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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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Peter Riley

from 'Proof...'

Proof that the world exists. Crossing Europe
in the backs of lorries, the noise of the engine,
the road rolling under, deeper by night.
Occasional glimpse of an urban skyline
changing lorries before dawn. Proving
that the world is, but unstable: the Refugee's story.
I usually wake up about four to half past
and don't go back to sleep again until after five.
I lie there listening. And it is through
this hole in the night that the wren sings.

*

The wren sings a series of single-pitch rows, usually
five to nine notes long, decorated with curlicues.
Some of these "notes" are tight clusters or quick calls
interspersed with short rows of chirps, a slide or two
and finally the "tell-tale machine-gun rattle" which
tells the tale of the Refugee's journey across Europe,
a sonorous black hole day after day.

*

Lucy Hamilton

The Laughing Child

Inspired on seeing that both trigrams signify Fire
thus completing the hexagram to symbolise Brightness

I remind myself that the random never cheats
or lies but can be a paradox| as every truth

has its opposite which is also true| those two
sun dogs I once saw from a Greyhound in the desert

was a mirage like magic| a ruse of physics| a visible
trick by the invisible| Now as I glue my photo

of the two girls in Kun costume| their beauty
radiates over Water Lily Lake by the Pavilion

where the brightness of sunset will fall slowly
or *come of a sudden*| The law of completion

is the law that a vacuum will fill with light
or dark just as an extreme will flip to its inverse

The way a laughing child can burst into tears
or the dog Tiangu eat the sun during an eclipse



Angelina D’Roza

Correspondences: The Lark Ascending

I would tell you about the composer, who worked on his *Lark* before and after a war, that between those years, between the original and its revision, he drove a military ambulance. That each alteration pasted over the previous notes, erased that old reality, as though it never happened. Which of course, it didn’t. Or Schafer’s composition of snow, his sketches of snowdrifts crossing a stave like memory traces sung and settling through the winter trees. There’s comfort in the weight of snow, the voices that layer and hum, a sudden dark as they open their mouths – *ah*. All this time I’ve been waiting for dawn when I already had what I needed. Do you want to hear how trauma transforms the freedom of a lark? This lark that’s so in love with the land. Perhaps the violin is the bird. The piano is the earth. The intervals between them like an expanse of air that grows, diminishes, equivocates. Or is the lark a projection of the earth’s subliminal self, a haunting without significance beyond this reaching upwards?

On Listening to *My Baby's Taking Me Home* by Sparks

A house in which rain does not fall, a place in which spears are not feared, as open as if in a garden without a fence around it. (Irish; author unknown; 9th C)

Home, like a ritual. Like a hat taken off, head lowered at the back step, my breath held to hear the song more clearly. A sort of peace in the repeated word falling as leaves on the mat. I am exposed to its element, even as I try to shape this word to stone so carefully in my mouth. To dovetail my feet into the floorboards, the lights gone on like the ink flourish of a signature. And then someone, blown in, the altered note that unsettles walls, uproots joists, that makes what was ordinary exquisite.

*A sudden blackbird on the broken trellis
its broken song flowering here
and here, one repeated lyric unconsciously*

*beautiful like the clematis that returns
each year with no idea of how glad I am*

In asking you to love it, I am, of course, asking you to love me, though that word loses meaning the more it's used, while the song only grows more eloquent. Is this loss what happened to *god*? Like the Vikings minting Christian coins and spelling St Petri with Thor's axe, as though the rise of one religion and the demotion of another to mythology met in quivering peace. Here too, there's repetition, the notion of god continuous even as it changes, while the word *god* stays the same. But if there's a parallel of attenuation between the language of god and love, isn't there also our desire to be held, to be home, to lower our gaze and read intentionality into the soil?

Aonghas Macneacail

sùisinis 1996

i, present here, alone
have human breath to
offer sùisinis
this pale gray afternoon
the wind is silent;
over there the sea's asleep,
the cuillin's great saw masked

but here, where there were
céilidhs, quarrels, courtships, still
the mason's measured art remains
while hearths are air-conditioned,
thatch and thatcher long absorbed
into the turf, the singing wheel
which span at summer doors
is air, is memory, the stories
of old voyages, from
lochlann and from gaelic south
which married here, have long since
put on threadbare coats and left,
those tweeds which took their colours
from the rocks and leaves did not
go willingly their dumb inheritors
(still numerous) have nothing much to say –
a cough, a bleat, a cropped appraisal
of sweet grass, shrugged fleece, while
there an eyeless shepherd's house
still wears its iron hat, red, furrowed, dropping
rust into a skewed and swollen mattress
which sinks through the broken bed as if
a ship of scaffolding gone down were
dragging this dark porous reef, its nemesis

and as i walk among stone vacancies
the ghosts i call on stay indoors, while
on these shaven grazings, any questions
from my pocket radio discusses how
it's cheaper to feed blood and bone
to herbivores

Gordon Alexander

In Pure Heart

The lamplight of remorse, in a dull ring
Little like gold, I shall not put away,
Hoping that if I never cease again
To struggle with a heartbroken chimaera,

Struggle of blood and tears, as it wounds
And savages me in a pure demise,
My own as well as that of a fond dream,
I might one day return to Fontainebleau

No longer found in rotten canvases,
The Fontainebleau of old layers of brown,
Like paper or rags, as when I in love
Found my antique betrothal in some attic.

