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GUEST EDITOR 129 / 130
KELVIN CORCORAN

GENERAL EDITOR
TONY FRAZER

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Submissions

Shearsman operates a submissions-window system, whereby submissions may only be made during the months of March and September, when selections are made for the October and April issues, respectively. Submissions may be sent by mail or email, but email attachments are only accepted in PDF form. We aim to respond within 3 months of the window's closure, i.e. all who submit *should* hear by the end of June or December, although we do sometimes take a little longer.

*This issue has been set in Arno Pro, with titling in Argumentum.
The flyleaf is set in Trend Sans.*

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Maria Jastrzębska

Twenty five

For the 63 days of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 scouts operated a military or field post delivering thousands of letters and packages. Letters were limited to 25 words each. Perhaps some were love letters. This is a sequence on the occasion of 25 years with my partner. I have however taken the constraint of 25 words per letter and written 25 words per stanza – 25 stanzas in all – by way of tribute. The poem draws on my own life, someone who grew up in peacetime.

How careful
you have to be,
counting each word.
*Are you safe? I kiss
the nape of your neck,
kiss each finger.
Wait for me!*

Were the birds
this morning
real? Lightning struck.
Rain scattered
metallic shots. I turned over
to look for you. It's the first
thing I do.

When I couldn't sleep
as a child, I'd conjure
butterflies or multi-coloured
balls bouncing instead
of severed heads
while stone-eyed executioners
closed in around me.

Remember our first
walk under the cliffs?

I lent you my jacket,
pulling it close
over your shoulders.
You wore the wrong
shoes, slip-ons, flimsy

as orange and red
butterflies, perched
on your feet.
Clouds ignited, copper
over our heads. I had no idea
the future had already
netted us.

Red's the colour
hummingbirds prefer,
they lick nectar
with their forked tongues
from red flowers more than
any others. *Bei mir
bistu shein*, sweet red.

What did we laugh about?
Laugh about now?
I don't know. We snicker
sudden as horses,
bolting, kicking, bumping.
Jaws loose, nostrils
soft and round.

On the dance floor
everyone wants a turn
with you. You hop,
shim sham, slide.
I lead, attempt to,
you follow –
we both know.

Remember the man
at your mum's wake
whose coat caught
on fire, the woman
at my mum's who asked
which business
we were partners in?

On the beach
men tell me stories.
At the buoy. Exhausted.
Panic attack. Treading
water, I thought
of my daughter.
You give me that look.

When we quarrel
I lie awake, then your hand
creeps across all those
frozen rivers, outwitting
scavengers between
drops of rock
and ice, finds mine.

Words are ants
carrying moments.
I want each one
to count. But illness
rattles the window –
a past lover, disgruntled.
Some days are just lost.

Fi got caught
kissing another girl
in the school library.
We thought it was funny
then her parents
and the family doctor
had her sectioned.

Simon Perchik

Five Poems

*

It's how this hillside weeps —a rain
any minute now will cover the stones
each mourner leaves to help you find

the way back —you dead are always thirsty
and though there is no shore you drift
as the last breath to leave its hiding place

—it's a cemetery! why are you belting out
one love song after another as if no one
can hear you reaching into the Earth

with a voice worn down to the bone
by lips that no longer move
are used to making it home in the cold

sent to bed as snow —before and after
covered with footsteps louder and louder
giving up everything just to cry.

Tomi Adegbayibi

On Cobalt Roads the Trees Are Ultramarine

The way home is not lost, is not hidden or potholed. Its floors are paved with ores seeping crystalline Atlantic drying cobalt glass. The glass is road, is path, is forever. The air above forever is always wind, always salt of oceans. The way home is not void, is not pigmented abyss is iris Irises ashen in piles of sand trapped between green and purple. Trees feathered peacocks. Children of women of men hiding behind the bodies of feather trunks seeking their roots.

A woman born along this road grills plantains and yams for no one. Halfway south, halfway self – hyphenated heritage. The way home is a lazuli bunting's song trapped in the stomach of a boy-man learning Lingala, Lapis glass winding in on itself.

