

ZONE

by John Kinsella

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The Snake and the Egret

after seeing Giovanni Bellini's *The Madonna of the Meadow*
and thinking back...

An unkempt dam on the edge of marshland,
with sienna walls dissolving to sand,
the heat haze spreading the lure of moisture,
snake and egret meeting where waters stir —
dark lens dense with unseen contraband.

That they both struck first could not have been planned,
the egret's beak a shot of light that scanned
a vacuum, drawn to action to secure
an unkempt dam.

The snake — a tiger on familiar land,
struck the empty space between them, each gland
shooting poison through its fang into air,
the tense light wavering loose magenta,
blank parrots scattering beyond the damned —
an unkempt dam.

The Crossing

In deadwood,
on ropes of haze,
on knots of frost
suspended
in brittle air,
the parrots shimmer
brightly —
 they hear
your determined steps
across the vacant
paddocks,
 the crunch of salt
below your boots.

I place my hands
to the surface
of ouija night
& write landfill
& title deeds
like premonitions
across the deck
of wet hessian
that covers
the silo's bare floor.
Without map
or advice
I set out with you
across the salt,
never doubting
the accuracy of your step,
the rites
of harvest.

The Iconography of Drought

Screwed up by the sun, held together
by maggots, dehorned and castrated anyway
it stands like a rotting ship struck by lightning.
The eye is a window to unmoving space, the
brain inside defrauded. Any birthmarks
are made by a whip.
And yet nothing is forever, this universal
victim will not be knocked, it was not
mummified in the belief that God is a drover.

Sidney Nolan

The colour and texture of The Dry
seem to deny fuel for fire though sparks
tessellate the dark hide as if its bones
are burning, or the pasture
is shedding its invisibility and erupting
like hot tongues, lashing out at the rainless storm,
declaring green fields the camouflage
of the "uncomprehending" who can't solve a riddle
despite the answer staring them in the face.

Worst drought on record? Taking it back
like war footage — the mystification of contortion —
the punters thinking over their tea or beer
that these beasts might have had souls,
that the abattoir might not have been
up to scratch: their bones crossed and sticking up
like totems. But then "surreal", a word they'd
not heard before, blurred the images: not beasts
at all — these were of another world!

This small drought was massive to us
a farmer says, dumping skin and bones
on the tray of his truck. There were so many
the crevices were choked with their
dumb spirits. At night you'd sense them
flooding out over the malicious ochre
just to give themselves space. Had some hero
up here last week taking photos, telling me
their expressions were excruciatingly beautiful.

A splash of blue paint might bring
irony if there were room for it. Yes
even scoured sockets have sight. In London
it has them saying, "Don't you feel close
to it? As if it's going to twist and squirm
out of the frame and onto the carpet."
And it being such unseasonable weather —
cold and raining in mid-summer,
a hint of drought straining at the fence.

Insides

for Lyn Hejinian

The layout... formatting
within the body cavity,
and how, if you think
about it, things will stop:
not quite adding up,
so vulnerable.

Taking the corpse
of a still-warm rabbit
and opening it:
skin peeled back
to bone-joint,
insides flicked
into a bucket, mixed
with the insides
of other rabbits — the bits
that made them work
now pig-feed. Or sheep
strung up, headless
sacks, guts gathered
in barrows below.
Fly-thick, dogs
frantic, pig-feed.

We can't look at
each other like that...
so easily unravelled,
come unstuck.

Held close by a loved one,
nurturing and knowing;
plastic models in biology
class — the liver
fitting there
and the heart
locked up tight.
The plastic overlays
in encyclopaedias — *this* organ
on *that*, clear cut.

Forget about it —
it works even when
you sleep.

