

# SHEARSMAN

115 & 116

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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 for recent issues we have sometimes taken a month longer.

*This issue has been set in Bembo with titling in Argumentum.*

*The flyleaf is set in Trend Sans.*

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# Geraldine Clarkson

---

## **Fox, the Prisoner**

Fox, the prisoner, impressed on several counts:

- 1) by offering cranberry and açai tea in stylish china: conical cups with blue & yellow Clarice-Cliff-like patterns
- 2) having attended the Station without demur, her apparent lack of need to micturate during a 3-hour recorded session in Interview Room 2
- 3) her manner of peeing when the occasion arose for her to attend – accompanied – the Station WC: swift, efficient, without noise, gaminess, or a solitary glance into the glass above the basin whilst rinsing her hands (3 pumps on the soap dispenser)
- 4) the observation that her home had been completely devoid of paper – books, journals, newspapers, jotters, napkins, printing paper, notepaper – with the exception of one lined scrap pinned under a Welsh-Lady paperweight, on which was written the word URGENT and your own contact details.

## **Fox, the Prisoner II**

*[Editing in]*

2a) her grim intensity when speaking of her ex-lover, his ex-parents and ex-children, the neighbours left, right, and opposite, each one of whom she described in authorial detail; the meat cleaver, the bed-sheets, the lilac bathroom mat, primrose linen shirt – all of which the Polish cleaner was said to have assisted with; and the two fountains of blood, arching, crossing, and seemingly unstoppable, exiting his carotid arteries like the flea-bitten tawny brushes of a vixen and her mate. Crucifox.

## Every Wednesday

was shaped like an avenue of drizzle –  
v's pulling away in torqued autumn light –  
eager foragers, off, nosing truffle-rich mulch.

An ice pack on my heart to reduce  
inflammation, a palmful of pills to slow me  
and the girl – who invited her – I don't recall

the start of it – a lolloping lump, her feet hooked  
under the sofa – amiable enough, with big  
rough opinions which she jutted into our

conversations, without seeming to need a  
response, but looking 'knowing', her electric  
gaze always switched on. We talked of the dead

but in an easy buttered-fruit-bread  
and-tea kind of way, passing the plate.  
Except the girl, that is—

she seemed able to remember  
the underside of everything, chance  
words overheard, signs in the air and

in the breath – queen prophetess of  
the sofa, sensing the hop of devils and angels  
round the teacups, messages in the leaves – V's

name in a hospital report, in a letter found  
at the library and handed to the police, a priest's  
subterfuge. The days always ended with some fresh

rush into pain, a yanking from the domestic  
into grim medieval scenes, starved vistas  
where each of us was alone with hollow cold

and a taunter. The Wednesdays lasted  
for a year or so, we don't observe anniversaries  
now, and the girl has returned to wherever

she came from, though I see her in shops  
sometimes, dragging around a puggish toddler,  
whom I recognise as my own, and who'd vanished.

## **Beryl-the-Peril Bluebell**

Tell blue, flower.  
Tell a querulus of best  
blue to the flat white  
meadow stuck in  
picture-book reverie.

Stalk joy with your stem  
and your airy, fairy bell.  
Stick pistils out  
and in that shot-silk thimble  
ring like hell.

# Adam Flint

---

## Rome

in this print lie traces · soft-soled · of an irritant earth · felt in the  
split apart from the welt · wild arum leaves after rain · smeared with  
white gore bled from their petals · pure as the curls of bernini's last  
christ · cool steep moss-breath · rich from rock-walls · in perpetual  
shade · before the touch-burst tamarisk brushes · past arms in light  
· acacia blossoming infant fever · byron's sunburnt swim to the  
bolivar · the host's unwanted divorce · all other incidents of vigils  
neglected · down from teetering minds · pollarded cloud · the  
roman pines to a beech-lined tiber · a prison-house for the angels ·  
jailed by wings of stone

## In the Fourth Emblem

*(After Nicolas Barnaud Delphinus)*

Part leaves clothing  
young bark,

enter divested of  
tread in the wood.

Pause, flotant,  
at spongy galls – oak-

succubi troubling sleep

strained from the splinter. Lift amid

the ancient,  
eyes, to lions.

Their manes sheaves.  
Full August.



# Mark Weiss

---

## **A Suite of Dances XXIII: No More No Less**

You may become of me your own imagining.  
The never-ending acquisition and forgetting of language.