Part way north a group with mouths filled with hydrangeas walk in the direction of their grandparents, in the direction of their grandchildren, an always of backs bending forward and back.

There is laughter and exile. There is a girl reading Soyinka into a hole in a tree. It swallows her and the Mediterranean. Reads plays and poems to the ocean floor.

The way home is dispersed. Scattered webs of saxe silk.

Suspended in space, a stretch of road that is there and that is here.

Walking has removed its feet.

An open road, its new trees, its body of leaves, of veins and sky.

Returning.

Retreating.

Poem in which i became a bear

and fled to the sawtoothed haunts
of the forest, distended and gestating.
the bear had been swelling inside
of me – a cervical cyst with a thicket
of hair – since ninety-eight. *unkindly*
form, unkempt and eager-eyed. all
her stares were sidelong. bear would
be born, a stiff aura of fur, radiating
outwards like a halo from my cunt.
sundered, surrendered, not knowing
how to say. so *bear*. you could drown
in bear, all your precious memories
accessible to fire. bear would be
worn on the outside. not your soft
bear: stuffed animal eyes turned
to the wall. no, not a *stuffed bear*,
but a girl *stuffed* with being bear.
this crypt of thistles. hair-quake,
hair-waltz, a carny's horny bearded
bride. a bear is a threshold. a bear
is a fur terminus. carnivoran
frontier, self-lubricating howl.
in the forest i licked my shame
to shape. there were tremors
there was vomit. until i became
upholstered in bear, until i became
a sprinting crouch, bellowing my
bleak disclaimers to the hills:
come at me! i dare you! my mouth
grew long, innovating bayonets;
i gathered mass. pick the crust
off a girl, there's a bear beneath.
he thinks he did this. they think

i think he did this. they think
i am sorry. a bear is a stain becomes part
of the design. i have eaten men alive,
corrupted and replete,
i have hugged my own consoling
bulk all night long. between
maiden and *mother*, a bear. her
shape stirred into the circumpolar
sky like nuts in fucking yoghurt.
not a skybear, i. no azimuth. no altitude.
no *catalogue of stars*.
i choose the damp earth under
me, close enough to him to
take off his head.

Stuart Cooke

The Space Between

What the dusk has done
is let mist settle on the valley;
dark ridges protrude, like the spines
of ancient sea creatures, from its woollen veil.

The sky's still blue enough, but it's burning up
along the border with the earth, most of which is obscured
by the blackest ridge, slumped across the foreground,
insisting that everything follow it into night
(you can't see its details anymore,
other than the cauliflower silhouettes of a few trees along the saddle
and its fierce gradient, sloping
into the centre of the scene,

but just a moment ago, across the valley
where there aren't any roads,
I saw a single light
travelling down the shoulder, flittering
between murky wads of bush,
and it seemed like life was beginning to weave
into dream, when,
at the very instant the light vanished,
my eyes were caught by a single bird—darkened,
distant, perhaps a kestrel—
gliding through black space and the woollen valley
and the embers beneath the sky,
and you were there with me, or you could have been,
before you were gone).

Gareth Culshaw

Bits and Pieces of Who He Is

The chin he found in a stonewall holds sunlight
for his working hours. He grubs up another work day,
pushes the tractor wheels out of a gate.

Rooks fetch back the blackness he hides in his head,
as they stagger across the ploughed sky,
bend the rawky air with their caw.

There's signs of orange peel in his fingernails,
but he never eats on the whim of a hedgerow.
He catches his face in a rose petal when the morning
rises from the nest of night.

The thought of oak branches, shape his arms,
allow him to stand against the coughing wind.

Sometimes he shears sheep in a pen. Grabbing
them by the throat, he yells into their faces.

He seems to think we're all part of his flock
as a frown escapes his whittled fringe,
when you pass him walking the dog.

The shaved wool whitens his beard fills the hair
he lost when his youth died.

