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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; submissions may also be made through the upload portal on the Shearsman website (on the *Contact* page). We aim to respond within 3 months of the window's closure, 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.

Contents

Karin Lessing / 5
Jill Jones / 11
Alex Wong / 17
Katy Evans-Bush / 21
Claire Crowther / 24
Sophia Nugent-Siegal / 28
Jack Barron / 33
Joseph Nutman / 37
Helen Tookey / 39
Leia K. Bradley / 43
Mark Fiddes / 46
David Miller / 49
Tom Cowin / 55
Katherine Meehan / 58
Rizwan Akhtar / 61
Bernadette McCarthy Flahive / 65
Sylee Gore / 68
Ellen Harrold / 70
Ann Pelletier-Topping / 72
Jay-Philippe Vibert / 75
Margaret Ann Wadleigh / 78
Isobel Armstrong / 81
Mark Ward / 83
Janet Sutherland / 85
Norman Jope / 87
Giles Goodland / 90

Notes on Contributors / 92

Karin Lessing

After the Pruning

to sit down
on cedarwood bench,
on flower

craftsmanship
with patience

is *virtu*
quoth the Roman

on
radio waves

he said are you
listening

the daily tasks
laid out
take that branch

“un nuage
plus grand
que la montagne”

about to flower

* * *

observe
as it is about to flower
as it divides into four equal parts
that strive equally
and the stem or stalk also

up-
wards
while in Giotto's painting
the angel
dives down
the background
a "heavenly" blue

* * *

sticky leaves
in Spring

the pending blossoms
weigh heavily

I have tied
a string to the lamp
which hangs
from the ceiling

"la fleur est la raison
la raison est le sexe"

* * *

later,
at the farm

three dogs
will leave no footprints

Mouchette, Fleurette,
Apache
will be remembered
in the child's mind

and the pigeons
coo, coo woo again

caw, caw ... flies by
 mocking
they walk up and
down the field

* * *

looking for a piece of wire
to keep the cat off the roof
killed seven, the newborn
pigeon's
 wings
shaking in the light
in the morning light
 the flower
not yet

fully open

* * *

“gauzy”

Ida Rubinstein
didn't like to have her picture taken

in Giotto's painting
not a leaf that stirs

and Joseph is dreaming

“why should I move
from this place”

where are you?

I'm bundled up
in permafrost
turning *au ralenti*

* * *

then tell,
tell us
Mister Jo
the cost of dreams
their dimensions in space
the inscriptions on rock face

one sees
stars

“le ciel”
the sky

Jill Jones

The Nights Before Your Return

it wasn't what I intended for year's end —
to come home in pre-dawn light — traffic was scarce
— I know I'd stayed too long, taking measure
of myself

— the sky's still overcast — I drank too much —
I've done worse —

I have no resolutions now and never have — the city
was layered in smoke, skirted by bats, filled with glittery
colours — little 'saturns', clever arrangements
of light — still the childlike wonder

the streets moved in groups — dogs still barked, cats
still hid — a day to be faced with or without explanation

in the morning — what does a 'good time' mean?
— a way of being that ends up trashy, but not
ill, remorseful, bereft

*

she leaves me a breathy message — I imagine touching
her — I take my phone outside to the wooden table
— we discuss the future of the euro, a friend's job
states of art and nation

then I'm alone with the meditation on self — to go
beyond self, rediscover effort

*

sun shines down on King Street — awnings angle
on the footpath into shadows — news of drownings
terrorism, sport sport sport — the street's full of couples

getting used to being alone for a while — crying
in the health food shop between echinacea and
St John's Wort — do tears smell? — internal
aromatherapy?

shopping shopping, everyone's shopping in
sales time, but I don't buy much — the bus squeaks by

*

the fan is spinning — work at the screen done — a cricket
in the garden — a goods train's metal clanks, blades
of the fan pulse false waves of air —

here's me alone (ah, poor me!) and tonight everyone is
door door, swinging jokes and words between fences —
I'm nowhere in this, bemused by that

I drink my tea's silence — air is noise, songs on
different waves, but the same window

I've finished reading someone's memoir and
I don't care — its anecdotes drift without punchlines
or reasons — on TV, What's Eating Gilbert Grape?
very touching

we win the Fifth Test, a wind's blowing through the house
taking some of the heat out — the Australian Open is
coming soon — to the south-east lights probe the sky

*

I'm back at work — today was a planning day — sourness
near the surface — outside a glare of summer slackness

tonight, a play about Oscar Wilde, not such a great play —
The Judas Kiss — first half too expository — don't
we know all this?! — second half more affecting — I felt
attuned then to the Oscar-like sentiments — Naples
— older than *inglesie* — Naples of sun, volcano
and the melancholy bay Shelley brooded over — what
we can't lie about, Oscar could lie about — ... and
that's the Irish for you, our Irish friend says ...
— ...OK?

