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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.*

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# 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 unbelief. 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 insanelly!

## 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 soldier 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

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## 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 kipeens—'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

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## Lastness

July dusk. Parched grass, pale whelk, sharp rock  
Seaglass lump, maple lace, glazed cup, pine cone  
Lichened 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, faïence 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

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## 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 gallowed 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

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## 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

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**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

lassoes

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 clambers 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

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## *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   vermilion  
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

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## 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

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## ***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

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## 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

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## 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.