He skittles the sheep with his stare whistles
the tractor homeward to unmute the silence.

Fokkina McDonnell

All advice is reversible

like the silk jackets from *Patra*, in a paisley pattern or cobalt blue. If you're slight and short, you could become a jockey, but you've probably left it too late to turn into a horse. A horse is always two halves, anyway, and refrains are the life blood of pantomime. If you want a moustache, I recommend Charlie Chaplin, rather than Adolf H. Bear in mind that Churchill also fancied himself as a painter. *Avant-garde* is fine here on the continent. I didn't know what *spotted dick* was when I arrived in little England. And I asked a man about *pouffe* pastry. I can see *you* are sophisticated already and can tell your fettucine from your philistines, your syphilis from your Sisyphus. Yes, I agree: a rolling stone gathers no moss.

Dear Darkness

I apologise sincerely for only now replying to your invitation. I have already tried to be a lighthouse, but that didn't work. Perhaps, it is because we are all orphans, and we focus on the small window. It wasn't clear to me from your earlier letter (the one you sent via Japan, after Sumiko's death). We must respect people's wishes, don't you agree? Because our piano tuner was blind and Helmut Walcha was a blind organist, I didn't want to have lessons. So sad, he became blind after being vaccinated for smallpox. I'm sorry, Darkness, I'm going off on a tangent. With travelling east several times each year, I have lost the odd hour. *For now, we see only a reflection in a mirror.* The dark of the coal shed. When I was 12 and I saw my grandmother in hospital (I was supposed to leave things with a nurse), I beckoned the quiet man in the dark suit. He is always there, walking two feet behind me, a dutiful wife. You know well enough I've been looking ever since for the ferryman's smile. Since 1977, to be precise.

Best regards,

Paul Rossiter

A Visit to Runmarö

in memory of Tomas Tranströmer

the ferry backs carefully away from the jetty
in a frothy swirl

and then the water settles

skerries wooden jetties
the road
rises gently from foreshore to forest

I swallow the silence-potion

pine silver birch rowan
a red house where a crowd of ferns
has quietly advanced all the way to the doorstep

gravel-surfaced, the road winds
through forest, marsh and meadow
past school, chapel and graveyard

and now here's the poet's name
hand-written on a green mailbox at a junction
where a modest track leads off through trees
towards a steep slope down to the stony shore

'there it is,' says the old lady walking her dog
pointing to a small two-storey house

pale blue shingle walls
windows outlined in darker blue
red-tiled roof with a red-brick chimney
all placed on a platform of patient grey boulders

*a house that senses
the constellation of nails that holds its walls together*

garden chairs are stacked on the porch
the house is quiet, keeps itself to itself,
behind the glass of the living room window
a dangle of wind-chimes hangs motionless
as though waiting for someone to return

I walk back through forest
past scattered houses, past meadows
past a reed-fringed lake

*the earth is springy under my feet
and I suddenly understand that plants are thinking*

at the jetty, half an hour to wait for the boat

Gerrie Fellows

from Shadow Box: Poems from the Hunterian Museum

Object: Carved Stone Ball

403.6 grams
Locality: Aberdeenshire
3200–2500 BC

Handheld a weighted sphere
deeply grooved to fit a fingering
the whole hand takes part in

a plaything for the mind
come to us from the past iron-dark
speckle of biotite in granular stone
worked by Neolithic hands
in a tooled, ancient trade

The mind asks for meaning
gets a curve ball, carved ancestrally wielded
an object willed
but not into the unknown

Unknown is only where we find ourselves
enquirers desiring to recognise
a symbol of power
an artefact of ceremonial
a device for speech memory story

for guesswork our best guess
for an object blessed with guesses

turning as if in the dark

We are in the dark

the object shines in the light

glitters with Scottish earth

Carrie Etter

from The Sentences

The sentence declares it's a cold day in early March, the maple and sycamore leafless, the daffodils tawdry with yellow. Proffer or promise. There's a reckoning of days, an interminable catalog, a diminishment by number. Such small rooms know little oxygen. *Heave ho*, says the old man walking his little dog. *Heave ho*.