if it's about love, how can we love these days in the face
of social eavesdropping, breathless advice? — where is
the bright room, beside the bay? — sun wakes you
the moon's tide draws you to the body, hand and skin
— this is all that's left after the money goes, the
reputation — the skin expands

but tonight there's fun for afterwards — cheap
champagne — cheap matches that don't light — now
I am falling asleep, and love creeps up on me — her
postcard of a turtle — she's sick and I worry but I must
sleep — alone with the fan —

*

free tickets again in the heat, is this how to live? — song
of the circus — du soleil — girls together on a trapeze
a frisson — it's about skill and trust — rehearsed
rehearsed rehearsed — a woman's voice hangs over
the stage — another language, no words to ground
my mind — the mind has to make itself up — love
must enter the mind, bring together the whole
— figures of air invite further mysteries

too tired for late dinner — I must be dreaming of
the sky again, how it wants me to escape — but
escape what, to where

*

green tea floats — silence or melancholic music? —
there's nothing heavy in the air tonight — no cars
or doof doof or bad mouths, only echoes, tremolos
in a small corner of the vastness — or just my mind in
its argument with my forgetfulness — my attempt
to shut out death, of something

— next door hoses while we all wait for rain — noise
of the fan is this room's own summer sea — the planes
are using a different flight path — she says she'll be
home soon, the trip has been too much

*

down by the harbour this evening, B tells me how hard
is marriage, his children learning another language
— and poetry? — he suggests Pessoa, Machado
Andrade, Amichai, Bachri — yes, no women

the sky is purple, clouds are tipped orange — the air
is cool and dry, stone steps hugged by weeds —

D takes our pictures on the steps, she's leaning
on a brick wall to get the angle — the city and its dark
waters glide close by — for half an hour after I see
purple then orange squares

it makes fire in everything I touch —

Hungers and Sacrifices

We uncurl, brazened by the yard sun.

The day's peppy. We clown around bushes where you retrieve a broken cup, a trace of magenta at the lip.

In the affable light your forehead's glowing.
Your blue eyes turn sapphire in the angle of sun.

Mine green like a wall.

A wind gust tackles our cheeks, we attempt affinities with morning's jazzy ions, the horizon's pastels.

We applaud freshness, day's breath streams through our hair, clothes we've lowered onto our silent skins.

The drain next-door gurgles again.
There's the woof of a washing machine.
We raise bare forearms to demolish intrusion.

Tea leaves gather at the edges of cups, tired blood-brown lots in backwash.

We continue our speculations about the lightness of midday among a crinkly circus of vegetable beds a trough of compost, the legato of decomposure.

I spot an old doll in a basket, its cracked right cornea victim of childhood games. Though it may be sacrificial, its chipped red fingernails are still happy.

A discreet but rickety feeling is unleashed by afternoon's indolent light, beside the music of a table cloth.

We waver like cellophane in evening air, under the pale gold surface of the moon.

We feel like conspiring, stealing our identities to become
useless celebrities, stoic detectives, immaculate drama queens
or better still, mechanics in love.

We drive at midnight down the dirt track to the weir.
There's an awkwardness when we stop
then kindness enters with its unconditional moment.

We remember what we first touched together
what each day has done and undone
and what's washed away.

A Warning at the Table

We get the monster we pay for.
It will finish each day like another meal.
The table is ordinary but wide.

Even in the dust
I told my monster there was more.
Come on, the bread, the beer, the apple, the tea!

Here are the crumbs that follow us.
They dance at doors, with the serious money
and the children who warn us.
What they find under the table.

Every door has its monster.
Every monster once was a child.

Katy Evans-Bush

Opportunity

What a wonderful world we live in
every morning a new chance

This morning I woke up in my bed
left the warm bed
slipped slippers on and then made tea

Got to boil the kettle even though I can't
have the heating on
got to open a canister
and put the leaves
into my sweet teapot and got to pour

freshly boiling water over the tea
so that it blossomed

and then I got to pour tea into
my blue & white charity shop mug,
milk in first, of course
because I'm only a philistine

and then the tea
the delicate, astringent tea
from which a small plume of steam
rose in the freezing kitchen

Claire Crowther

Hazards and Thrown Humans

Whatever material you might consist of:
I'm wood.

If I pillowed my top layer—material
having a skin,
beneath it electrons are going and coming—
I'd soften
my surface, my tegument, down my flights—past
these hard pillars
that turn me and twist me—I could become twill.