New Awareness of Light

Some time ago, when I wasn't dying of lead-poisoning and the keening of a fly, as I like to think of my rotten interior when holding a gentian – I sometimes call it, that rotten interior, the Mystery of the Green Coffers which, I hardly need add, were locked and rumoured to have been cursed by a diabolic cult of sailors who, scarcely escaping death, pledged themselves forever to sickness and the Leichnam-divinity –, I found some kind of purpose in ruining a wing of rarefied oak with the foul blood of mistletoe and fruiting ivy. But since the light of a declining dawn appeared to me, not even the ruins of thought – not even in a dim curiosity like that of a dying figure like Napoleon, in the green mansions abandoned above the sea, held there for some unknown reason, for he is lesser than Napoleon, though still the holder of a notable office – detain the one who, as though dead, cannot understand beauty: words are no longer sufficient; their

charms are not equal to those of a Chardin, or a Rembrandt; his learning has already risen beyond the reach of words, and almost beyond that of music, and yet he can still hardly read, his various vocabularies, ancient and modern, still somewhat limited. There is nothing that can be done: of the world, which contained the Hermitage, the Musée du Louvre, he can recall only a discoloured mop in a bucket, in some kind of courtyard – a sort of coalhouse of brick, covered in calcareous plaques and accretions, can be seen behind it – which used to be interesting, vaguely reminiscent of a Corot, but isn't interesting any more.

The Ecstasy of Lyric

I sometimes find myself in the position of opponent to the crumbling Amor, his face washed off, author of all that is petty and deceitful. His smile as though lost in flannel belies the eternal acts of corruption that Orpheus fundamentally fails to grasp.

Only when I learnt of the vicious motives of the wasp Anteros did I acknowledge love's golden, marble-floored sun. It is spacious and lonely, and the heart predominates; my thought is full of empty recitations. I walked burdened with the year, a small temple of Apollo consulted often, late at night, under the dreary lamp. Each day I found through some door, presumably mine, the unchanging bed of defeat, the cat long-departed to the bronze-sunned cities, black with heat. I sensed the dismal practices of our foe, the embittered, amphora-headed Mesembria, but my shield was riddled with grief.

There is no defence against the philosophical depths, out of which sick Amor, his ancestor the unmoving Dis, has understood the days that required no meaning. Wandering vipers dropping from him, his alchemical interpretation of life is satisfying to lovers and deposed priests obsessed with ennui.

Determined to prove life meaningless without love, or something like that, he breaks into the old corridor, experienced in everything as he approaches the lonely door of calm Hypnos. It is now, under the sword of the murderer, white-winged like love, that peace shall become hideous like the endless humming of an insect, and our long sense of purpose dies in a rotten corner, like a city where dogs run like obsessed sleeves over a cemetery.

Geraldine Clarkson

***from* The Vitalist Sees the Signs**

The Vitalist Creams Off the Prophets

The vitalist is not crude, and has a full head of sublimations: from Amos to Zechariah, she knows her stuff. She eyes up Isaiah, handles Hosea, and has an octobranch broken tongue which crumbles like butterbread if she comes out with truth and wise saws. Biting back deeper matter, she's sore.

The Vitalist Finds Employment in a Funeral Parlour

where, in a back room, she helps devise new merchandise, 'Ashes to Casserole Dishes', 'Departed Fistbumps', grief crystals for the bath—*Relax Relics*—and other dead-friendly ventures. She fantasises about a *Lock-it Locket* wearable key— which secures a door you never want to open again. Her bosses are impressed and though she works for a sub-living wage, without holiday or sick pay, there are posthumous perks, and a coffin thrown in. Also use of the garage as a gym when it is empty.

Treadmill of the dead.

The Vitalist Endures a Winter's Tale

Lost, she then loses everything she has, as a kind of revenge. She loses her parents, her siblings, her children, co-workers, home, country, dentist. She is cold and angry and the wind burns her naked and icy, but quite dry, and she bokes a winterword.