* * *

There's always chatter in the off license. *Let me tell you about sentences, or don't talk to me about Heidegger*. There are tins of baked beans, plastic bags of spaghetti, sixteen flavours of potato crisps. *But how cold does it feel?* The most frequently bought wines have either palm trees or sea vistas on their labels. Chuck, chuck.

* * *

If one can take a sentence for a walk, how does it work in a loop, the widely favoured form of walk: does the sentence end with the same word with which it began or somehow end just before it, so the first word could be touched with an outstretched hand? The loop goes down the road, up the slope, to the right past the green, along a further, flatter right through poplars and the occasional skitter of dogs, down further right into the turn, over a mud path that in summer is banked with blackberries and offers a view of sheep on the far hill. The sentence can cover a lot of ground. In the distance, looming, the wonderful If.

Cliff Yates

The Detective's Raincoat

(after Lisa Jarnot)

Not to pretend to be snow, but to taste it, your tongue
burning with cold like a picture frame, to hear
the bicycle inside the earth as the world tumbles
like a gobstopper inside your mouth, and not to be king
for a day but to dream of oranges, gobstoppers, snow
and the radio through the wall, music and voices
from under the carpet, and to make floorboards
creak in the dark, to know where they creak
and where they don't on the silver staircase
with its fabulous promises, and not to be a prisoner
but to do without salami and pastry, to welcome
bewilderment and uncertainty and the wind over tiles,
the sound of the refrigerator when you open
the door, the muscular horses, and to spin
in the downward pull, the freedom to consciously fall.

Simon Smith

A Note to It

It became immediately apparent that the poem I was living in had stopped meaning. Its batteries were dead, its discourse had run its course, its markets crashed. Utilities were disconnected, the place inhospitable.

Like scattered wrappers, the writing fell silent. At rest. *In medias res*. Unidentified militias occupied. Cables cut, wires tapped, windows taped & prepped for the blast. Levers, buttons, the cursor unresponsive. Exhausted, inert, useless.

Useless as the machinery of coke furnaces, or steel mills, or metaphor. Essentially Time & Space had changed, so the language could no longer function. The dead arrived in squadrons, were already there. Trade halted. A ruin uninhabitable.

I was floating in rooms, corridors, passages – places of change & transition that were constantly changing, and then not changing at all. Then Time was blocked. In so far as I exist I am in the folds, the creases, the hinge. Suspended.

I was closer to the dead than the living. It was safer to discourse with them, to mix, conspire the Truth. There were bare wires – earth, “live,” neutral. Incognito. Or at the edge. To kiss the living meant almost certain death. Statistics, stasis.

I was more alive in my dreams than waking hours & tuned to birdsong. Like a blindman from out of town. “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday”. The trafficator flashes the warning, right. Autocued.

My father, who died seven years ago, came back to life. “Great to see you, dad.” “Great to see you, son.” We never called one another “dad” or “son.” In fact, he says nothing but drives cars.

Time stopped. So, I lived by night, talked with the dead, read off the Ouija board. The corridors narrowed. I took beer, wine & whiskey. I listened to the radio at night. I became a radio. I am a radio. All night. Static. “I” am Greek & I am posthumous.

I dwell in a caravan, & Elvis is dead, but it is no longer the summer of '77, & the writing had stopped meaning, felt silent. The regiments of the death's heads. To know where to look. To know how to look, to know.

It's the ghosts that are speaking now instead, on the inside, tapping the Morse along skirting-boards. I read Spicer, listen in, glass to the wall, ear cupped. Time is stopped. "Now" is nocturnal & vibration.

This "house" means "ark". Now that the ghosts are speaking us & have moved in, I am their guests with interests in code. Now they are the ones gathering curtains into pencil pleats, pins in their mouths.