Below, the narrative
for Glen Phillips

Blackout residue
as thick clouds
overhead sub-scene
ash scree lifted in the burning,
litigation — mallet
on the ironstone hills,
tanned as pegged
bounties and predations,
exfoliation: out of the projects,
badlands, where love
is scuttled and patronised
(the love of America
is a new departure
for David Lynch, but here
it gains credence):
you're here only as part of me
and that's can't be,
it's a journey,
an exchange of territories,
mile on mile of masculinity,
Spike Lee suggesting a bullet
for Charlton Heston,
the earth — the dirt — no longer
as receptive as the tides,
salmon gums' lessening
intensities, signposting
where family flourishes
like the standpipe
at Wickepin, eternal source
of water, nose-turning
at drought, like death
everything is perfect
and decomposition
a sonorous speech,
first rains and the pipeline
deflecting silver-skinned
accentuated song
an outsider would romanticise
and take back to a place
of denser population
and a greater number of cars
per square inch; take
this long weekend, flooded gum and gimlet,
dryandra bushes and a stock epithet
working-out characters — out of sandy soil
a platonic theory: the old bloke,
a fettler sinking a carton of beer,
grows thinner but larger on the inside,
poverty shrubs and pressure packs
of Mortein hazing salt lakes,
pink at midnight,
humming through the veins of the town
Lake Grace Hotel watering its own,

and a fire-tank on the borders —
smoke bush blown tyres insurance policies
breaking the surface a flock of migratory birds
just out of sight, always coming
at this time of year; the blips
indicate long distance: cable, satellite,
an anecdote — memory
suggesting a fertility
beneath No-Man's Land,
back there, a fair way
down the track: ossified
and porous, the remains
of the day

Mary's Story

He's in town, working at the bank,
convenient actually. One of the few
times managers & their clients

get on. I mean, he never really liked
the work though he'd hate to lose
the farm. He loves the birds.

Especially the red-capped parrots
& that tawny frogmouth that's been
up by the top gate for years.

The only joke he ever made was
that I'm in love with John Deere,
my tractor, but what the other

blokes did with that nugget shut
him up real quick. And he doesn't
"excuse" me with "buts", like

"but she has a voice as sweet
as honey" or "but she dresses so
delicately & sews her own clothes".

It's that time of year, the best
time when the rufous hay has been cut
& set in stooks like it should be.

I like the old ways — the same family's
been stooking here as long as any
of my family can remember.

The Girls

It's a satellite town —
the district centre twenty k's
down the road. The Girls,
as the locals call them,
moved in a couple of years ago.
A kit home on metal pylons,
with broken bikes and packing cases
scattered beneath. A Celica
with rust bubbling around its seams
sits near the hills hoist, flower-print
sheets catching the dry breeze.
It's a dead run out the back of town,
a "no-man's land", one of them jokes.
The kids are playing games
in the dirt. The bastard
from the co-op refused
The Girls credit on Friday,
with no money coming in
until Monday. Redneck prick.
Calls them mongrels, says
watch out for their cousins,
that you have to wonder how
they make ends meet. The Girls
couldn't give a shit. They're
bringing up their kids
out here — the fathers
out of sight out of mind.
The old woman next door
will slip them a tenner.
The days are hot
but the evenings cool.
Through the front window
the sunset and shadows connect.

Mount Bakewell

for Elsie Wheeler

The first snows have come early this year —
lightly coating the sodden December
ground, vanishing by evening.

The sparrows were busy about our
feet outside the Round Church today —
as if to say “we’ll eat while we can!”.

I hear it’s hot down your way,
or maybe I should say “up your way” —
who’s to say which is the right way up?

The Round Church, built by the Normans,
is as old as it gets in Cambridge,
though a short way out of town

the Gog Magog hills are as old
as the land — a sleeping giant
awaiting its time. Maybe it’s a distant

and younger relative of Mount Bakewell,
maybe the two have never met.
But each marks a place as well as the other,

and thinking of it I think of you,
of the walk from your house to Trinity Church,
of parrots relishing the fruit trees.

The God Show Comes to Town

You come along...tearing your shirt...yelling about Jesus.
Where do you get that stuff?
What do you know about Jesus?

Carl Sandburg, from "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter"

The great marquee glows like snow
in the stinking heat — so bright it blinds,
burning the distance as cars
roll in from all over the district.