Lucy Maxwell Scott

Rosa Argues with Leo in Ten Letters

February 1894, Paris

I am here, defining Polish industrial development. But you are not writing your paper. I write many articles for the Cause. You tell me nothing of the Cause. I beg for news like sugared almonds. Not a word from you. And the Russians? What of the Russians? Do not imagine that a 'sweetheart' thrown into the mix of your words makes your withholding more palatable?

March 1894, Paris

My concierge is engaged flagrante with an undercover agent. At night I smell her violet perspiration. I hear her whispering while I write for you and the Cause. You are not here.

April 1894, Paris

I have destroyed your letters as the bitch downstairs may yet denounce me. Why are you not here?

June 1898, Berlin

My mother is dead, and yet still you take your pen and ride furiously through my lines, striking out this and that. I thank you for the lessons, for the many important mistakes you have brought to my attention. Will you not fix the matter of your citizenship?

July 1898, Berlin

Do I love you? Yes, yes, yes. With the violence of a swan. But first I shall prove that capitalism must break its neck.

September 1898, Berlin

Today I am dressed in the jaunty yellow jacket I have purchased. I throw back your demand that I wait for your guidance. You demand I hold German politicians in my pocket, seduce nations, bring forth a revolution, but still fear that without your presence I will purchase the devil knows what.

December 1898, Berlin

Undercover agents loiter by my basement, spit tobacco, suffocate the air with the musk of their aspirations. They chat idly with the janitor while their eyes follow me through windows and out onto the street. Every step they are there. And where, my love, are you?

January 1899, Berlin

Why must you dismiss every Russian, every Russian sentiment, as irrelevant or counter to our Cause? What does it achieve to create your own Siberia, freeze the life out of the revolution for the failings of the few?

January 1900, location unknown

If I wish to go to the dogs, I will. I and my words will steal out and mingle with the multitude. And you? On what grounds do you hound and harangue me? With what books do you imagine yourself the teacher and I the troublesome pupil? Every dog has his day, and today is no longer yours.

May 1900, Berlin

You have charged in again on your high horse, your pen slicing through till you have decimated the reluctant Poles. Remember. We agreed. We will not attack. We will raise their desire for the Cause with words. I am disturbing Catholic meetings, crowding halls, enticing in the bourgeoisie. Leave all of this to me.

Eliza O'Toole

Abscission

I

I remember the heat and the cows, and the shimmers in between, and the cows' pats and their halos of flies, their crusts, and the warm belch of the dairy herd, all piss and shit. I remember the field, the divots and the sandy soil, the places where limbs lay fallen and the nettles, the damp depressions puddled by the herd, the rings of field mushroom the size of plates under the drip line of the big old horse chestnuts, the drunken estate railings. I remember chewing the soft white inner stems at the base of blades of lime green grass, the sweet sheath shared with the deep cherry Lincolnshire Reds; and having stung legs spiked by scratchy pasture. I remember blood. I remember Pat the Polish cowman, and his skinny sheep dog. There were no sheep, but Jess brought up the Reds for milking and they were as meek as sheep under her stare. I remember the dairy clock striking every quarter, five minutes before the church chimed. Five minutes gave the dairy herd time to be there, ready to start the milking hour. I remember the Reds swishing their tails in the dry, and the dust and the flies, and I remember the long slow, the dust motes float, and that it was five o'clock. I remember the tinder grass and high summer. The glimmer and the stink. I remember the telephone wires stretched to infinity, the thrum of endless fields of harrowed furrows. And the bombing swallows. Screaming. Sky full.

II

I remember deep damp ditches, dogwood, spindle, guelder rose, wild damson, cherry plum, crab apple, oak and ivy and my bare arms clawed by blackthorn whilst looking for wild garlic, bluebells, and Queen Anne's lace. I remember the grubbing out of hedges, the gashes, the gaping holes with trashed raw edges. I remember the stumps grinding and the chain saws. Sappy and whining. And at harvest, I remember with stricken awe, the miles and miles of burning straw. I remember streaming eyes, and the stranding: rabbits, hares, stoats, field mice. The stubble burning, the flickers of sparks and the glittering glimmerings of moths smoking. I remember choking, and the sloughing skies of pewter stoked with pink. And the shadow of a dog fox cresting the fire driven across acres and acres of smouldering stalks. And the diving pipistrelles. Echo locating. Sky full.

III

I remember the autonomous reality of the land and the loss of adhesion in the abscission layer. I remember the time of separation; I remember the fall.