I connect to the world's silence, to snatch a signal from out of air, to drag along the zip-wire, the blood rush where vessels transport vessels, vessels people. I signify via a series of magic lantern slides.

Peter Robinson

Ghost Photograph

Unsmiling, still, three figures stare
at the lens for a family photograph.
Round studio Liberty furniture
they're set on a rug of animal fur:
a father, his up-waxed moustaches,
the seated mother, her lazy eye,
and Norma, their blonde daughter
in sailor's suit, all posed before
the backcloth's painted hill-line ...
See it emerge, preternaturally clear,
emanating from her mother's hair,
look now, an ectoplasmic smear,
like a flaw in the plate, a water stain,
another ancestor caught there ...

Rosanna Licari

Finding Lucy, Ethiopia 1974

Asleep in the tent
Johanson's dream is a mix
of bone shards, psychedelic dust
and fragments of lyrics
from three-chord Beatles choruses
Yeah, yeah...
Hadar.
This place has to be full
of hominid bones.

Morning. A light breakfast.
The African sunlight is everywhere but
two hours on the stinking hot plain
reveals nothing. Johanson tells
the grad student, he wants to go back
to the small gully
that had already been checked
at least twice before. *Why not?*

In the dusty sediments
he finds a few horse teeth,
the skull fragment of an extinct pig,
antelope molars, some monkey jaw.
All in all, just bits. *Yeah...*
Nothing to sing about.

Midday and shirt sticks to skin,
sweat streams down Johanson's forehead,
his hat baking his brain
as the temperature heads
for 110° F. It's time to drive back
to a cold face cloth and lunch.
But as he turns to leave,

he sees something –
a broken ulna, an elbow part.
Yes! Yes! Yes!
And there is more.
Near this, a part of a small skull,
then a femur.
More walking, more bones:
vertebrae,
ribs,
pieces of jaw,
part of a pelvis – female? ...
another bone
and another.
A hominid skeleton.
Could it be whole?

When it cools down,
all the fervid expedition will return,
carefully staking out the site
for digging and collection.

At camp, amid the night's banter,
laughter and endless whiskey,
the cassette player blares the Beatles'
"Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds".
We should call her that! someone says
and fossil AL 288-1 becomes "Lucy".
And she will bring light.

Hours and hours
of working on the bone jigsaw.
It's obvious weeks later.
No duplication.
It's one mother of a hominid.
Only one.
40% of a 3.2 million-year-old skeleton
that tells homo sapiens
that our ancestors walked
before getting a big brain.

Australopithecus afarensis:
Southern Ape from the Afar region.
The new species on the family tree.
The locals call her *Dinknesh*,
Amharic for “you are wonderful”.
Love it... Love her...
Yeah, yeah, yeah...

Note: On 24th November 1974, Donald Johanson and Tom Gray found a hominid fossil that changed the understanding of the process of evolution.

Janet Sutherland

Footnotes to Smalt Blue

“Observed that the rain on the previous night had been snow on the hills, those in the distance towards the frontier of Albania having their summits covered & contrasting very prettily with the smalt blue of the nearer ones”

George Davies 1847

*To molten glass add cobalt oxide
for colour which is never strong—
if ground too fine the pigment weakens
so grind by hand and not for long*

Old Stone Mountains

distance still lays down
complicated hues

you might ask

if anything alters
is it us

the question

our hidden
bones

how did we get here?

layer on layer
utterly and completely blue

Kenny Knight

Sparrow

Take me back
to the wind
to that tree
spreading its shade
beneath the blue
watercolours of the sky

let me out
of this room
out of this cage
of lost feathers
out of this paint box
of congested art

take me back
back to my cluttered house
in the labyrinth of numbers.

Silver and Red

You open the door
come in out of the sun
close it and move deeper
into the house of scissors
the sky seen through the window
looks as white as your skirt
as blue as your eyes
which are hidden under a fringe
of brown hair which hangs
and drops over your shoulders.