Jesus lives and empowers and clean-cut
born-again don't flinch as stickers —
Shoot Ferals — resonate on bumpers,
their heads full of roo skins and roadkill.

As the preacher lays hands on young girls
who swoon like the nineteenth century —
a local boy thinks, "wow, drop dead gorgeous".
Perspiration shimmers over their bodies.

The PA system snaps and howls
and tongues get tangled, drunk
in the airless atmosphere they let loose,
it being vaguely sexual and oriental —

like memories of Vietnam
or more recently the prospect
of a relative peace-keeping in Timor.
Rare birds flock in widow-makers

drawn up along the sportsground.
Tea and cakes heavy with dairy
sweat in icecream containers.
With sheep packed into three-

tiered trucks — credit cards refuelled
with wool and grain cheques — donations
come thick and fast — the show wrapping up,
moving on to the next town.

The White Kids Say the Swing Rope is Theirs...

The heat intense and the river
cool beneath the eucalypt canopy,
white kids swing out and drop with a shiver,
the heat intense and the river
thick with snags, one stays under,
a black kid jumps in and sets him free,
the heat intense and the river
cool beneath the eucalypt canopy.

Avon Valley School Kids

The streets shimmer with heat haze
and lemon-scented gums boil white
with cockatoos. A utility with a dodgy
tailgate flaps along a side road,
crossing from bitumen to gravel
with a crunch and snap of metal.
Local kids play on a vacant lot
opposite the school — the wheels
of their BMX bikes held to the air, rearing
like cornered snakes or like machines
about to stack bales on trucks.
No role-play confusion here,
their games entail such positioning,
the books in their bags spilling out,
dog-eared with lives unrelated
to theirs or those of their friends.
Wordsworth has little to say on the day,
and likewise Banjo Paterson. The kids
just don't care, and why should they:
the swimming team breaking state records,
footy side the best around...
"Rough diamonds," a teacher, now part
of the town, suggests. Another insists
"we don't have racial problems here,
Aborigines are integrated and respected
right round." Lining up on the quadrangle
boys are neat but "earthy" in cadet
uniforms, mothers thin with work
"proud as punch" — their sons' glory
pre-Vietnam... The shoddy
vampire jet marooned on the municipal
outskirts as high-tech as you'll get —
the BMX a precision weapon,
the bike charge a sublime tactic,
skills honed on tractors,
out shooting rabbits.

Parents who hunger for their kids...

for Sharon Olds

Parents who hunger for their kids
to become pillars of the district,
deposit them in city boarding schools
where church atones for loss
of country spirit, where drinking
and "troubles" are layered away,
where wool on the sheep's back
is iconic and prayers are mimed
at the crack of dawn. A town is only
slightly quieter with their absence.
Down near a bridge where rapids
ascend, an egret studies a heron —
both stalking the flow, breaking
flood residue that's dried to paper,
trying their best to ignore
the family that's come down
with their dinner — a picnic
on a Saturday evening, the school term
about to start and the daughter
packed and ready to leave
early in the morning; the flag
of leave-taking raised like a sporting tunic,
a name stitched inside a hemline,
an emptiness welling up inside
despite the cerise sky glowing,
not knowing why, but knowing.

Avon Improvisations...

for Tracy

Flow-down drop-zone:
run-off growth spread,
silt and wastage,
egret and heron eye-off
opposite banks, arched
and striking out
white as rapids ascending,
scape-goat, pluralist in-stress,
though residual loaners — found
in-print, the algae coating the grasses
like hand-made paper
you might mark with a stylus,
or break through
with the key of a hire car,
the security system activated —
payback, payoff: those flocks
wheeling in, do we need
to mention species?
Wing colours? Beak shapes?
And this, the legacy
of flood...