I could bolster
the humans thrown down me, they would not break.
Window,

you melt, you transition—your glass, glass can hold it,
a body,
glass can flush back across opened space as a body
is hurled,

the thrown human will raise your resistance. A flash
of glaze holds
and the flesh does not shatter. And you, iron fence:
you cry 'Hazard!!!'

to passers-by. Guard rail, you can stop them, humans.
Persist.

Don't deny your ideals are forged out of you, beaten:
you're fixed
at three feet, but, young pickets, you quiver, you judder,
you shudder,
you shake and you tremble—excited! You'll bolt past
a spine,
an upside-down head. Up you go. Then when bone
and dear blood

slam at you, they'll meet metal sky. Why so thoughtless
sweet matter?

Humans will lob fling and sling their own species away,
catapult

sisters and brothers. Inertia is not so supine
as it's strong.

We must learn to desist, then, materials: matter
does mind.

Covert Bird

Out, I walk miles through fields to find the quail
where it calls
its doubled syllables: *where where wit wit*

I've left my shy writer in our stone home.
She's shackled.

She's a pinioned creature: *there there sit sit*

Our stones clutch air with swollen thumbs. Sick of
cracked tarmac,
cold and teary, I turn: *scare scare quit quit*

Back, limp room to room. Which is she locked in?
Fly, quail, flush
up from your obscure run: *where where wit wit*

Sophia Nugent-Siegal

Flotsam and Jetsam

I—Shipwreck

In the union of the tongue
Coming together and apart are one
The marriage of the sword

Cloven-footed beasts
Like the queen of Sheba
Mistaking a mirror for water

The river begins in the broken word
It becomes Narcissus' reflection
It becomes Echo's echo

Her yearning is all voice
Her voice empty of meaning
Like a cracked cup

II—Disguise

Masked in the sea
The spirits rise
Drunk on themselves

To their own selves
Turned in
Like fugitives—or careless coats

The label on the outside
Does not scratch the skin

It is the aureole of Europa
A cloth halo bellied up with salt-wind
Above the hunched back of the bull

The god in meat
Wrapped about the eye
Like a snake
Or a snake-skin washed ashore
A shadow in the sands

III—Quest

We seek to know
But do we know to seek?

In the labyrinth there are no doors
But at its centre Rosamund

What sort of rose is she?
To the philosopher a crystalline sphere
An elemental testament to triangles
To the bishop's ear a mermaid's song
Communing each upon the sharpest rocks
But to the fearful and the weak
The rose smells sweet

IV—Recognition

They try the test of mirrors
To see if a creature knows itself
But does a thing ever see itself in mirrors?

Or rather the surface
Like the moon whose craters need telescopes

Stroked by the poets for centuries with goose-quills
And trapped in nets of numbers by the sages

The acrobatics of vision
Bring sight tumbling to the mind
Blocks rolled downhill

It is the patterns written on sand and water which last
What Electra remembered was a curve
And that was how she knew

V—Conspiracy

The suspiration of conspiring breaths
Breeds the spirits between the mouths
The immaterial substances of angel wing and demon foot

Weaving a web like a spider which bites mouths alone
Mandibles clacking out skeins
Like scissors striking aetherial skin

And then Arachne gone
With her Velázquez spinners
Replaced by factories of water and fire
(The new dispensation)

It is from these innards
It is from these inwards parts
Needles that swim like tadpoles through the weft
Combine and strike flame
Devouring the cotton air
And the slave's hand

Speaking of Caesar

Jack Barron

Silent Reading

Almost angelic the arc, flutter
then wow: blank face, its winged
talk in some unquietness
turns dark, late work to utter

what soon withdrew, in love
with slighter matter. The living
room against the language game,
the facts just shy of

consummation in the darknesses:
they wound, as you
go without saying. In the head
does dawn appeal, loose as

pooling water, unanswerable
breathless stuff spilt
across the slim volume, which,
just briefly, you're able

to feel, like velvet or something
floral: a more denied
desire it fits as in a page
the dawning plaint for want

of disbelief. I know I read
just by fainter light to form
a fine excess and listen for
you. It's how the simple span

is tried again, the tear once more
illapsing into paper; I hear
by this a music out of true
about what this is speaking to.

In So Far As

Pressed flower: we play in softlock, an ending
in itself, so far as the pressure will allow.
Each stone is precious, and not to us unconscious,

is made in the graphic's fault; is that
at which we knelt, read yew and litanies, wept
and always rose again.

It is as we may think it: names left
like dark patterns becoming pathways
purposed for our being

in the substance that appals us: the firelit dead
among the dead, the prime example
uncertain when close-to. For there is death

in every loop: *Pressed flower*, its inisolable
loss lies flattered, so racked with joy
and some more burning voice. By which

within so many turns to rise is our pain
refreshed, an even breeze against all
doubt. I say pain, I mean it as an end.