When I gave him his first camera  
he lined up small things in the beam of sunlight  
and studied refraction, translucence,  
reflection.

Make much of small victories.

Find the key in the donut.

### AN DIE MUSIK

The dog barks at certain intervals.

I mistook it  
for a living thing.

You mount stairs.  
You mount horses.  
I watch you mount them.

### FEMME FATALE

This graceless child's become  
a slayer of men.

Strong, capable.  
Nothing ethereal about it.

They chatter on about something and she,  
her face contorted,  
“How can they know,  
how can I tell them?”

## THE WANDERING EYE

Touches  
his finger tips  
with his finger tips.  
Over and over. So that's  
that. In a sky  
that's always  
cloudless, fingers  
of light, white  
fingers, over  
and over. So that's  
that.

And at the other  
end. As if end  
lessly, and then.

Enough.  
So that's  
that.

## THE BONE

Impossible geometry of rocks, the crystalline  
structure writ large.

Fragments  
of a mind, one might  
have thought,  
obdurate. Bone  
on flesh.  
Bone on bone.

Well then,  
it's all  
water in the valley,  
and one man's daylight  
is another's darkness.

Bone on bone.

A life's  
tawdriness, a day's  
distress. Oh  
la.

Here let me say.

Possibly a different understanding of mountains.  
It does  
as I begin to sleep  
have teeth.

Built on a rising figure  
there. Damp  
quarry  
in a damp quarry.

Follow the sound  
to the source of sound.

Never asked  
the meaning  
of it.  
Who hasn't faked a rapt  
attention?

The meanings  
assigned her, an a  
greement not to.



Faint streaks of tinted cloud stretched by themselves  
float half- or more concealed behind Fuji  
that almost flawless mountain thought to be  
extinct though could be dormant no-one knows  
but hopes are rampant still. (We've peered down from  
the rim of Asama on seething lava  
smelling foul, in Kyûshû looked across  
the bay to Sakurajima which smoked  
all day while water swaying black between  
us and the island steamed.)

That sheer cliff on  
the left and almost vertical allows  
a narrow path undreamed of years ago  
when travellers had to clamber among rocks  
along the shore at lower tide and glimpse  
up fearfully. Firm pine-trees cling there, ripped  
by gales, seem sinister. Above to-day's  
path, left, strips of bare rock stand out through thick  
low foliage like long blurs of moss. More pines  
lean gaunt and ruggèd. Threaten. Wait.

Two males  
while wandering down the higher slope pause to  
admire the scene to right, their left. The path  
soon wending to the frame will vanish to  
re-enter further lower where a peasant  
climbs, a heavy burden on his back.  
He'll also have to leave the print he's on  
and halt to catch his breath then chat perhaps  
with those down-comers in the hidden part  
of that long curling path we'll never see.  
This print is Number 17 of all  
the stations Hiroshige studied, brought  
to life and dazzles us with. Other ones  
survive and differ slightly – some have throngs  
of trekkers, show one only stretch or tilt  
the angle to the sea but what they have  
in common is a mostly put aside  
phenomenon.

Despite the frequent sun-  
or moonlight artists here have never let  
a person or a tree throw down across  
fields, streets or gardens those flat silhouettes  
they actually possess. This is a world  
lacking a shadow. On the ground or floor  
all stays so clean, uninterrupted by  
each still or moving greyish shape, just one  
more elongation from the feet or edge  
or grip on earth which birches have. You don't  
observe that absence, take for granted what  
the painter hasn't dwelt with, see a land  
not adumbrated like the so-called west  
but lit the same way everywhere. Van Gogh  
when Japanese prints got so popular  
dismissed all shadows for a while and did  
his buyers notice? Did we note it here?

# Julie Maclean

---

## cause, effect, fish and similes

every night he notes fronts  
temperatures    movements of cloud  
where the sons reside  
sailing miles into the ocean  
on the strength of a forecast

not for a moment considering  
Lorentz and his chaos theories  
kicked about like pig-skin footballs  
cumulus forming around his imperfect head like fungus  
wind creeping up his imprecise trousers

real weather is a teenager  
howling            calculating  
its own behaviour  
patterns collapse into nebulae of fantasy  
like the time I caught one son

cosy in cyberspace examining women  
in unlikely but desirable /ferrety/ positions  
and my first real lesson to him  
within the Theory of Everything —  
          *uncertainty    certain*