Scratchings

That's the best place to look — today,
this morning, at this time of year:
it's bright and hot around there.
Two absences — the echidna

and meaning. Proof is here,
as told. Durable trees that hold
their leaves: hooves
breaking ground like Sensurround

and axe-blows ringing settlement.
Scratchings, markings that work
when working's almost done:
scant evidence of termites,

though phonic libraries resound.
In listening, close to ground.
Plosive catch and guttural plough.
Mother tongues and history.

You can't refer, an English critic
says: Saussure apocryphal and sporting
with locals — shooting signs
in road holes. Shout down,

public audit, echidna in parenthesis —
keeping low within perimeters
country town not promoted
within its written prejudices.

Echidna Photomontage

for JD

Sign wastage is not quill-written,
though feather might visually
correlate — we ask if it's been
hollowized, or tacked down
like skin on a hunter's drying
board — a medley of trouble spots
of this supplanted eschatology.

miniature savage technical growth
in an aquatic dry — urchin, anemone, porcupine fish,
crown of thorns starfish chewing away
at the Great Barrier Reef — adequatio;
style value? or rupture? to engrave
to save to colloquialize the grave —
memory of plough cutting its way

through paddock, through scrub,
pre clearing, when echidnas grubbed
for termites, found rabbits at wandoo roots;
it's that simple, we might call it abbreviation,
a ceremonial technique: nuzzling, bristling, cutting
three dimensions like growth —
boustrophedon, with no references

beyond its limited territory. the sky
metallic blue, favouring neither left
not right as vantage point, return
to disk operation, an orientation of quartz
and gravel finds, tracked roller, war machine
imposition, as if habitation and class distinction
are required — protected with a magic pen,

serial number kept on file at police stations.
it's about retaining social independence.
noxious influence spiked with hubris —
where the third eye travels, I will go.
Its appearance a fact, not necessary.
Sand and rock and wry vegetation.
The risk of extinction. Graphically speaking.

Zone (echidna)
for JD

The echidna subjectively fades
amongst the imported hydrangeas: soft underbelly
personal and ratiocinate per funky inhabitants,
getting down stereotypes and glitz,
on the screens and at premières
watch third men medius terminus
so long out of contact, I write
measuring truth by length of emptiness,
stacked biologies undoing and working up God's
inner map, chartered x-ray or rogo: character actor
on low denomination coinage,
as roads criss-cross the remaining herbage,
stand on stand of old growth forest
conflated to football pitches per seconds,
as I root around the termite-ridden ground
surrounding clumps of mallee, hot
to the core, a seriis vicissim ad jocos transire
a surly Mr Sterne might joke, provincial
and thinking over the channel, in real time
ceremony of my anthro underworld living: I deflect
attention as I might say of you: it's a metaphysical trick
to get the artist in bed. Dead horses
hanging from the rafters of the Tate,
a stuffed squirrel revivifying taxidermists as artists,
an atom of my quill stuck on an Australian tourist's
inner-ripple, trod into the tower's carpet,
deposited in the restaurant of the Eiffel tower,
30 years downwind from the moonlanding
or Citroën's intra-cultural shuffle; the air
seems different. What do you think
as they grind you into personality?
Upstaged by publicity, their indifference
to sickness. Hey, do this for me.
It will be great for both of us:
rage fade rage fade rage fade rage fade
reflected aphanisis the marks of our diggings
as I conflate. Let me tell you about hydrangeas:
litmus and universal, papered
against the mountains of gardens
edged in Snowdonia. We've got them
just down the road. Maybe on Storey's Way.
They're in papers buried in a national library.
They're in my childhood near where
I ran away — to stop behind the post-box.
To stop and eat my store of biscuits.
Hoping to be found. On the TV Jerry Springer
conducts his freak show — I'm the ringmaster
he intones, these are the performers.
Realtime distorts him. Another talk-show host
tries a publicity stunt. The death of Diana
becomes a tale of two cities
becomes cross-iconic and devolutionary:
we shall build will build, we will.