Joseph Nutman

Aubade for the one who walks with me

After Juan Ramón Jiménez

I meet them at the high place—out of town upon the hill,
I hear their footsteps in my slowly waking thoughts,

and then, there—as I come out of the woods
in the sun—*here you are*—in step at my shoulder,

always in sync as soon as we meet again, like old friends
who pick up the thread and never miss a beat.

Occasionally, I catch them moving like me—except—
how they glide through space seems much more elegant,

though I'm slightly older, more bold and less sombre,
so I take first turn to describe the scene with language:

chalk hills rolling eastward, woods (probably private),
poplars on the horizon, and the cresting morning sun.

My walking partner waits, shakes their head, corrects me,
murmurs artfully about what's actually arrayed—

*hunched shoulders of iron pyrite dusted with sugar,
an arborescent moot of elders caught by lithograph,
a row of field hands regard the long day's work ahead,
a pantheon of gods in an incandescent aperture.*

I humour them—nod, and do my duty as the scribe,
but whose words are likely to stay standing
when I die?

Helen Tookey

Glasshouse

Thick air caught in your throat
sets you coughing. Water vapour

condensing on glass, mould
creeping over the windowsills.

Blow-flies, crane-flies
—a richness of corpses.

*Cereus, beacarnea,
neoregelia—*

this place belongs to those
who can suck nutrition out of the air,

can trap water
in spiked cup, swollen foot.

Blunt snouts pushing up,
broad tongues, pink at the tips

as though touched, enflamed
—you recognise a language here,

silent, shared, like the glances
girls exchanged in the mirrors

back at school, tiniest flicker
of lip or eyebrow heavy with significance

—a whole coded repertoire
and you shut out, burning to know.

Priest

John Singer Sargent, *Vespers*, 1909

This time, you see it.
Something in the shape of the face,
the dark short pointed beard.
A face from a snapshot,
a small blurred photograph
deep in your mind.

He doesn't smile.
He doesn't move a muscle.
He is as much a part of this place
as the stone pillars,
the whitewashed walls.
As the five worn stone steps
leading into the dark,
which is where you must go.

He doesn't try to hide the truth
but he gives you this cloister,
this soft settling evening dusk
for as long as you need it.

Not forgiveness you've come here for
but compassion. To learn
how it might have been.

Leia K. Bradley

No One's Penelope

Trusting stability takes habit, Martine, I know.
You resent my need to find beauty in every leaf that falls into my path. Look,
this one matches my lipstick, crimson as a stolen kiss. You roll your eyes
at the messages I read from a Morse-flickering streetlamp;
you think I am frivolous, maybe, that I should be more like you: ready
as an adder. Poised to strike, to sink fast your fangs
into an inevitable enemy. Do you jump, ever, at your own reflection in a
[looking glass?]

All the lapis lazuli in the world cannot protect you
from your high roil of fear. Preparedness against pain
is a soldier's causeless life, and a short one at that. Look,
I don't know if I want there to be a happily ever after
more than I want to know if it is worth sacrificing myself
to hold your Ship of Theseus mind together. I am
no great seamstress or healer. Yes, I know the words and ways
to enact a great love, to tie myself to its sails and sing my own siren psalm
to keep the bloom ever verdant, but I do not know
how to make someone let me.

I have valerian for sweet, lulling calm, Saint John's Wort
for heart healing, feverfew for when your mind swells
with rage so incandescent I fear
your skin will crack open like a vase in an opera house, that
white-hot light will gush and pour from you
in a heavenly, righteous burn, all
heat, all saviorhood, all abominable depths of care. What of your own stake
in your own serenity? Odysseus pretended to be mad purely so
he did not have to play
clever hero once again. Lost to his own tragedian need to outwit,

you, too, will have no one to return to if you choose to sacrifice yourself. You will only be alone.

I want to hold you, but you shrug me away from the armor of your skin,
and I don't know how much longer, Martine, I can be strong enough to stay
while you choose a hero's journey, as if we all don't know
about Sebastian's arrows and Lucy's eyes,
how saints become saints, how witches become immortal.
You do not need to burn and I am no Penelope.