# James Coghill

---

## **from after Aniara**

*Harry Martinson's epic science fiction poem*

3

*threaten havoc to our time and state*

peculiar dove / dove of especial note / dove trapped  
in a bare white room /  
dove that quotes lenin / dove that eats grit / dove that is  
categorically un-pigeon  
a new angle of attack reveals / unexpected overlap with various  
iterations made during a gunfight in which your exact opposite  
who is the colour  
of poached aubergines / condenses pre-spatchcocked  
on our world's  
jolly windscreen / who by some unthought route /  
*put down exactly what*





# Michael Aiken

---

## The urge to stare deeply into any body of water...

Rain loosens oil stains on a footpath slick with slime,  
awash with unclean, sleepless people.  
Streetlights and taxis sail through the storm  
as one lone, mangy cat, clumsily desexed, yawls...

A low wind blows. Shuddering, a junkie says  
*You feel that? Mother Earth's turning  
in her shallow grave*

The water draws eels from crevasses;  
bricks soften in the old gaol wall  
and mortar falls away.  
Ibis circle a drunkard, watch  
for his wallet to drop.

This is the kind of rain  
– undead  
walking down the street,  
bent against the water –

the rain that draws great eels out  
from beneath concrete and trees,  
from rifts and fissures in the footpath  
to roll like sea lions, following pedestrians.

Translucent bags sluice through grates,  
filter across sunlit currents...  
...no river known to me –  
no river, no lake,  
no great ocean not already desecrated  
by petroleum rainbows and degraded chains  
of molecular aggregates impersonating cnidae.

A stormwater drain:  
the concrete remains of one bold water course,  
the other reduced to an entombed sewer  
left for rats and explorers to haunt;

this city's beloved swamp has been drained for a park  
and beneath it, the subterranean train station  
now a lake filled with white, blind eels –

Lake St. James – awaiting the disaster,  
the apocalypse that will send us under,  
seeking shelter in its vaulted rooms,  
gathered to supplicate in that flooded chamber  
And offer our friends to the predatory hunger  
of its patient, anguilline angels.

# Robin Fulton Macpherson

---

## Sun Through Mist

Normal life has been persuaded  
not to be normal.  
Colours have been told to calm down.

As if a horizon has stopped  
vanishing ahead  
and allows us to come up close,  
feel the roughness of leaf and stalk  
in a lost garden,  
hear the half-finished sentences  
of the tall people  
who sometimes answer, sometimes don't.

## Early Words

«Pirnmill,» perhaps a place-name  
like «Shedog» or «Sannox,» jabs  
in the flow of adult talk.

«A little-bit-of-bread-and-  
no-cheese» – what yellowhammers  
chirped swaying on their top twigs.

«Himmler,» «Messerschmitt,» almost  
acclimatised, local, like  
«double-daisies» and «lupins.»

# Alexandra Sashe

---

## Pastoral

*(Ode to Simplicity)*

Via the Land, via the hours'  
fluid awaiting texture,  
their unshared and common pace  
of the clock, of the embracing landscape

Of the home changing its face  
via the sun wrinkles, fields' furrows,  
aging towards its birth

the Song of the tongue resting upon  
the objects' silence, muteness, withdrawal, –  
the sole verse of a single word  
sings for  
and out of Love

The wise hands are falling apart,  
they sing their fall, and take rest in hay.

The hour touches the land and fills to the brims the cups  
of those who were called the last, and came.

## Pastoral

Yet the birds flight  
lilac and rose,  
mute and forbidden,  
is encountered and received  
in the hands  
whose embers

are beads of the evening rosary,  
whose burns are read in secret  
by a child knowing  
their fortune.

Patient fingers unfold  
their even layers  
    of birdly purpose.  
Grains of corn are laid  
for gold, in the hands  
that carry the sun.

Fields' mouth, clothed with obedience,  
partakes of the clouds' embrace  
and blessing.

It is grass, ever-white with her maiden name,  
that belongs to her bridegroom, and  
waits at the gate.

# Mark Russell

---

## Men Reading

About war, they say, there is nothing new to hunt. It is as common to write a Dear John letter sitting on the beach at Big Sur, as it is to cycle through the mountains in 45°C. It is the distance between the tongue and the gun, and by equal turns, the veracity of the clinical drugs test, that may land a tornado safely in the desert, far from centres of population. A man found reading Plato in translation in a public toilet may be a Greek scholar after all, or taking precautions. Two men found reading Plato in a public toilet may be understandably annoyed at the intrusion, or the CEOs of rival corporations that produce high performance battery packs for light civilian and military helicopters.