I sit here facing the mirror
watching you run your fingers
thorough another man's hair
watching your lips move
sometimes without sound
or none that reaches me.
I think yet again
of the vanity of men
while waiting for you
to call my name
in that time I read a story
in the *Daily Mail*
which I quickly drop
back onto the table
as if my fingers
and my senses had been burned.

And then I see your lips move
and then my long hair
falls to the ground
summer has gone
and now its autumn
I know as the days
reach into October
that leaves will fall
all over the city
all over the land
but much sooner than that
someone else
some long-haired stranger
will sit where I sat
will take my place in the mirror.

And if I never see you again
what I'll remember most of all
will be your red fingernails
your smile in the mirror
and me stripped of language
smiling shyly back.

John Muckle

Recuerdos de la Alhambra

Unstoppably the river of love flows into a sea of harmony
& here below a man is listening to Andres Segovia
In the late twenties, a tripping canzonetta by Mendelssohn;
I imagine a boy listening to it on an old 78 rpm record
In Hampton, during the war, super-heterodyne radio valves
Buried in the back garden in order not to hear them shrieking.
Django Reinhardt's piercing vibrato, controlled passion
Restrained by intellect, attuned to a mathematics of pain.

A restless line encloses the boy's beautiful, absent mother.
She stares out into the road for hours, dreaming vacantly,
Mostly leaves her spouse to his varied & peculiar interests.
What does any of that rubbish matter to her? Nonetheless
She is a kind, loving mother to all of her four children.
Actually, she is the daughter of a famous music hall star.
The boy lies under the grand piano, transported to ecstasy.

He attends Hampton's school for unexceptional children
Where he meets my mother & sometimes pops around
To show off on her family's piano. Happy-go-lucky boy,
Proud of his talent & his grandmother's pub in Battersea
& after the war when Segovia comes again to Londres,
Julian & his father observe his technique with binoculars.
His right-hand particularly. How he does the light & feathery
The tremulous, choking lament of the gypsy peoples.
In memory of this my mother propelled me towards art.

Peter Bakowski & Ken Bolton

Martin, Martin

“Who gave us these?”

“A woman from the Scout Hall,” says Martin.

“Well,” says Betty. Despairing.

She had meant the question rhetorically. “God knows what they were thinking,” she says, eyeing the books again:

Modern

Business English; The Life of the Spider; Mark, the Match Boy; Fables in Slang; Dave Dawson of the Air Corps; Penrod Jasper; The Wit and Wisdom of Good Pope John; Boy Ranchers in the Desert; A Mother’s Prayer; Best Loved Poems of the American People; The Curse of Darwin; Tom Sawyer; Crystal Vision (two copies); The Ordeal of Harriet Marwood, Governess; Letters For All Occasions; A Heap o’ Livin’; A Pocket History of England; Ginger Meggs; Sergeant Silk, the Prairie Scout; Adventures of Ulysses; The Southern Oscillation Index; Gold Fools

—all in a box, wooden, with metal handles on either side. Would once have had a lid.

“We could give them to the hospital,” she says. “They sometimes come down here asking for books.” And “*What?*” she says to Martin—who says, almost *sotto voce*, “Will they thank us?”—picking up the books and taking them down the road. Not a lot of fun, Martin. Not a lot of fun those books. Did the scouts *read* that stuff?

Kerry Priest

The Carpet and the Dream Field

The Ogham Mother's Instruction Manual says you must picture it more like a handshake with a tree. First thought best thought. Take an interest in everything, Listen to music you don't like. Read books on boring subjects. Consider your transitions. Stay focused. Listen deep. Collect a twig from each tree in the Druidic tree calendar.

The wand-maker knows that the power source is not magician but tree. Baby has opened the box of cassettes, her two teeth inspecting corners. Awai-agadidi-meu-ba-ag-agg.

This alphabet is best approached by a deep encounter with each tree. Imagine how it tingles when sap juices flow, shivering towards a low sun. Wake up half an hour early to meditate. Wake up half an hour early to exercise. Wake up half an hour early to practice affirmations. Get more sleep.