Field (n.) (v.)

between etymon and reflex

a chasm

Penelope Shuttle

pretend paths

from Evening Journals

a pretend path
ebbing into golds
and menial footsteps
of dusk

*

past master of the sky

he grants your vow your wish
your request
in a hush of ankle socks

*

a tiny birth-control pineapple
hearsay of the past
the sub-lunar hands of the sky
sister ships with no ports of call

*

a silkworm spell
and some octopus cuddles

rocking a moral cradle
making a stay-at-home fuss

*

the wolf-lily's rebuke
a thistle's gift
loose ends
and tingles

*

toy worlds
all corners and mistakes
rainy versions of everything
(apricots)
a moth, postponed

*

a stint of cloud
bluffs of light
the one-sided kingdom
wardrobe dusts
the side-stepping light
a locksmithery
a keepsake bird

*

pouring the balmy sake
from an old kettle
a bird's nest
tucked
in his back pocket

*

Obstacles on the Yellow Brick Road

When a girl's an empty kettle

Barely vicenarian, this kettle
besought to be replenished, so iron
tracks led me to Amsterdam, off to see
an old bloke wielding obsidian hair
but not much else – had groomed him patiently
not yet knowing men rarely need grooming
by definition, I knew George Clooney
would be in town doing his tricks and went
four hours early to grant me the chance
of a more enchanting bedmate – I failed –
he took a deep drag in default attire
light-absorbing enough to be allowed
to grease me with rum and Coca-Cola –
stubborn as squeaky metal I ignored
how his pepper wouldn't hide salty roots,
thought that squinting my eyes maybe I could
believe this self-inflicted illusion
and what-the-hell let him fuck me – I lay
awake, endured snoring throughout the night,
imagined the bath scene in Out of Sight,
realised both men would never suffice –
afterwards, he wrote of love – I did not
waste any heartbeat of sadness on him.

Edward Lee

Shadows Remain

Sometimes we didn't
have time to shower
before we had to return
to our spouses, our hours
limited by the depths of the lies
told to buy that time.
Those times, our skins unclean
and yet purer
than they'd ever been,
I felt less guilty, the
smell of you
on my body
easing my conscience
when my wife asked me
how my day had been
and I lied as easily as though
my tongue had been born
to tell anything but truth.
What cruel people
we were in our love
for each other. What
cruel people we had to be
to save our love
for each other.
We wish our others well
now that we are gone
from their lives, our cruel selves
no more, now that
no false words are needed
to disguise our truth, though
their shadows remain

as such shadows always do,
like dirt on the skin
that an ocean of showers
can never remove.

Our

I lip-read our future
across your nipples,
my tongue moistening
those words that catch
in your shuddering mouth
as you guide me lower,
deeper.

Finn Haunch

Northern Town

i.

This is how I imagine it, the point of no return.

Shunted through a train window: snubbed chimneys –
the fuck-you fingers of the north, that were once
warm to the touch.

Psalms of steam and pig-iron abide in the memory,
each one stubborn
as a spelk.

Look up from your seat – there are kids gobbing from the footbridge.
Take note of them.

In the pub, once, some bloke sidled over
with a story. He told me how this viaduct,
that his grandmother saw built,
is stuffed with straw. We smoked fags in the doorway –
we drank stout, disputed its god.

Far above us both, dark water dampens
[through the arches.

Do you know where you've found yourself — *do you really?*

ii.

Masher Dawson, my great grandfather, owned that yard down there –
he was the one who lost an arm
punching through a window, who screwed on a hook
that curled from his sleeves like
a coat hanger.

He butchered his own pigs, too. We kept his arm
from being chucked in the skip, you can see scratch marks
scoured on the rods. This was just another thing that people did, you
would have done them too.

But that yard ... me and our kid
went there. We would scramble under warped
wire fences with secateurs and blunt scissors,
cut tunnels through brambles that
sprouted over the concrete.

Smashed bottles
were in the clearing; there were glue sticks, damp exercise books,
the sort of stuff that us and
our mates would make fires
with.

We sniffed the fumes together
and had visions – we were laughing
yes, but we were so
afraid.

Phenomenon

Midmorning – that plainer-than-thou protestant cloudlight
stops me, mid-swing. The axe snugs into my palms.
Three suns are overhead ... greater, lesser,
greater... *this*, according to Google,
is a parhelion sundog.

Something that happens sometimes.
Midwinter – four-hundred miles upwind, on the peninsula,
the suns harden: a dog-walker, looking up, sees
a hermit with a storm lamp shuffling
over snow. Under this, ferns.
Under this, stiff grass. Under this,
a candle burning in the well.

No-one had placed it there —
the moss-dark was glimmering, and even picturing it
throws time out of mind
to here; in the dead garden, time resumes, the axe
drops.

Lisa Blackwell

Turquoise swimsuit

You are almost thirteen years old. You are in the back garden in your new turquoise swimsuit, the material of which stretches and ripples in a new way.

The sun flashes on the ripples of your father's pond. Self-built. The koi carps' startled lips gape at the surface. Their ghostly orange and white forms blurred beneath.

Your father says:
Oh that's unusual.

