don't look at those too long and high on the sides of buildings iron flowers trivets for citizens to stand on and steam taking the air well colour it was the cover of a book a green book I thought only the light fell over it the reinforced paper was a mutinous mask not-purple not-brown it presented not-colour to the point of saturation like an ill cocktail I turned away from the sight into my memories did I ever pass a field of tilled earth maybe from a train I'd seen something like that not-brown not-purple relieving issued green and what happened it did then memory ran out suddenly light ran like liquid and I was betrayed by everything I'd put a hand on put a name to for I could no longer say the green book the green was not was not-green was not not-green the green book was red and nothing was but as it seems and I screamed to meaning in my head what it means 'the green book' is the book is green under a level kind of ordinary light and that light exists nowhere but in the mind and now not there either.

This dark figure moves from peripheral vision when the nest of the body has sprung apart. It jets up from the ground. Turned to face each bodily action, it leads as it beckons, beckons as it mirrors, contracting, decontracting, by a plumage spray of lines.

This dark figure envelops as it emerges. Its flow of limbs manifests in the form of valleys of shadow. To have one's head within and touching its shoulders is to rise on a string of stillness towards the hovering grip of an oval that has direction and is no face.

This dark figure, in sending itself out, draws after. Constant on all sides, it places itself ahead, proceeding containing the person, that which is drawn at its back. The prickle of nerves betokens the instances of its moves.

This dark figure exceeds human hopes of summoned familiars. Who shuts their eyes on it finds it absorbs a central solar whirl. Who is never within is without it, subject to suctioning gasps. The air makes holes in those so detached, bodies unable to catch themselves up.

Detachment is this dark figure. That is immeasurable as one.

That animal will not say: I held an image like a shape of damp sand

in the hollow of my fist, a shape fit for cities with cathedrals. Now you have made me explain it, the movement of my fingers explaining it has brought about loss. Look, a pinnacle has crumbled, and the right side no longer has a door.

That is the animal whose mouth is a curve.

That animal chooses the way that is easy to it for that is the way for which it is most fitted. Who can follow that? It canters along without trouble until it comes up against a rock face. It grazes itself, takes courage, and relaxes the points of its shoulders. It has no next steps. Its feet are shiny. That animal begins to soar.

That is the animal whose mouth is a point.

That animal whose mouth is long cannot hide its incisors. It snuffles as gently as it can for it has learnt about human kisses.

This animal, turned out and kept for domestic use in the suburbs, gets flat, damp fur. It rubs itself against the walls until the paint flakes off them. It fouls the garden with the wax that drops from build-up in its ears. It loses the sense of puddles and sits in a pool of its own misery. It believes that scraps are its portion. It eats toasted mould. It offers its back for the bearing of heavy loads but can only rise to its knees. It does not know to ask, to ask to be let out.

This animal, faithful and grateful, accepts punishment as its due. It notes the loss of its own gloss but in the absence of substantial bodies of water can do nothing but itch through its pelt. It does not wonder that an unattractive animal should be badly kept. The animal that it was is a sugar-fuelled dream. It sees its own eye reflected in brass bathroom fittings and feels something like fear.

This animal that was accustomed to perform several rescues per day now is kept going by mean and intermittent attentions and soothes. It looks about for gifts to bring and arrives with rubbish wrappers dangling purple and orange from the side of its colourless mouth. For these gifts, it is beaten.

This animal tries to make a nest in a kitchen that is cold. Onion skin

falls to the floor like a putrid blanket. Soot peppers this animal's fur. It is a lashed and pitted animal.

This animal bursts the house open one day and finds another. It cannot do without houses now, but it will find a house that is more wild. It seeks, plunging through rivers and moorland. Its former keeper must keep up or be rolled and bitten. This animal bounds and rises. It is pliable when it likes and heavy when it will. It nudges the moon and tunnels the earth and greets the dawn like a fury. It is an animal that knows no terms. It cares nothing for sweetness or savagery. This animal remains beyond those animals forever.