Mark Fiddes

Interior with young woman seen from behind

(After Vilhelm Hammershøi)

A Delft tureen, the artist's wife
turned towards the lilac wall.
Their faint blue symmetry.
A stillness created not by paint
but what is beyond the window
across the courtyard in the stalls
where they are flaying a deer,
drinking aquavit, slapping backs
and singing bawdy songs.
Blood pools under the carcass.
Late flies cluster on the new pelt.
Along a forest path, leaves stir
with long-departed footsteps.
Smoke rises from the valley.
By the lake, urgent lovers kiss
under clouds pressing south
where a boy king is crowned.
Factories smelt shining miracles.
Ships load with dark cargoes.
A city falls to a bored army
behind hungry, unruly canons.
A century of noise commences
the way it means to go on.
Yet this day is framed by Ida,
a still life caught in his interior,
the back of her neck, her hair
unbraiding before a lilac wall,
sparking a million revolutions.

David Miller

Path

the stain
lifted itself

& flew
& then collapsed

stain or shadow

**

garden table
garden chair

white chair
white table

she would smoke a small cigar
& gaze & think & meditate

the bougainvillea's no more
the eucalyptus tree tall

**

the sheet music shop yielded unexpected treasures

but then it was gone
abandoned & boarded up

just dirt & rubble where it stood
the corner restaurant the same

the train station
disused

trams run there now

**

a swift flight
past the bushes

in the rain

which bird?
too quick to see

**

there's rain
& there's rain

there are dreams
& there are dreams

**

*a gardener comes here unseen
you can see where he has worked with the plants*

*no there is no gardener
you can see that the weeds tell their own story*

the philosopher rode into college on a horse

the horse absconded
greener pastures awaited

Tom Cowin

On Ancestry

to the exfoliating dawn up
Fulking Scarp beside Perching
lost village whose calcifying

voices raise the pale fire grass
of morning. Curvatures
of impossible shelter, where

to rest but the hook of an arm,
wriggling comfort among
the chalkblindings and Devil's

Bit stillbursts. His limping
chafes at the skin of day
starting to cloud, deafening

Fasciated

An interior, a queue
and lit like deluge

I could so suggest
a mutual solar

low-level language
barrier is a beautiful

alterity and bur to
catch the way the day

tumbles through
the plate glass is

like an over-bloom
excess like below

the apron like petalling
the rounded glow

of possess flattens
reciprocal absorbency

like glutting anthers spark
broader than love

or leaf shapes
fully open to each,

foxgloves, forsythia, euphorbias, lilies,
and verbascums such as the mullein.

Katherine Meehan

Riding the Gallows

Into the great cosmic blank you can enter your choice:

Void or world. Choose both. Okay?

No one gives a fuck about transcendence.

One sees everywhere the terrible shame of turning away
and binding oneself to like *super* deep thoughts.

No one should want this.

Like a defamatory fresco slapped

on the city walls, you are an act
of humiliation and treachery—
simply by noting there is nothing fresh
in the moral woodland, the trees are ill-intentioned,

they wear martyrs, each one a copy
of some other martyr, the genealogy
of suffering, mass-produced and flimsy,
with no record of its origins except
the ones we found in the fairy land
death-in-life almost anticipated.

We are not sure if this is why

when the lights go out, you are lit
head first by the implication
that “mundus inversus” is
the proper order of things, that only through
inverting oneself in tights and a jerkin

can reality be properly perceived
and that it is dangerous to do so, there is
a risk of stroke and asphyxiation—
the *actual* magician David Blaine
righted himself once an hour
throughout his experiment with hanging
to avoid brain damage and death;
it is likely that an early retirement,

taken in this fashion, would be less painful
than composing emails each day.

I Asked the Sky to Like, Subscribe, and Share

What if it was true, I asked myself, everything the sky said?
I was already inside of it; it spoke closely to me and everyone.
The sky—it sent me messages at night
I would stay awake for hours listening—
I spoke back to it, emptying myself—
no scrap of me got past it,
it had a way of turning me towards itself—
I asked if it would like to meet in real life;
I had no idea what that meant at least half the time.
I wanted to know it better—it did not have the trouble I had
with obsession; I wanted to get so near to it,
like Yves Klein leaping upwards in that picture,
only without the occulted tarp below.
Oh Void, love me insanely!

Rizwan Akhtar

shrink

dawn is like an unattended page
squeaky birds tear complacency
gained over night in a warm quilt
“what was the dream that jolted”
you have asked me taking a note
images permuted scribbled
prophetic is so apocalyptic, the
silent is so noisy, in-between
I feared you declare me insane
or some other term unheard,
regime of physic disorders bigger
than a continent, wars say in
Africa plagued souls, Fanon lived
diagnosed the colonial madness
of establishing a collective dream
but a white dream with a white core
but my individual dreams are black
Lacanian, I cannot figure out like
Conrad’s Marlow whether it is
a nightmare or not, ‘You are my
shrink’ ‘you know history burns
jungles of community and when
we give vote we only think about
taxes’, bloodshed is a parliament
we endorse—women in Kashmir,
Uyghurs in consternation facilities
Kurds in Armenia are not so distant
cousins of Bosnians and survivors
of Dresden and Palestine—all dreamt
freedom but then came Guantanamo
again we surrendered to the dreams

Of Blairs and Obamas, chucked out
Mandela installed Generals, democracy
is so subtle to the effect of a dream I am
narrating in which I saw a Syrian child
embraced by a Turkish solider and here
you are digging up its nitty gritty.