He pinches the material of your swimsuit and rolls it between his thumb and index finger.

All of a sudden, he has the electric-shock realisation that you, with your new woman body, are in the swimsuit. He becomes self-conscious and slightly embarrassed and retreats into the house. Mumbling something.

You laugh at him. You feel the power of your body but also its betrayal. This is not the body to shinny up a tree. Or to give your brother a dead arm.

You begin to wonder if this body is more trouble than it's worth.

Jessica Bundschuh

A Mother's Court Testimony on Grief

Let's start with the grief of a burning library. Imagine a fire long ago in Alexandria: 400,000 rolls of papyrus send smoke up to Zenodotus, the first librarian who weeps and casts a curse at the furies. One summer I watch a three-week trial just to hear the victim's mother finally say: *when a daughter dies, a library burns*. Then the court reporter reads back to her testimony about a drilling hammer that bludgeons a skull and a pocketknife that pierces a throat, and this mother, who actually is a librarian, admits to neglecting the librarian's mantra for survival: classify, catalog, edit. *What's memory left with*, she asks coolly, *if it can't scavenge what's lost?* like the Egyptians who made foreign ships wait in their port for copies their *own* manuscripts. Handwritten anew, their scribes licked thin inky reeds, bruised and frayed from abuse, which brings us to the end, with summer fires hotter each year. Now the mother dreams of mornings not to be: eating palmed orange raspberries with her dead daughter still warm from Adam and Eve's *snake-and-apple days*, papyrus singed.

Tim MacGabhann

Carlos' Grandmother

From a Tape 1

Interview Location: HOLIDAY INN EL PASO

Recording Date: 30 / 12 / 12

[TV noise: audience applauds, Elvis Presley mutters his gratitude]

'Last time I saw my grandmother
she asked me
to roll her a cigarette
from the garden.
She held up her kinked fingers.
"I can't anymore."

And like, this was a whole thing.
She'd say she saw light
criss-crossing on the floor
as though thrown off lake water
coming through leaves
of the tobacco plants,
the beanstalks, the potatoes, the calabacitas —
and they weren't even there anymore.

Plus, you know, she was still funny.
When I brought her a cheese this one time,
she just moved her eyes
over its big moon-crater pores, said,
"Everybody is being so kind. I'm worried."

So I figured she was laying a prank on me
with this whole cigarette thing.
And so I slipped out,
meaning to slit open a Lucky Strike

and spill the brown shreds into one of my skins for her.
Subterfuge can be kind sometimes.
Plus, you know, I might top her joke.

But there it stood, a swaying green miracle:
the same stalk my grandad would fondle
and pull wet leathern braids from
to leave parching on the boards of the porch

while he filled his ears with the bright gauze of the air:
bird-chitter, cicada-shirr, dripping miles of trees,
his radio burbling out the football.

[lighter clicks, the wet sputtering of a bong]

'And I mean, you know, I shouldn't have been surprised.
All sorts went on there.
Grandma used to grow these orange chiles in a clay pot
to fatten on bad arguments caught in the air.

She chopped them into carnitas once, out of spite,
but the pot burst open to warn her husband,
spilled black dirt across his plate.'

[click of a can, Zippo scrapes then flares]

'After he went, her room became an El Greco sometimes,
hearts crowned with fires ringing his head
as he knelt to kiss her forehead, a living painting.

So the hank of tobacco draped on the porch-rail
no me sacó de onda. I just fibred a root-fine twist
of the stuff into a skin, licked shut the fold,

took the lit roll-up back in, and pressed it to her lips.'

Hannah Linden

Bulb

He said one day it will be yellow like the sun
but first it must get used to the cold.
It's been a long time under the surface, hidden

in the back of a cupboard, forbidden
more light than it is ready to hold.
He said one day it will be yellow like the sun.

Blow it a kiss, for luck. It should be family, not one
on its own in a grey back yard. Like truth not told
it's been a long time under the surface, hidden

and alone. Love has to be strong to keep its song.
Be a trumpet, be a horn, a big brass band: unfold.
He said one day it will be yellow like the sun.

Not withered in the darkness passed father to son
and daughter, a canker that stops you getting old.
It's been a long time under the surface, hidden –

this family curse of pretend until broken.
Lass, you need light to loosen the mould.
He said one day we'll bloom yellow like the sun.
He's been a long time under the surface, hidden.

The Hole in the Cape

She takes her rest – embers into ashes,
this sleep, like red consumption – Grandma

all her life-blood sewn into this cape. Wait
until the end, she said, burn your last period

– here is your strength: let go. Forget
your father, the woodsman, the fight for a beast

inside. This is not your story. Naked or cloaked
we old women can only give you so much insight for free.