VIRTUAL PRESENTS

FOUND SONG

I Sing a Song, Naromankayem.
He is in love with her, or makes much of her, Ichoatoati tao.
Kiss me, Chouba nioumoulougou.
I would be named, name me, Yetikleé yatek.
He loves him, Kinchinti loné, Tibouinati.
He hates him, Yerekati loné.
A quarrel, Liouélébouli.
Drunkenness, Liuetimali.
Strike, beat, Baikoaba.
A whip or wand, Abaichaglé.
Beat him, Apparabaë.
Scratch, Kiomba.
Kill him, Chiouibae.
He is well, Atouattienly.
He is sick, Nanegaeti, Naneteiti.
Sickness, Aneck.
He hath bewitched me, Naraliatina.
I will be revenged, Nibane bouibatina.
Revenge, Nayouibanabouli.
He hath bitten him, Kerrelialo.
He is wounded, Niboukabouali.
He is yet living, Nouloukeili, M. Kakekeili, W.
Life, Lakakechoni.
He is dead, Aouéli, Nikotamainali, M. Hilaali, W.
Bury him, or it; which is not said only of a man, but generally of whatsoever is put into the ground, as of a Plant, Bonumbaë.
Burial, Tonamouli.

WHICH WAY UP?

His factory makes plastic cups.
He's frightened by memory loss.

Passing obscurely away . . .
is a night shift worker
daytime insomnia
he has two sons
(one's there one's here)
sees no sights
this man

Guyana's ex-footballer
acquires no accents
on automatic
drives his gear car
(now here then there)
with mild fists
huge gone

He's frightened by memory loss . . .
His factory makes plastic cups.

Which way up?

Huge gone
with mild fists
(now here then there)
drives his gear car
on automatic
acquires no accents
Guyana's ex-footballer

This man
sees no sights
(one's there one's here)
he has two sons
daytime insomnia
is a night shift worker
passing obscurely away . . .

KITCHEN BUSINESS

As if as normal
a bird hit the window
at some speed just like nothing
it was sitting on the fence
by the time I could realize
that wood and blinking pain
perched outside my head.

FOR SO LONG

The usual blend of night and stars and sand,
snapped to last, could substitute for honey

(It was no joy,
 toiling up the ridges,
except that unexpected warmth
in stone.

I felt, and wanted it to be,
clear fire.
Now I'm afraid
to call on fire: its human smell.

The landscape mixes, and skin seals
on joints' thrown rhyme.
Sand's more
forgiving: the impact so much less.

Who's mystical,
 swears that clocks climb backwards?
You'd laugh them off; my life's no proof,
your own.)

did it not resemble how sight passed
to bitter at one shot far out of hand.

SLEEPLESSNESS: SIX

Who's been drinking quicksand?
Our insatiable clock has.
The breezeblocks barred nothing.
Stripes are getting past the pillars.
*Want a drink of water
to take the edge off.*

Tilting round thoughts,
one shadow head flattens.
Nighttime has cool guests:
Footsteps. Pause. Silence.
*So, walk the corridors.
The house has gone zebra.*

(Cheese-and-bread lady,
her time's after lights-out.
Lines like instant coffee
rule her rough thumb).
*A drink of boiled water.
A tumbler, with ice cubes and a straw.*

Two steps down,
the evaporated reception room.
Could falling stain the terrazzo now
full of fronds and moon.
*It should slip down like emulsion.
The kitchen is newly scumbled.*

One light's on somewhere further.
The switch sits fingernail-cool.
Are you the same kind as the creature?
The light globes in the living room.
*Short in the indoor nighttime,
walk hugging the floor.*

Eyes take yellow notice.
Tiger-Mother. Seen
in her natural surroundings: aloneness.
She rips out a book. She feeds.
*We are of the same kind,
you and I.*

HEREDITY

Land animals demand a notion
of sea green.

Don't go there.

Plentiful
as dead man's fingers,
answers ribbon out
among the angelfish –

Yourselves,
ankles caressed in rented sandals,
conceive a wish for alteration
floating clear and floating under,
rocked by gorgonia, fanned by dreadlocks,
concede a rush of alterations –

half creatures, half notions of sea green.