A Posthumous Letter to My Father

By writing this I am trying to make up
for not talking to you when the time
was ripe. Now the silence spooks
around your figure emerging from a
field of echoes seeing you hulking a
grey Vespa reaching home punctually—
regrets of my childhood climbed over
shoulders heavy despite that rare scowl
I caused by transgressing, that pretentious
despotism carried a child hidden inside,
a wispy odor of your sweat attended me
how you hatched vowels caressingly
and bred rebukes in manly plosives
on evenings I behaved and bothered
your lingual fits subsided benignly
couldn't a pathos be more handsome
than words held back long letting me
imagine a fossilized language breaking
rules of memory before I could close.

Bernadette McCarthy

The Sallies

One day, a woman gave him odd jobs.
He wanted to ask her what hellebores were
but could only say 'no' and 'fuck'.

She left him to the morning bee-drone.
The gutters were cleared of muck,
ivy tangled round pillars tugged down.

He was pulling up sallies everywhere.
The rotted clog of knotweed
he dug out from the rockery

was tough and rangy as a ram's hoof
and he felt vital again, like a rootball,
tracing the veins of it back to the pulse

of a shepherd in the Carpathians
hopping from one foot to the other
to stay the cold.

He eased buttercups out from under stones,
sweltering in the honey-glazed afternoon.
At five she gave him apple tart and tea,

which he had beneath the Pampas grass,
and a crisp brown note.
Going back, the drifting catkins

fleeced his shoulders like a *cojoc*
and the road was a river joining all rivers,
the Sullane, the Lee, the Danube.

The farmer's wife clattered down
from the tin roof to kiss him hello.

Where goats sleep is a good place to build a house

He went to gather kippeens—‘small wood’
he muttered knowingly—
from the haggard and saw

that orchids were popping up like harlots
where he had dreamed April away.
He was grateful for the tropes of spring

as the trees told a rosary
in a tongue he no longer recalled,
responding to the breeze

as it wafted the willow down:

sally sáile
salix salcie

Sylee Gore

Lastness

July dusk. Parched grass, pale whelk, sharp rock
Seaglass lump, maple lace, glazed cup, pine cone
Lichenized twig, blunt cork, down feather, stubbed chalk
Moss, blackbird shell, acorn cap, quartz-stung stone

Talisman: the last word taught in childhood
Seed, stalk, husk—both archaic and brand-new
The first terms learnt in old age: will, heirloom
Legacy, testament; estate, accrue.

Winter morning. Cloud-white box, faience tray
Plaster cube, salt cellar, tea sieve, brass latch
Beeswax taper, silk square, unfired clay
Alabaster urn, smoked glass, burnt match

This sun-ruffled catalogue, steadied by rhyme
This landscape of objects, shadowed by time

Voice

Apart is exquisite: one sun, one tower
one holy room paged full of days
yet dry, bare of form and steel power
The lone mind by the window lifts its gaze

Converge. Two voices strengthen thought, and ten
extend it. Plait the rope so taut it holds
apples, rings of roses, cobblestones, then
hoist beyond known doors. Court vertigo

The tower, extended, wants a chorus
not a mob. A tuning fork's tapped 'C' peals
the mind of fog to sound a ferrous
star: a bold north is the only way to see

Proud in splendour, yet waking life alone
a rooftop garden is the only home

I Prefer to Avoid Challenges

We use a list to wish. Stump of beeswax
in one brass cup, charred wick in the other.
Cars mimic waves, and the wires beneath things
distend and crack the clay to cuneiform.

We use a list to define: skyscraper
dive bar, summer on the chaise, belvedere
shivering chestnut-green in May.
In the round library, light soaring down

the page. Fingertip and thenar webspace.
Kneecap and lobe. A list helps us forget.
Overhead, separate clouds daub the eye.

We make a list to remember. Eyelash,
orbital bone, popliteal fossa,
the hollow at your throat, all the soft spots:
ripeness never fleeting before it's lost.