## Men Singing Doo-Wop

About war, they say, there is nothing new to detain us. It is as common for the tenor to be on top, as it is for the bass to be on bottom. It is the chaos of harmony, and by equal turns, the peace of discord, that brings the barbershop to heel. A man insisting on using the off-beat may be passing on his DNA to all and sundry, or about to die by firing squad. Two men insisting on using the off-beat may dress like that on purpose, or to avoid capture by the bad guys.

# Rosanna Licari

---

## Saudade

During those old subtropical summers  
the humidity soared  
to an operatic pitch.  
We sat on the front porch covered  
in a film of sweat  
barely moving  
unless to sit in front of the fan.  
The mango tree stood  
like an open-armed goddess  
her blessings exposed  
as pendulous golden fruit.  
The yield that didn't finish up  
in a chutney or yoghurt  
was foraged by colonies  
of screeching bats  
and became a fermented compote  
under the tree.  
The smell rose in the day's heat  
to remind us  
of bacchanalian rites:  
orchards,  
young wine,  
amorous dancing.  
But we were far too sticky  
to think seriously of lovemaking.  
Then in the afternoon  
the clouds bore down  
and the storm washed us clean,  
as, open-mouthed and facing heaven,  
we stood in the drenching rain.



## Archaeopteryx

The puzzle laid out –  
fossils examined and re-examined.  
Re-image the skeleton.

Re-imagine.

Gradually it came about,  
first two legs moving from the pelvis  
add bristle and fluff,  
then the wishbone, begging for flight.  
A demand morphed into wings and  
whistled through weightless  
hollow bones. Quills added  
and a creature marked the transition.  
Not all bird –  
serrated teeth  
a long bony tail  
wings sporting claws.

# Mark Goodwin

---

## This One Water Gesture

from far  
off a

river's run s    whirls s    wells  
its wet

sounds through

air here holds  
a whole

valley in one

vast wobbling  
sonic droplet of

place

a sound-recordist first  
p    laces her ear

here at

point one at  
this place-sized

droplet's edge

her delicate metal  
microphone is

not really

solid it is  
wet's image of

solidity list  
ening now

a recordist m oves  
her ear through

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Note: The expression *this one water gesture* was spoken by listener-&-field-recordist-composer Hildegard Westerkamp, whilst being interviewed by composer sound-artist Cathy Lane. (Source: *In The Field, The Art of Field Recording*, Cathy Lane & Angus Carlyle, Uniform Books, 2016.)

# Eluned Jones

---

## Enlli Child

Speaking in a strange accent, he draws the absence  
where one church terminates and another English  
replies; comfortable somehow, gentle in his mellow,  
cured syllables. His tongue becomes the fingers  
that hold this feeling – once, twice – while a sea states  
its inconceivable body to a stranger's feet; here,  
it says, one man stood on a different ending,  
he tasted gorse, heather, those obdurate thickets  
that speak sharply of a death. Mine, he queried hesitantly;  
then, endowed, it spread deeply as his blood, staying  
as the sun moved behind stone and Hywyn's eyes  
shaded; for the language that was once a cell  
explains itself as lightning, erecting a sanctuary that fails  
to refresh the wind, or his fingers as he lingers into wood.

## Shadow language

George Borrow dreamed his shaded English from its parable;  
its soaked letters – how it stated a man who is sometimes  
called god, but who died here. The precariously mortal body,  
it says, was suffused – yes, it suffered and that it bled,  
overcome by a symbolism which might have been  
his generosity. Strange. My inherited mother tongue shies then  
to realise this bodily confession of my own bleeding; but  
in your scratched arms, it must say, have you not already  
disobeyed; yet how I will cherish the words; and how I write,  
unforgiving, this truth among the insular mouths who carved out  
a landscape, closing down the stubborn flesh as they did so,  
their old man's scalps calling it, futilely, strength.  
But why recite the words given aloud to the dead, my English  
replies; see, you have made for yourself stone and blindness.

# Caroline Maldonado

---

## Out of the marshland

*after sculptures by Laurence Edwards*

They are the creek men. Carcass- carriers,  
grown out of reeds, forged from  
mud, twigs, leaf-litter.

Their lives are mudflats, their history marshland,  
tides and sky. From daybreak  
to sunset they journey

erect on their raft till they reach their end.  
All day they carry our remains  
and wear our faces.