A doctor (praise his insight) diagnosed
fifty years' schizophrenia, released
a woman in her eighties from the names
holy, senile, sane.

They say,
Listen to your grandmothers.

This one
put out milk for snakes;
died in public,
coming back to life
in her favourite god's arms;
sent her maid
to thrust a loaf over the gate

at the cast-off son
who (thinking himself a visitor)
came from the cruel asylum
on foot.

What happens to devotion such as hers
for the Triple-Lotus Lord, Whose Consort is
the Chandi, She Who Tears Apart Thought?

Both eyes closed, see a single eye
swim across the bridge of the nose.
How does it seem so?
Is this, then, under water? Utterly?
Unstrung
the body's code
lies between
parrot fish and rocks, not yet and never,
black water recrossed,
tight-fitting genes.

ANACONDA

Water most closely resembles space,
more so than our hard imagining
of ideal nothings; water, sure as snakes
are steady, pouring over every sit-
uation.

The day the man was measuring
the lawn for tents to seat those who would feed
after the prayers for our dead, the sun brought
a smell, it woke putridity among
the thriving aubergines in the expat's lot beside us, that we called
waste land, and viewed as vacant.

Then the birds
began arriving, and the message was not one
of sympathy, no more than sky is blue
with trying, effortful, to hear with what
we gasp and deafen ourselves: sublime.
Black, black, the vultures seemed to stem like ink
from the nibbed, judgmental mountains. They looked
as proud as raptors, fearless, let me watch
(looking me in the eye) their cooperation.

And they held it up: a rope to shame
a zoo; a length of cappuccino marble;
cream, black, and brown, its head and tail still
parenthetical, unseen upon
the earth among the vines. Two vultures pinned
it straight upon the air for all the rest.
Snake hugs the shape of what it must become.

OUTDOORS INDOORS

Sparky.

Sparky the Parrot.

Sparky

goes

with

purpose

feels the impulse to fly

not flying feels the sense

of the side of a chair

starts climbing Sparky sees

the snake between the roof

and no ceiling the snake

in the house

Sparky's green

chlorophyll pistachio

Ganesh-green

Sparky's blue

poison-throat starlet-lid

lotus-blue

Sparky's red

Sparky knows what is red

(Sparky's ruffle is in

such bad taste)

Sparky fights

Sparky confronts the snake

in the house an arm's length

wriggle of detachment

the young constrictor moves

shuts sleeve-like will have fed

Sparky rules

in this house

near forest

where no house

puts ceilings to the rooms
for fear of trapped fruit bats
Sparky
who had his wings clipped
who had her wings clipped
(too young to lay an egg
it doesn't matter which)
sidles,
the almost silent the tender fistful
crab-wise and falcon-faced
triumphant.

MARKING TIME

They jab roots, take off,
rattle guava branches,
fierce and raucous, green-rumped,
at that cooler moment:
six o'clock, a school day,
in your other hemisphere.

How well you don't know them,
how sure the day's induced.
Move north and east, to England.
Noon seems like five p.m.
You confer upon church pigeons,
you bequeath you
through following their milky motions through
novel reassurance of return,
some body's exultation
exulting in right use.

Having no subscription
to Mediterranean gods:
that makes them angry,
now watch
you reduce
a smear of powdered palm,
a no-longer-traditional name,
scooped by their forgetful
confidence.

Note remoteness, love, just how
we hardly leave the house now.
Nothing's as close as circuits.
One skidding key brings armed response.
Go outside before much evening.
Come soon, come back in.

Breathing in and waiting
for the next such words

from such long mouths *****
It's a child's nightmare of swallowing
stars, they go down turning
their points in a monstrous scrape of brilliance,
bursting planets, jumping
stars.

Did you see the picture
of that girl in the papers?
What a lovely dress!
And she was just thirteen.
Imagine that! Four cars didn't stop.
What a tragic fate!

What's devastation, or very ordinary,
on the terms of myth –
a tree splitting: the halves
falling away,
dried sides,
its blasted grounding system showing, missiled
by a bolt from the blue,
human-handed sides.