Fire and sleep war with each other. When the time
comes, your eyes stinging with smoke and tears

you will have to decide how to make your way
out of the forest. Invisibility may be more valuable

than you had thought. Grey hairs
and what seems like madness –

there are holes everywhere
if you learn how to find them.

Andrew Taylor

Song

As time leaves years behind
life's ever changing

space severs heart from heart
first love bids youthful memories

fresh affection deeper fountains
spring feelings

single moment pressed softly
flowers such a constant joy

impassioned tide ill designed
little cared for but the hour

was gratified summer skies &
sunny smiles shade severe

solemn sweetness deluge of
distress to join the broken chain

& wake the ancient flame
turn to that magic sound

that busy hum of social sound
mirrors mimics nature

Time's warning finger a score
of years departing starless nights

*August 27–November 9, 1837. Patrick Branwell Brontë
April 5–April 8, 2022. Andrew Taylor*

Rochelle Owens

from Patterns of Animus Part 4

Carnal/Spiritual

“But how could you live and have
no story to tell”

1.

The rhythm of spontaneous
change moving back and forth evokes
the scenic order

Earth Air Fire Water

Long ago an hour ago
only a minute morning to evening
evening to morning

Past Present Future

Cold at dawn warm
at midday boiling at midnight
a course of events moving

Back and forth every day

Bears the data data
of body body of data with each
breath a sucking sound

Animal soul Spiritual hole

Biomorphic geomorphic
polymorphic moisture and nutrients
flow in your mammalian brain

Slashes of solar light

Vibrating subatomic particles
split vertical/horizontal chasms
and fissures in the earth

Work is a binding obligation

Black and hot my coffee

Disease Famine Torture War

2

“Stupidity is brief and artless---
intelligence squirms and hides itself.”

2.

On the monumental screen
an amalgam of letters join together
organize themselves

Vertical/horizontal

Moving back and forth
a jagged black line zigzags splits
zigzags breaks apart zigzags

A latent image appears

Disappears your eyes move
constantly while reading Body of Data
Data of Body

Notodoris Serenae

when they pulled that sea slug
grey-green from my elbow crease
I saw scattered spots
late night lucky blue

when they pulled it
(branching moist plasm
its appendages raised for
attention) I saw

what they pulled off
left globules saliva-slow
I saw naked bellows
unreadiness a soft blob

when they raised my arm at last
I saw so much of this pale
and clingfilm a way of not
being flesh unwrapped

Gone

As in what was once a rusted nail my father pointed to high in the wall
of the shophouse he grew up in with his seven siblings.
As in it became a mamak shop and now *we don't know
as the one-way road system makes it hard to stop and see.
As in paint peeling on shutters of coffee shops at traffic lights
and overhead the swish of powerlines strung pole-to-pole with
swallows roosting fork-tailed wing-to-wing. Along the lorong
that no longer exists all the people who called and continue
to call lai lai walk unhurried as if once again they live there.

Jill Jones

While Out and About

I heard a storm sweep through the drowsing suburb.
Low-key danger bathed me in an unobtrusive lilt.

I was out looking for that fellowship of lifestyle and inclusion.
I was some way southward of its habitat and wingspan.

I was a soundtrack of clues, a kitbag of samples.
I was rinsed in a secret light, which seemed to be the heart of it.

Perhaps I was some kind of souvenir, the sough of a clown
a wastrel half-shadow, self-effacing but true in its fashion.

All my dollars have been synthesised into dashes and currents.
The fix is in, full of declines and disorders.

I was still looking for that femur of brightness, in the thunder
hefting over sparse timber, my grin in its shambles.

What I Didn't Know Even When I Did

I see my shadow on the wall
as if a fraction. I wonder if it's me.

I'm a topography, not a centre, my body
sand and water, blood and rust.

I peel clothes into the washing machine
my skin, a free space for thinking.

My memory is a many-sided room
of light and increments, folds and shade.

My animal gist leans into concrete, wood
and clay. I'm still disorganised.

At the window are other secrets
bent in small but vigilant ways.

Sweeping

My head should be lighter today
Deflation is a form of rest
I had my hair cut yesterday
Things always look different in a mirror

I swept the path today
Tidiness does achieve something
My clothes are cleaner, although it may rain
Cleanliness is normal, just as it's not

I'm not sure I quite get Verdi's Requiem
Taste isn't inevitable in this weather
The house has made a lot of sudden noises today
Indifference is a way to hide

Deflation is a kind of tidiness
I'm too dizzy to go out walking
Being dizzy, I think, has gone out of fashion
I'm not sure what I need to make a clean break from

Something is stirring in matter
I should put on a clean shirt and stand up
Let's see what happens
Let a little something unravel

Denis Harnedy

Esker

In the days of dark subglacial miracles,
under pressure of ice,
water sometimes flowed uphill.