★

Today the branches  
they carry are huge,  
double a man's length.

You can see it in their eyes.

Other days they carry  
nothing. Still their  
shoulders weigh heavy.

★

The mudflats at dawn  
moulded like lava carry  
the imprints of feeding birds

but sucking the rising tide  
are larger holes. Who  
has passed before me?

★

Sometimes behind the men  
often leading them  
(you will see her shadow)  
– the memory-bearer.

From an assembly of bones  
her breasts sway  
like dry leaves.

Listen to the wind blow through them.

At low tide you can follow  
her footprints only so far.

# Jeremy Hooker

---

## Homage to Charles Reznikoff

There is music  
in this man walking.  
Alone, he is one  
with his kind,  
a wanderer between  
the old world and the new.  
Solitary, in subways  
and on sidewalks  
he hears the song.  
On streets of Manhattan,  
by the Hudson River,  
from Brooklyn  
to Bronx, Bronx  
to Brooklyn  
and in Central Park,  
his day's walk  
is his vocation:  
listener, composer,  
new poet.  
ancient scribe,  
a wanderer who observes  
fellow strangers,  
pauses, writes  
in his pocketbook  
and walks on, unknown,  
minstrel at the feast  
of common sights.



# Vik Shirley

---

## ***From The Flotilla and Other Scenarios***

*After Lee Harwood*

i

The flotilla ran into trouble about halfway through the procession due to complications associated with the reintroduction of Benzedrine to society. This long-overdue comeback was not, however, being enjoyed by the literary set, as one might expect, considering the associations for which the drug became famous in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but instead was being embraced by competitive Sea Captains – or ‘Skippers’ as they are sometimes known – who simply wished to ‘have the edge’ and ‘make good time.’

ii

“I urge you, Fabio. Say *na zdrowie* (naz-droh-vee-ay) and keep eye-contact as you knock it back, or else we are done for. Your line about how crinoline hoop skirts were highly flammable and, at times, deadly during the height of their popularity in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century is not going to wash here.”

iii

*Sometime in the 1980s. Shopkeeper TONY is stood at the counter while a ten year old stands pointing at penny and half-penny sweets through the glass. TONY is unshaven with matted, greying hair and bloodshot eyes.*

Girl: One of them please.

Tony: Yup.

Girl: And one of them please. Tony: OK.

Girl: And one of them please. Tony: Right you are.

This goes on for some time, until the girl has spent her twenty pence. Behind her, a cortège of girls wait with their twenty pence pieces. Tony thinks about the gin under the counter, the shotgun in the basement and his wife who has recently left him for a more

successful newsagent based down at the precinct where Tony can't afford the rates.

iv

“I beseech you, don't do it, Bartholomew. Hurting those who have hurt you only reinforces the original, aforementioned, pain.”

v

Of course, later, it was more about the garrotte that spoke volumes (which came in volumes of a voluminous nature) and *Guttersnipe: The Next Generation*. It's going to take a while to get his scent off everything.

# Ian Seed

---

## Ziggurat

1

We love the rolling broadleaf  
of your anatomy. Let's hope  
the rental suntanned strangers  
at a loose end occur  
about this silent, new white sofa.  
Across the world, wider girls  
skipped our sleeve. I had a teacher  
knowing it was mine,  
gets his first man-bun,  
but it's when you see  
people start blasting,  
I gotta show you the sea.  
I want to have it personal  
so we can share a nifty coda.

2

You know the feeling  
with you right next to me  
to put it politely  
wolfing the cheeky.  
That's the good news.  
Let's talk a dark wood  
leather bound aesthetic.  
There's no better metaphor.  
If only I could get to you  
before the geese  
balance right together,  
remote from the sense of sinking  
or floating the curve  
and dip wander behind them.

# Norman Jope

---

## In Corleone

Outside the Central Bar, a young man in a ski jacket keeps watch – there’s something tucked under his arm. Beside him, a painting of three rustics adorns the bar. Each of them has a sharp unspecified object in the hand. On the other side of the door, there’s a poster advertising Il Padrino – a herbal liqueur in a long slim violet bottle. It’s almost impossible to see inside or step through that door from here. Only a man in a bottle-green coat and navy jeans, half-obsured, his back to the camera, evades curiosity.