A local theatre company advertises
island-colonising workshops for 9 to 12-year-olds.
Empire of marginal unconscious,
elegant crime qua Lucifero com'io l'avea lasciato,
a fox or foxglove at high altitude, though not so high,
just in terms of, comparatively:
the fox is like a cathedral in English poetry,
what did Villon make of the fox?
I, echidna, slow moving, grubbing,
unctuous to some, bulldozer determined
to others, undo chaotically about the scrub,
unlike the methodical metro visitations
playing neat hands, getting away with it,
L'Amour et Psyché at the bottom of it: the public
will lay claim to this, hot-core, pheromonal,
François-Edouard Picot, pyramid-selling his links
to an ancient heritage, Charlemagne reinforcing
lineage, progeny, the spectral arms industry
and flight after flight of warbirds
coming in over Thetford Forest in Norfolk.
Down the road the American Cemetery.
The dead lie in American soil framed by British
primogeniture. Jam tree, mallet, salmon gum, york gum, smoke bush, she-oaks
come from god knows where: god knows,
where, as if here is everywhere. Here is.
This body of the soldier.
Boadicea, Colchester, the Roman roads.
It's here. All here. Rodin, Camille. The familiar
icon, the feminine gesture. Here, I suckle my young.
My eggs turned out of my body.
Like words. Complete sentences
in themselves.

Counter-pastoral: cow wallpaper

In the big house
with wrap-round verandas,
hessian water bags cool
intently as the wind sears
dam-watered greenery drooping
on chickenmeshed walls,
cow wallpaper and latin
shrike undermine the collective.
Furrows and windrows
star picket fencing wire
jam trees replenishing
shifting species upwardly mobile:
obsolete is obsolete becomes obsolete.
First to the wheatbin, he socks
the sampler for quoting moisture
levels, he's as aggressive as contours; zigzag
raises xenophobic beaches like dam walls,
it topping the century
in the old scale most days
in summer round here:
the saline spring a bad joke
as uncle tap tap taps water
fading with age, aphanisis,
cow wallpaper most wanted
in the do-it-yourself narcissus
bush museum, the town's
only tourist attraction —
photographs of the Old Country
working as market slogans: the wheat
that drives the soup can, merino wool
clothing the Chinese RED army
despite Peking and Moscow
lacking the beautiful
THING [(yet) — but that was then],
as a spark sets off wheat dust
in the industry's oxygen tent,
blowing the harbour apart,
wrecking subsidies
like a pig's heart
driving the Federal Minister's
enthusiasm for genetic engineering:
the rhetoric of seed and pesticides,
farmers tearing up test crops,
pouring Stockhausen
on company's classical waters:
the cell the cell the cell,
tranquil waters, golden summer.
It's as if Perceval had done wheatfields
and anthills weren't on Drysdale's
rocky plains; Langley's "white gully
among fungus red", flora and fauna
pied in language and dialect,
hungry for a chemical fix,
for artefact and sales

as in London the mouthpieces move
while bio-companies video protestors,
make cow wallpaper,
perfect their knack for publicity.
Inwards, the weather: bulls
licking their hoofs, kerning non-
sense and we love our produce
ich ich, that's what we say,
setting up parties,
making it happen.

Revenge

"What romantic legends do they hear there?
Tales of lineage, and of terrible accidents:
the rearing tractor, the sawmills' bloody moons."

Les Murray, "The Inverse Transports"

In rose light,
scanned backdrop,
a fully dressed tree
looks leafless —
colonial haze
verging on night,
white-tailed black cockatoos
refusing or unable
to settle; brown snake
in rough woodstack
still active, heat
lingering in its flex,
not quite wrapped up tight —
snappishly parodic
striking out at the dog,
muzzle-warmth
magnetic and fatal:
boisterous blue heeler
whimpering, snake
dead before the dog drops,
girl in tie-dye dress
bringing the axe down,
dead breath of dog
warping her childhood:
short, sharp shrift.

On The Presence of Birds in Australian Poetry 1

"The bell-birds direct him to spring and to river"
Henry Kendall

In the tropics a palm finds its way
into the corner of your travel snap
but down here, scrub stripped back
with only stragglers hanging on,
it's the bright wings of the parrot
that blur on the periphery.