The tape spool is seaweed on the blue carpet, amongst pirates and Vikings. A wand does not direct power so much as bestow it from the mother tree. The Portuguese man-o-war cassette has snagged a Gokstad Viking.

Picture it like a handshake with a tree, a moving of your mind slightly closer towards the realm of seeds and flecks, into an emptiness of wind. Take side routes. Allow distractions. Cultivate mistakes. Devise self-imposed limits. You are the story-teller making shadow puppet shapes on the cave wall. Give yourself a deadline. Be nice.

Baby gives her Mother an opalescent tape wig. Aaideeee-agawijadid-dididi. You will reach slowtime, sun-time, a constant shedding and returning.

Julie Maclean

White witch hitching

Had I owned a primrose 2CV
/two steam horses four wheels/ in '73

I would not have climbed into a truck
with that ugly farmhand /pas Anglais/

who took country lanes peut-être
to pluck the courage to attack

swerving back on the freeway to the ferry
I missed by fifteen minuits

Picked up by a suit instead
in a slick sedan dinner en famille

in a room out of a Maupassant story
/autocorrecting to motor song, milk thistle, Newcastle/

Sailing the bay next day Le Havre
in a couta boat out of van Gogh's Saint Marie

How could I forget the canvas-ripping
speed of jeune men I was Jeanne d'Arc

Maid of Lorraine /autocorrecting to
Dark Zen/ virgin soul intact

Back then fearless full of it
missing the flames by an eyelash

Daragh Breen

Birds in November

I BIRDS WEARING BIRD MASKS

A black rose blooms
suddenly and briefly
above the heavy fir tree
before the crows
appear to simultaneously
remove their masks
and disappear

the flower head remaining
only in the skull,
a lingering smell of smoke.

II BIRDS AGAINST A GREY BACKGROUND

Above a damp field
a ghosting of birds
against the low winter sky,
seen and then unseen,
tilting out of sight
before teasing themselves
back from some other world.

They have been flitting in
and out of existence
all morning,
silently returning
in dribs and drabs,
unwilling to stay too long
in this grey realm.

III BIRDS SUSPENDED IN DISBELIEF

Waking

to the storm-felled tree
in the near corner of the next field,
the moon's shorn antler
the creature of it
having taken itself off to
some emptied industrial estate.

A brief throng of crows
hangs momentarily
in the memory of the tree
before they debris the rising wind.

Later

dusk is moths of sleet
dissolving against the window.

Belinda Cooke

That Year

1

A Moment

For Mr Mullen and the Team

Each morning you spend
ever longer in the shower,
the plastic bead curtain
falls and falls....

You gaze down at these breasts
you'd always secretly despised
and realise, for the first time,
just how beautiful they are.

Never out, but now so much deeper in,
you love everyone and they love you,
you're introduced to the man
who will save your life (you love him to) —

when he pins you to the board
and sends you spinning,
you look him in the eye,
you do not flinch.

2

X marks the spot. Crescent moon.
Memento to this passionate affair.
God, perhaps, a step too far,
you start to believe in mountains.

I'm Chemo girl
in the Garden of Gethsemane —
O Christ!
Let this cup pass from me!

That Year

read again,
could walk again,

to be in a place where all
is done for you and love kicks back
satisfied, but to –

read again – endlessly and focused –

to know it is three years.

This cannot have been me,
when nothing mattered,
not this absurd,
artist's – insane arrogance –
Ooo – look at me...
the channel to God...

Maria Stadnicka

Urban Afterlife

After a funeral, paperwork sits
in boxes at the end of desk rows.

Undertakers pause to change
suits before shift handover,

diesel engines flatten down
places of rest. Glass, iron, gravel.

Machines know: cities grow
in negative spaces, oil traces gift

buildings with signs of the cross.
Gliding hawks operate traffic

for clear passage. Night drops
its guard. Machines argue.

Power cuts add imagination
to people's lives. So much for

ending day's work seeking dawn.