The plasterwork is peeled and venerable and there’s a worn-down balcony on every facade. There are very few people about at this time of the morning in the evening, as I glide from street to street on a milk-white vector. Watching for signs of intrigue, I am invisible – unlike the vehicle from which this footage was taken – I am scanning faces that have been thoughtfully blurred so that even the girls, on the poster outside the Solo Gioielli boutique, are as inscrutable as sphinxes.

In this day without a date, at this time without a time, I am unwelcome but nobody knows it – this is a place whose secrets would come at a price. Recalling the hilltop towns I know in England, I imagine the murderous mobs that they might have secreted under conditions of heat and poverty.

At an elevation of 558 metres above sea level, passing a stray brown dog, I exit by way of the Via Spatafora but the road is blocked by the disappearance of my possible route. Perhaps – given all I’ve seen – it’s as well that I’m able to emerge unscathed with a single click of the mouse.

# Jennie Osborne

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## Breastplate

My breastplate is a series of reproductions  
births, over and over, the labour, thrusting forth  
of tiny eggs – are they eggs – like pearls  
that bivouac on my body  
a glistening waistcoat of not-to-be

they cover my ribs like frescoes  
in a crypt beneath the asylum where gargoyles  
leap and chitter – you know that place  
some call it the labyrinth, some  
the dream body

they wear little red jackets, like to breakfast  
on pearls or anything  
small, spherical, precious.

# juli Jana

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## **action painting**

our round table critique of what is a poem  
or what could lead to one  
the dissecting & bisecting of ideas

it is a brush stroke exploring  
an unknown surface  
matching colour upon intent

the words I wanted to say  
were not the words I did say  
nor were they the ones I wrote  
I know I wanted to say something  
but it was not yet formulated  
therefore I conjured some words

being at a loss as to what to say  
I said something that I should not have said  
Just because I had to say it  
did I

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# Kenny Knight

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## Last Night

Here on the outskirts  
somewhere beneath the stars  
on a balcony in the trees  
an owl hoots above the car horns,  
calling out to welcome the moon  
and the mouse that moves  
in the shadows.

Your hand touches my fingertips.  
The fog lifts a wispy eyebrow  
drifting like plankton  
across field and lawn.  
A rocket that can only dream of space  
sparkles over the street lights,  
falling unseen like a diluted nightmare.

On the last minute of the year  
you flick the head of some dead king  
up into the darkness  
and close your eyes  
counting sheep or cardigans.

Here on the outskirts  
the house mumbles to itself  
small avalanches of soot and dust  
and other rumblings stretch  
from room to room.

The wind, indigenous to everywhere  
brings a touch of the international  
rocking radiowaves across the Atlantic  
brings the breath of other lands  
to these shores.

The windows chatter away in French.  
It is winter now they say  
and the sky has grown  
as distant as last night's lover.

Here on the outskirts of town  
somewhere beneath the ceiling  
we slip into sixteen  
and wait for the voice  
of the owl to call again  
a sound as old as midnight,  
lovely and haunting  
bringing a premonition of sleep  
and other delights.

## **Making Mary Shelley**

I made you  
out of bits and pieces  
out of this and that  
the heart of a frog  
the legs of a waitress.

Stuck paper all over your body  
tattooed with old words  
gave you language  
made you multicoloured  
added a second coat  
a hat and gloves.

Your fingernails  
were the colour of a wedding dress.  
Your mind a jigsaw of land and sea  
Your gaze, filled to the brim  
with innocence.



Your body, made out of science fiction  
out of superglue and Superman comics,  
the shoes of the road,  
the face of Mary Shelley.  
You were as tall as marijuana  
on a night out in the rain.

On Christmas Eve  
I wrapped you in gift paper  
left you under the tree  
sleeping on pine needles  
and in the morning  
fed you sunflower seeds  
filled you with mud from everywhere  
rain from a dozen thunderstorms  
lashings of spit sprinkled with sawdust.  
I taught you to play the piano  
to appreciate jazz and Americana.  
Gave you a starsign  
one slipper in Capricorn  
one in Sagittarius  
gave you a bicycle pump  
the fingers of a short story writer  
the eyes of the crowd  
cloned you for the supermarket  
made you out of the rags of capitalism  
made you as durable as vanilla.