I walk round Lucan,
past the Marian grotto on Dodsborough Road
near the bus stop.

It is dusk and
listless people wait for the bus,
their facemasks already on.

An older person presses their hands and forehead
to the rock at the base of the grotto.
I am embarrassed and look ahead.
I don't know their gender.

What quickening happens now?
Do I walk the route of a subglacial tunnel?
Would a flame reveal pure fluid
rushing past walls of ice?

Tamar Yoseloff

Les yeux sans visage

The surgeon bends over his daughter's mangled face;
the camera turns away.

He makes her a mask, eyes wide to the world.
Her window is a cinema: the lonely train,
the dog pulling its lead, the winter tree,
the concrete pavements, the crowds.

She singles out a girl giggling into dusk,
her skirt riding up, her skin—
the surgeon will lure her in,
slice off her face, offer it to his daughter
like a velvet cloak, graft it to her greedy bones

so she may know
the brush of her hair on her cheek,
a man's fingers seared with desire.

Nothing exists that is forever

i.m. Christo Vladimirov Javacheff (1935–2020)

He started small, with cases and cans
trussed like frantic bundles people make
when forced to leave in the night
with what they can carry on their backs;
then cars, buildings, bridges, islands –
stamped with foot falls and thumbprints,
hammer blows and bullet holes –
shrouded like grave goods to be shipped
to the next world, no fixed address.
But he believed in this world,

what we choose to protect. To cloak
is to keep safe, as you would a swaddled child
handed to its mother like a gift. His gift
to us: our world under cover, hushed.

25th February 1970

Rothko took off his glasses
and the studio clouded over,
removed his shoes, his trousers

but kept his socks on,
the kind executives wear,
fine knit, black.

In the street
men hailed cabs, black
patent shoes refracting light.

Ice cracked as they clinked
highballs by the pool
at the Four Seasons.

The murals devoured him,
demons steering every stroke,
black on maroon.

They lived for the cut and thrust.

He slit his right arm,
one razor-straight line,
maroon on white.

Hostile takeovers, blood sports.

He was found in a pool of blood
six by eight feet wide.

Lucy Sheerman

from Pine Island

Wellington, Saturday, 30 June

Dearest

I have been chasing Charlotte Brontë's correspondent across the world. The forthright voice, the tactless comments, the speaking out of turn. Here is a street named after her brother, echoes of a Yorkshire landscape I grew up in. The lady on the bus shows me where to get off: 'There's nothing to stop you crossing the world. It doesn't mean anything, does it?'

I walk up and down Cuba Street looking for the shop Mary ran with Ellen, working through the day and forgetting about dinner, prizing open packing cases filled with the goods ladies wanted and sent to her by Charlotte. *They sat on the cases and read and read. A few minutes of Nicholas Nickleby and they were asleep.* The shop assistant wants to know if there is anything he can do to help and he is not surprised when I tell him that I simply want to be here, on the site of Mary's shop. Be able to tell you of my being here.

She seemed to find no friends; instead, when a letter arrived she would pace and read in the backyard while people came into the shop, took what they wanted, and left the money. The only written record of all that long residence an advertisement for piano lessons. Charlotte's letters long-since burned, according to instruction.

Thoughts of her were unfurling far away and when she found the notice of *Shirley* in the warehouse where she bought goods for the shop she 'blushed all over'. It wasn't a place women went to, her biographer notes. She didn't know then that she was no longer her old self, had, in fact, become Rose York. How long it took for correspondence to find you out. She sends a letter to the friend she left, so many miles, so many months away. I too, will write to you.

Yours,

Wellington, Sunday 1 July

Dearest

'I began a letter to you one bitter cold evening last week, but it turned out such a sad one that I have left it and begun again. I am sitting all alone in my own house, or rather what is to be mine when I've paid for it.'

All through the night I could hear the sound of water. I didn't know if it was rain or wind or the sea out there in the darkness. All this time I have been afloat in a desert. Landlocked and the water only an idea to walk beside; the tangibility of waves out of reach although I spent all night searching. Meanwhile on the other side of the world everything is opposite – light and heat and scorched plants.

At the Wellington Museum there is a display of polished wooden spikes, smooth as tusks. Gripped by paranoia and fear of the dark, at the turn of the nineteenth century every household here owned one. As if a ship might also dock here bearing a solitary black dog and an abandoned testimony of rising terror. This place was so isolated it's no wonder they began to turn in on themselves and live in their own superstition. At a time when nothing was accidental these gleaming stakes brought a form of comfort in the midst of panic, warding off all this darkness and distance and the fear of irrevocable mistakes.