Ellen Harrold

The Carving Flint Rakes These Audios

Sweet, sooty cadmium floods the water bough, collapsing civilizations' dust through upended physics. The rate of replacement halts the surge, flickering o'er the supple weight cast by tidal bulge. The force has thus far obeyed number, although that may change. We have no empirical evidence that the laws of physics can't be broken. The judges usually just adjust them for any discrepancies. It's what makes humans so much more powerful than the universe: we can change our names.

There is a fishing hook caught in the shallows.

Dust floats dim and interesting amongst sweet-rot, coagulating. Or is it contaminating? There is a killer but no crime; more interest in judging the numbers.

Crushed Spine Split

Trawlers spark—
Star marked mirrors
hovering in supple care

Between
Arcs of grey/pink/blue

Converge at one with that great abyss.
At what fucking point does air fail to form sky?
When esophageal claustrophobia erupts
into limp fingers and sun-soaked lashes.

Taphonomies on Display

Ash fine mist catches on gallow'd dew,
Laundering the sun stains on tin and cadmium glass
discarded.
Postmortem mornings for the turbulence of hierarchy
throwing downward
in the catchment area of free-form revels,
a fox lays its withered skull.
Old age having settled its chase.
Finalised in pale angles and caught breath,
a milky cloud saturating the eyes.

Pigmented light fulminates,
dying to soft reds, then pale grey.
Under the weight of commute drizzle,
some cyclists send their glances.
A pedestrian stops to stare.
Another calls the local council, snipping over the line
about rubbish
and needles in wait of wandering feet.

It takes two days for removal,
soft flesh begun its rot.
Lifted from that tarmac pitch
to ascend, a second coat of flames.

Ann Pelletier-Topping

Because her name ends in M

we drag her by the wrists
into the churchyard
among the headstones
she hardly resists

we scratch with feral claws
as if to snatch what's inside her
her face a flaming bloom
her arms tattooed in scrawls

pale blue eyes
plead with mine

but where does friendship lie
under a wounded sky

I long to fly between tribes
redraw the lines

out of myself
I am torn

a kestrel trembling
alone

Jay-Philippe Vibert

dawn

(from 'basilisk', Chapter Four)

helices chatter

(Beilstein rewrites Beilstein

profligate mark at the molecular)

a breath of life

(of course, ours is a science taught by constellations,

even the stars can sense the enormity of our uniqueness)

beginning

(Darwin blushed to theorize a peacock tail)

an engine stops in electric shock

bursting the frailty of its fumes

a narwhal shrieking at the surface lay

dives disturbed

cars lub roadside in plush alarum

spiders web, luminesce and brook
sugary fronds, slow-dripping saliva
flicker, vanish
a salamander's tail and tongue

our road divides,
the spine undulates drenches of tarmac
drills skewer the air petrified roar of crystal
cranes gob steel

lassoed

in time

helices chatter
pigeons crowd a crust
like screens of bristling
angels clustering a saint
as a cat licks at a puddle
whiskers rinsed in rainbows
working on the in-breath
brachiates
coral to clinker

a crab falls forward with the swell
waving red anemones on blue claws

the pursuit is not for a reflection but the pursuit itself
there is no magic but in the telling
'spellbound' is merely accurate
at fault, paradigms

a bluff in this expanse

impulse teratogenic

wasps gather a crushed snail's ichor

now

there are no lines for justification to cross

but the point is before extinction

try

there is no act beyond your own

choke. The tongue is brittle &

hopeful, is jaunty, dissolves

Margaret Ann Wadleigh

Beguiled by the Gyre

Chartres' spires rumble up from the crypt,
the place of her pangs. Underearth, a Celtic

well remains, a dark portal of shut-eyed
blankness, unwishing. Once, folk on foot

encircled thrice, to conjure the guardian
sprite of the spring: their Underground Lady:

Notre Dame Sous Terre. Shards of limestone,
relics of cemented bones disguise the fluids

in soil. Today, from a driveway a purple
violet clammers up a tiny crag of concrete,

climbing its local crevice in dank Spring
to pose (to solve) the Paschal Mystery,

to recall that there were other labors: eons
and eons of contractions, travails, volcanic

spasms and titanic shifts that transformed
ocean beds into sky-steeple of snow.

The ancestors said that God was unhappy
because it thundered on Easter Day

and yet, now, in the Himalayas, pilgrims
find seashells on the peaks: the ammonite

coils ascend and descend, always making
still, headway on a timeline of vertigo.