Abolish gardens. Why want
to pitter-pat in long grass?
Cast out from hearts of cities
uninterrupted singing.
Skin is ziplocks, skin is feathers,
skin is over skin.

VIRTUAL PRESENT

Something like a serial killer's housework
(they told me it's the milk float)
motored a whimper through one sleep-light zone.
Who's had a smashing morning?
When gutters run with milk,
at the outset day's deliveries don't pick up.

In the hot days when I would hardly move,
only to air before you
inescapable gifts, an inbreath cone
in place of saying what:
that hurt, conserving words,
sound of leaves ever the same as landlocked waves.

Such stars drunks put on roads: undrinkable.
Even to grasp against you
another form not letting you not know
how bright faces explode –
W h y begs the question w h a t.
Both fold together stuck at individual.

NICE AREA

Fascinating is the new Brilliant,
Wonderful the new Beautiful!
What is lovely has been lovely;
well it's gorgeous now.

Eh girl, see
out on this street
police ask people,
“if they need directions?”

And . . . what's your business here?

Looking down, who saw the crimson tissue-paper mountain
and thought: has there been crying here? or has there been a wed-
ding?

Who noticed it was half unused? Had you made a beginning,
or waited till the plural trees had deepened on their fountain?

Listen child,
it is night time;
that group of youngsters –
they are singing about you.
Lock up your door.

REVELATIONS

telling the mysteries
I thought she would be glad;
it made her quiet

telling the mysteries
I left her in some silence;
she sounds left out

telling the mysteries
I floated her a present;
she had more past

hearing the mysteries
through her uncreating,
what words were sad

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For Emma Dillon: 'A Book of Hours: From Aidoneus to Zeus'

For Catherine Chin and for Siân Grønlie: 'After a Hymn to Aphrodite'

For Elizabeth Irwin and for Ashley Clements: 'Seeing Later';

'On Metaphor'

For Sverre Grønlie: 'Blood to Light: A Performance for One Musician and Two Voices'

For Pétur Magnús Guðmundsson (i. m.) and Sveinn Haraldsson: 'North'

For Sunniva Grønlie: 'Oslo Readings'

For Leila Bissoondath Capildeo: 'Sleeplessness: Six'

For Sarah Colvin: 'Virtual Present'

The epigraph to 'Possible Box' is taken from Hesiod, *Theogony* in *Hesiod, Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. by M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) (pp. 1-33), p. 24.

'Hazardous Shelves, Deep Waters' brings together excerpts from: Samuel Johnson, 'The true principles of pastoral poetry', in *The Rambler* 36 (Saturday 21 July 1750): repr. in *Works*, ed. by W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969) iii, (195-200), 199.

Michael Drayton, 'Ode to the Virginian Voyage', in *Poems* [1619] (Scolar Press, 1969)

William Carlos Williams, Paterson [1949] (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992) p. 102.

Martin Carter, 'Where Are Free Men?' (*Jail Me Quickly* (1964)) and 'What We Call Wings' (*The When Time* (1977)), in *University of Hunger: Collected Poems & Selected Prose*, ed. by Gemma Robinson (Tarncliffe, Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2006), (pp. 113-116), p. 116 and (pp. 117-144), p. 122.

Amos Tutuola, *The Palm Wine Drinkard* [1952] (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), p. 104

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sonnet VI in 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'

[1846], in *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995) (pp. 377-98), p. 379.

Vladimir Mayakovsky, 'What About You' [1913], in *Listen! Early Poems 1913 – 1918*, trans. by Maria Enzensberger (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1991), p. 22.

Quotations have not been converted to the earliest or the best editions. Though in some ways this would be ideal and readers are urged to seek out these writers in such editions (or produce such editions where they do not exist), the poem is meant to show how one 'sea' of voices rolls from an actual set of shelves or in memory, including the quality of echo and muttering of translation or imperfect transmission.

'Found Song' is an excerpt from Charles César de Rochefort, *The History of the Caribby-Islands . . . With a Caribbian-Vocabulary* [*Histoire naturelle et morale des Îles Antilles* (Rotterdam: 1658)], trans. by John Davies (London: 1666), p. 351.

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