Here in Katherine Mansfield's house where guilt and sadness flow from the walls you can witness the roots of her weird realism in the Gothic. The old world haunting the new – this strange double from the old country. All the shadows cast differently in this light laced with oppositions.

'I am writing this on just such a night as you will likely read it – rain and storm, coming winter, and a glowing fire.' Darkness always encroaching on Mary's writing here in Wellington, forcing her to stop: 'You are getting too far off and beginning to look strange to me... There! it's dark.'

Yours,

Ken Bolton

For Giorgio

from lines of Tony Towle's

Hang it all, Giorgio de Chirico,
there is only the one battered faucet –
pouring out the ongoing present, in the minutes we possess.
Unstoppable. There is *no* rest.
Whether you live in Rome or Port Elliot,

there is none. Better than living in Dorset. All three tho,
bring to mind, to *my* mind, calm. Rome's traffic,
necessarily, *compels you to seek it* – a darkened room, a quiet square. Port
Elliot suggests a certain
melancholy – but restful. And Dorset? a boarding house, a curtain
pulled against the drear sea view, the esplanade malefic –

& *empty*: dour sea wall; where lamp posts, regularly spaced,
make their unconvincing case for the decorative;
the sea itself – & the sky, just barely differentiated
from the water beneath. Time, here, is exterminated, greyed,
denied purpose. One would turn inside to a television – if

in Dorset. Let us not—in any sense of the term –
go there (& *in fact I've never been*, nor you,
Giorgio). We confine ourselves to Rome –
& Port Elliot, with its fine beach. In its South Seas bookshop a tome
devoted to your work sits, has sat for a year or more – for you

to purchase, or to rummage thru – looking for the good ones.
Ha, ha, ha. My joke. They're *all* good
one way or another. I've been thru it many times, as must have others.

(It continues to look new. 'Ish'.) The loopy ones I sort of covet ...
But I have a lot at home – many a book

with works by *you*, Giorgio. My most enduring
enthusiasm. You set me on the road to loving paintings.
You, & one or two others, whom I've forgotten. ('Relegated'.)
(Nolde, Ensor.) *Then* how did it go? Munch; the contemplative
yet intense Cézanne; Matisse & Picasso – their unremitting

& inventive purpose; the great of the past – Rembrandt, Velázquez, Piero,
Raphael & Titian. The Baroque, the Rococo. My hero
Manet, & so on ... Pollock. And
– who have I left out? – Kirchner, Beckmann,
... (Rauschenberg). The *minor* greats – Marquet, Filippo

de Pisis. And 'Now', ... Oehlen, Christopher Wool. Time
never stands still. The faucet again. Where the element plunges out
in terrifying chunks, heavy with implication – *of your making*.
Timeless & urgent. I could *stand* beside that faucet –
lounge – metaphysical, yes – like the guy in the drawing, *The Mysterious
Baths*.

Don't make me revisit Dorset – Bournemouth, Weymouth – I couldn't.

Dorien de Wit

translated by Judith Wilkinson

crossing

you're standing on the edge of the pavement
as if it's a cliff edge

you don't know if surrender
is a movement forward or backward

you're carrying a suitcase in your hand
but really you're clinging to it
while you're rocking on your feet

not in doubt but as a sign
of the other person inside you

someone who moves about in your body
someone who's creating a backup life
in case the first one fails

making plans (while waiting for an overhead wire to be repaired)

building a boat that's so big
that the sea level rises
when it's launched

all the inhabitants of a continent
lift their hands up in the air at the same time
which changes the direction of the wind

making an encyclopaedia of things that don't exist

changing history
by excavating an area layer by layer
then dumping the soil back in reverse order
so that archaeologists will have to reread the past

drawing a map of disorientation

making the universe smaller
by raising as many roofs as possible
just an inch will make a difference

building a room so big that the horizon lies inside it

moving an entire village from east to west
at the speed of the earth's rotation
so that no time passes in the village

if this doesn't work

you can always move air around
by going for a walk for instance
air will instantly fill the spaces where you were

Chen Xianfa

translated by Martyn Crucefix & Nancy Feng Liang

Graveyard Bearing No Flowers or Fruit

Halfway up the mountain there is a large graveyard,
all the turf and trees that used to cover it
uprooted, so now
nothing but the rough, brown earth is left exposed.
It's clear, even in a flourishing Spring,
this whole place will remain
without fruit or flowers.

For my old father, death is something
to be found on our side.
Some of his old clothes in the old family closet
still strive to retain his human form –
on some occasions,
they still feel warm.

As to the flowers and fruit of the world beyond this,
we have no more than endless speculation.
How many greetings from the world of extinction
ought to be remembered?
In every speck of earth that I take up in my hands,
my old father answers me,
as my old, half-deaf mother,
just now burning the rice to a cinder on the stove, also
answers me.