Isobel Armstrong

from Broken Glass

3 Fight — remembering Keats

all it takes

blood and glass
a quarrel in the street
a broken bottle
jagged edge
a cry
aortic blood
pulmonary red
too literal
to be imagined
bleeding to death
in five minutes

but once understanding
his own lungs how glass
blushed with blood
that impossible red
incarnadine vermilion
fused in light and glass
that
red ichor where
saints and apostles jostle
for place in high windows
blessed with redness
plasma of glass robes and
angel wings and doves
redness that intensest

no

words vermillion
ruby scarlet carmine cinnabar
except when
twilight stains cast
a radiance on a cathedral's stone floor
remembering red
remembrance
imagining

4 Crystal

'It was as if a fracture in delicate crystal had begun.'
George Eliot. *Middlemarch*, Lydgate's marriage.

fissure
invisible almost

a fissure in crystal though
the split sides cleave
as if
as if
parting asunder
the breach rhymes itself
as if
assuaging an
originary rupture though

intransigent crystal
incorporates
an almost invisible
dyad
in its lustre
striation
two lines
held apart
in the tense glass

Mark Ward

Low Ceilings

after Larkin

All my friends have done away with lust:
a scarf they left behind and do not miss.
I sit outside an interchangeable
bar, watch young men commit to the premise:

someone'll always find them attractive.
It's in the eyes, I tell the empty chair,
imagining you captivated.
We watch heads turn, eyes meet, that knowing stare

focussed on me, for a moment, and he's gone,
content to look and move on with his night.
That's not right, Phillip says, lighting a smoke.

All I have is bitterness, he half-jokes.
He drags me up, throws me towards the throng.
The man looks again. In his eyes, I see life.

Janet Sutherland

from The True Briton, an N.F.S.Q. Barque of 1046 tons

(extracts from the journal of Victor E. Smyth made on a voyage to Australia with Geraldine & Julian Smyth 1875–76)

28th Dec. 1875: At 12 O'clock noon we were exactly under the sun, we stuck penknives upright in the deck & there was no shadow. V E S

I have set my knife
in the body of the ship
and eaten all darkness
where are the shadows of war
where are the shadows on the lung

*4th Jan. 1876: Sighted a vessel said to be the Lammermoor of the 19th ult.
Dancing on the poop in the evening. I dressed in female clothes & caused
amusement. T. Scarth played the fiddle. V E S*

My father who would often work in shorts
bare chested bringing hay bales in
took me aside one hot day in July
the year I turned eleven my chest
must now be covered-up I could
not walk the fields like him though
no one else would see My childish skin
scribbled by cut-stemmed summer
grasses laved by air which licked
me with its tongue would be
incarcerated bound what is shame?
what is rage? I learned that day
the simplest forms of them

2nd Feb 1876: Cook threw his white dog overboard, being out of its depth it was drowned. V E S

lured in as witnesses and connoisseurs
our diarist denies us extra notes
offers the germs of war and genocide

11th July 1876: At 1pm Mr H returns, and we dine. The most startling feature about this meal is that nothing is drunk but tea. I always ask for a glass of water. V E S

So that dragonflies may flick and dart
so that they buzz and creak
until the tongue asks for water
for something to swallow
so that cattle may drink
that they may toss their heads
cast droplets back along their flanks
until the mouth researches
runnels and channels
so that kingfishers may flash
and fish idle in the shallows

Norman Jope

From the Westernmost Bridge

Shelley in Pisa

The young man surveys the sunset, its darkest barriers of cinereous cloud—his death lies in that direction, beyond the Arno's mouth, but even if visible it can't be expressed in words. The silence of the Mediterranean depths has no equivalent in the streak of dun and sulphureous gold that lingers overhead like a newly-made scar. No sight on earth can summon the reality of death... for where it is, we are not. We can only summon its likeness in the things of earth. He cannot finish the poem... he has two years of experience to cram in at lightning speed before the boat overturns and his spirit sinks into the waters. He ends it with the word Gold and returns to his palatial lodgings and infatuations—lets life pile in, for he must drink it up as quickly as he can. That sunset has told him all he knows, and all that he will need to know. A quiet half-unpeopled town is his to feel at home in for the briefest of interludes... I resurrect him briefly as a wrinkled image, trembling and unfading on the city's westernmost bridge.

Giles Goodland

Illumination

Beyond the realm of bird circle floats from a face, places its lips on me. Scales of rain fall from my eyes when I look into it. In the quarter light of the moon listen. God's silence contains the sum of all noise. Our first language was light, followed by the sound echoing, not echoing through the public domain. Time hurtles, wind carries delicate sentence-structures. They sway and nod.

Departure

Cars tut under the forest's drum pressure. Like at the start of a beautiful war film, the birds are leaving. Geese's sonar. The trees smudge up a prayer which the wind drives off.

Alphabet

The devil's work is before this. Without it we would store the world in sense order. In the war against names I am on the side which holds denotation fails discourse, but the lark sleeps under my hand. Trees print a list of birds which the sky files daily into its unmarked cabinet.