Lydia Unsworth

Kijkduin (a leap of faith)

there's a sea at my door
I drift in foam-space
walk out
as far as the current allows
and am pushed back again
like this
I gain my exercise
the outlines of a figure, a face
sprouts new kinds of flowers
I revert to the Latin
wearing thick gloves, thick socks
resting at traffic lights
I carry around with me a sack of life, adding new beans to the pile as I
find them
I want everything in this sack and I want to enjoy it
the smallness of the space prevents
me from spreading out
I proliferate outside the house
in ways that are invisible
like this
I can manage
spinning down from the tree, flicking
up on the breeze
running my bare feet through the gushing water that cools the bridges
on a hot day
there is a small raft on which I try to be gentle
the land as flat as our monthly fee
the pollen thick, the confetti blinding
on a hot day

Cecilie Løveid

translated by Agnes Scott Langeland

Punishment

I am glad he received the punishment he got. As you know he will be led up to every single grave.

He shall lay a basket with the past and a basket with the present on each grave.

He shall wear dress uniform.

He will in addition have to empty the washing machine for all the parents, do their sons' and daughters' chores.

Go to football practice, go to the gym, sing in the choirs; he will be kept busy.

He shall record a lullaby for every single one.

At the place where the roof collapsed onto the government desks in the Y-block,

he shall stand naked and lonely with his body smothered in fragrant baby talcum.

He shall stand alone, a white screen will be pulled in front of him.

As you know he is condemned to look every single person in the eye, and as you also know no-one will look him in the eye.

His bottomless pit of self-defence should be overturned.

Sudden, brave, unexpected questions should lay him bare.

He shall not be allowed to change his name. For wherever he goes, someone will say his name. Someone will say his name and he will turn round.

He will be the notorious penitent. He will have to carry out these tasks alone, without the use of internet, manifestos, puppets, stand-ins or lookalikes.

In the judgement laying out his sentence, it also states: None of these acts of penitence must be photographed, sketched, cartooned or filmed.

No sound recording may be made, only the word *sorry* can be recorded.

You cannot go back and change what someone has endured.

For that reason, and even if he does all of this, it will be silent.

Gérard de Nerval

translated by Ian Brinton & Michael Grant

Disinherited

I am the shadowed one – the one bereaved– the unconsoled,
The Prince of Aquitaine within the ruined tower:
My one and only *star* is dead, – and my constellated lute
Is burdened with the black *sun* of *Melancholia*.

In the darkness of the tomb, you who have consoled me,
Bring back here to me Posillipo and the sea of Italy,
The *columbine* so greatly pleasing to my desolated heart,
And the trellis where both vine and rose are one.

Am I Love or Phoebus? ... Lusignan or Biron?
My forehead is stained red from the kisses of the queen;
I have been dreaming in the grotto where the siren swims...

And I have twice in triumph crossed the Acheron:
Playing turn by turn on Orpheus' lyre
The sighs of the saint and lamentations of the fay.

Ivan Štrpka

translated by James Sutherland-Smith

from *Bebé: One Crisis (Bebé: jedna kriza, 2011)*

I.

Your gaze

Your gaze feels like a sharp knife. My gaze feels like a sharp knife: *Bebé*.
Snail mouth, naked silence. Everything is naked, my dear. A relationship
outside speech. Unspeech. A relationship and unspeech. A relationship
like unspeech? Unspeech like a relationship? And *Bebé*.

A gaze is holistic or not at all, *anima mea*. Or it falls completely apart. And
where are the words? Where is the language?

We run through large empty stations without trains and without people:
a rumble heaves up from the marble paving, a pounding arises: another
body in another body, another body in another body, another body in
another body. Up to an explosion: *Bebé*!

Are we conspirators in this? Allies?

Or in cinemas? The film tears. Water flows. The film jams. The film sticks
to us. In a single glance.

At first glance:

Blood is hidden deep in the fleece, in which voices return to their bodies.
And what I see is a coin, a naked coin: smooth and empty on all possible
sides.