# Du Fu

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*translated into Scots & English by Brian Holton*

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## **Drover Toun**

1

Reid clouds bourach up wastawa,  
Dayset faas owre the level land.  
Poutrie keckles inben the wicker yett,  
A fremt hame-comer's traivelt a thousan mile.  
Wife an bairns dumfounert at A'm here,  
The gliff gaed by, they dicht awa their tears.  
In a tapsalteerie warld A tholed a gangrel life,  
But cam hame in life, chancie tho it wis.  
Neibours stow the dyke-heids out,  
They're sicherin an sabbin, ilka yin.  
I the wee hours o the nicht A lift the caunle:  
The twae o's, forenent ilkither, liker a dream.

2

In eild wis A gart ti tak the road,  
Hame's no sae muckle blithesome tho.  
Browdent bairns winna rise frae their knees,  
Feart their faither's for the aff ance mair.  
A mind the grand caller air langsyne,  
Auld trees that stuid about the stank.  
Strang's the souch-souch o the norlan wind,  
A hunner hairt-scauds, thinkin on the past.  
A lippen on the corns aa bein gaihert in,  
An ken the dreep-dreep o the pat-still.  
Eneuch for the nou, ti fill lip-fou the tassie:  
Fine it'll dae, ti ease the e'enin o ma life.

## **Drover Town** <sup>1</sup>

1

Red clouds heap up in the west,  
Sunset falls over the level land.  
Poultry cackle behind the wicker gate:  
A homecoming stranger has travelled a thousand miles.  
Wife and children astonished that I'm here,  
Excitement past, they wipe away their tears.  
In a world turned upside down I bore the vagrant's life,  
But came home alive, chancy though it was.  
Neighbours pack the garden wall,  
They're sighing and sobbing, every one.  
In the wee hours of the night I lift the candle:  
The two of us, facing each other, more like a dream.

2

In old age was I forced to take the road,  
Home's not so very cheerful, though.  
Pampered kids won't rise from their knees,  
Afraid their father's going away again.  
I remember the fine fresh air long ago,  
Old trees that stood around the pond.  
Strong's the sough of the north wind,  
A hundred sorrows, thinking about the past.  
I'm relying on the grains being gathered in,  
And know the drip-drip of the pot-still.  
Enough for now, to fill the bowl brim-full:  
It'll do fine, to ease the evening of my life.

A paircel o hens skirlin an skellochin –  
 Guests come, wi the hens aa fechtin, tae.  
 Yince A'd chased the hens inti the tree,  
 A heard the chappin on ma wicker yett.  
 It's fower or five auld yins that's here  
 Ti speir about ma lang an ferawa traivels.  
 In ilka haun a wee bit something brocht,  
 The whisky pig's cowpit, it's drumlie, then fine:  
 "Och, dinna nay-say a dram, wersh tho it be:  
 There's nane ti plou our fields o corn.  
 War an fechtin, an aye wi nae devaul:  
 Our laddies taen, ilkane, eastawa ti the airmy."  
 "Allou me nou ti gie ye a sang, auld yins,  
 Sic hership maks ma hairt owre great, A vou".  
 The sang dune, we leukt ti Heiven wi a souch,  
 Ilka haffet begrutten wi our tears.

A parcel of hens skirling and screeching –  
 Guests have come, with the hens quarrelling, too.  
 Once I'd chased the hens into the tree,  
 I heard the knocking at ma wicker gate.  
 It's four or five elders that are here  
 To ask about my long and faraway travels.  
 In every hand a little something brought,  
 The whisky jar's tipped, muddy, then fine:  
 "Oh, don't turn down a dram, insipid though it be:  
 There's none to plough our fields of corn.  
 War and fighting, never an end to it:  
 Our lads taken every one, east to the army."  
 "Allow me now to give you a song, elders,  
 Such hardship makes my heart too full, I vow".  
 The song over, we looked to Heaven with a sigh,  
 Every cheek stained with our tears.

Note

<sup>1</sup> 羌村: 羌 Qiāng is the name of a Tibeto-Burman speaking people who still live in western China. Etymologically, the name seems to mean something like 'sheep herders', hence my translation.

# Tania Hershman

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## **The Laughing Bottle**

*a prose sonnet*

Thirty a day and enough gin. I make my way down to the shops for tonic. Ice I have, and I keep buying more in. I sit and drink and it's never enough.

I switch to whisky, find a favourite single malt. The programmes on the television buzz and I close my eyes. Missing you will be something that is not my fault. Missing you is loud and quiet and sly.

When you arrive you want red wine. I put away the whisky and watch your hands. We sit with Merlot and we stop time. The television dies and I throw it out.

You leave and never leave and leave again. Our endless game.