Not rating the universal symbolism
of northern birds, where the name "bird"
will do for almost any species, as Harpur
knew even in the New Country
("His soul went forth, as in a sunbeam's track
Some close-caged bird from a long bondage freed,
Goes winging up — up through the open sky!")
there's been an increasing necessity
to name the bird's exact type!
Harpur's bird can't have been
a lyrebird or emu —obviously—
as the physiognomy's not right!
and a port-lincoln parrot works here
only as parody, and if it's a bird of prey
it'll depend on the exact location
of his father's grave in this monody.
But maybe "eagle" will suffice,
especially given the nature of tragedy.

In The Absence of Blackbird

As if this orbit of feathers
is the undoing of a neat myth,
not even its famed golden bill
can tone up this funereal coat-of-arms—
there beneath the orchard
feathers of the blackbird,
devoid of lightness
lodged in heavy
worm-rich loam, planted there
as if held between stodgy tides
of drainage:
tagging the gardener's dialect,
working tribulation
and fenland vapours.

The lair of the white worm

The snake I await — unfurling from its hollow
below this place straight as a Roman road,
or as sudden as a bend zig zagging
into oblivion: the pin-cushion trinkets and souvenirs
made from the living material of hedgehogs,
or the aesthetic dispersal of feathers from the thick
body of a pheasant, small red wattled heads
like unpleasant afterthoughts. Such is travel.
And this making self of place, or vice versa
as the kill collects like visitors at a stately home,
the upkeep overwhelming privilege, bedders
in the Colleges. But the snake I wait for — I wait
for it to unfurl from its hollow, to potlatch
itself to the asphalt like it should, it can:
this adder that might appear in spring or summer —
reaching out from Sherwood or Thetford Forest,
its violence more taut than the car's suspension,
that gentle bump of flesh compression.
But none appears, and it remains
like someone else's postscript
scrawled at the end of the document,
the undergrowth of popular culture
threatening deep in its hollow,
the lair of the white worm.

Visiting Wittgenstein's Grave in Winter, 1999

for Candice Ward

In the Parish of Ascension,
up All Souls Lane, tucked away
burial plan and nettles
absent, a disagreement
with cold space this visible
reality:
picture its form: on the other side
of the sentence, logical dulled stone
with name and life-range,
flat as... no celebration...
snug or uncomfortable
in the tightly packed plot
plot 5, row D, almost passed over
as you sightsee, weaving
in the frost-glaze and suncut
of midwinter, alone
with no one to speak... of, to...
as if you could be there too,
a description and a municipal fact,
to say unordered thoughts
aren't protracted, a discernible
condition, quietly
to propose blackbirds
so much louder

Ride to Grantchester Meadows — Ride 1

It's not quite a rural ride
and the conditions of work
don't prescribe the energy
displaced by the body

cycling in the crack-of-dawn
mist, a cold sweat triggering
a sparrowhawk as you exclaim
what you don't mean, the town

edging into pasture and hawthorn
hedges and a roadside thick
with thistles, stinging nettles
and upright hedge-parsley,

the cows placebos for the vegetarian
within consumers who wander
and jog and let dogs loose
by the walkways, the river

backed by burnt, cut, and summered
fields, errant waterbird stretched
on the veneer of glimmer over the dingy
water — so clean with morning, the sun

burning like a wet fuse, the breath
of cows on your legs, their shit
making things grow like publicity:
propinquity and self-efficacy

bringing you all home: fit,
purposeful, verdant, pastoral,
indulging in the history
of vole and rat and mouse

dead on the doorstep
of Grantchester Meadows.

Original Seed — Grantchester

What would original seed mean here
with biotech companies upwind

and genetically modified crops mutating
like a patchwork quilt? Yes, there's

a domestic subtext in this, bullfinches
shooting from hedge to fruit tree,

the fruit looking dated. Seasonal confusion.
Landscape poetry is a kind of ad

for the place within the poet:
on my island, I make my own similes.

Prizes for interesting varieties
welcomed. Expected. We can't buy here

though it's beautiful and Byron swam
naked with his drunken mates

in that pool over there. Our last
evening moving through this place

as one. Seed-health, fenland skies
looming, god-stuff — parataxis, dark growth.

In the places of bright light and space
remember this, our inward looking.

Gone to Seed

They'd convince you the weather
is fine — particles of sun declare
warmth, dryness, and sanity:
timor mortis conturbat me

Seed companies deploy test
crops on soil neatly top-dressed,
rape, RED tomatoes, and soy
timor mortis conturbat me

The terminator gene's rich
utility, deep sea fish
genes as anti-freeze — shiny:
timor mortis conturbat me

Tilted on the x-ray machine,
the floors and walls polished clean —
interphased technology:
timor mortis conturbat me

It's the welcome every trust
heaps upon the patient — lust
for health and equality:
timor mortis conturbat me

Copywritten dna
fragments, and begins to stray —
the structured fields look happy:
timor mortis conturbat me

The West on the verge of conquest
stores patents in its war-chest —
the harvest feeds an army:
timor mortis conturbat me

Pink Hydrangea 1

Thin burst of tissue-paper
all air and pastels, pink suffusion
of litmus, acid air
of industry
coruscating
clean mountain air
or distant fusion: peat and humidity
over fenground, each cluster
a cell of unfamiliar skin
exploded beneath the microscope.
The eye wants so much,
wants to extract atoms
from your fragmentary passion,
the soil inclined to
articulate the blue
of garden beds by limestone foundations,
the blue finery of gender
in the lapel, the corsage
hard core but always coming up for air
pink around the gills,
reliable as the day is long

Birches at Night

bark fractal,
limitrophic expedition
where chemiluminescence
is spiritual flux,
white declarations
as taxi-drivers
damn you — we —
foreigners,
trunks shocked up
and cauterised,
moon somnolent
but full: why do you
come here, he asks,
though it's not
a question;
streetlight and cloud pall
as you're reminded
of The Three Sisters
and Katoomba,
lit up with economy,
promotion, the vestige
of mythology
and class wars,
as blue as these trunks
are nereidic silver:
the pull of water,
of crossing
over

Dartmoor

The inner urges of the fell
are undone as the army
tests its artillery —
the wheatear plunges into rock
that should never
have been exposed to air,
the heather
fading

the gorse cap faintly bright
against the waste, black-faced sheep
with jaws exposed, stomachs hollowed
by foxes and buzzards
downwind
from the outlook, from granite tors
and stone settlements,
the horses being rounded up
for the locals' yearly
pound of flesh

the raven's nest fills the valley
as darkness leaks from the heath
nudging skewed and stunted rowan trees —
those haphazard solitaires

soon, a skylark will drop to sinkhole
where the rises fall towards
the fjord and the walkers
stumble forward
through the firing range,
the flags not up, the danger areas
and observation posts,
the solitary huts
of water-testers,
the massive inner swell
like blood petrified
and polished
by sharp winds

walkers huddle behind the Irishman's Wall,
thermos-flasks balanced in their laps,
compasses and maps growing damp
the animals dead quiet

Black Snow — Stockholm

for Marika

The grit they drop
to keep our grip
sets deep within the snow,
as if another layer
within the crystal growth —
traffic sliding by,
galleries busy
beyond the weather —
chatty and familiar,
a snow flurry
obscuring the palace
and royalty's fast cars
skidding across
the kingdom's surface,
a saxophone as bright
as the sun, shining dimly
in the distance.

Ice Sheets

for Svante and Catharina

Puzzle speech into liquid seams —
snow drift and boats locked in,
though rapid currents shift

the holding pattern, breaking,
adrift and thinning, impact
rendering ice less clear —

here, beneath brash blue skies,
islands not set on stone, it's hot
and full of speech, birds adrift —

surfaces changing though adhering
like good fortune, the kinetic glow
of layers, the transfer of light.

Mazes

for G.B.

Two pictures—one drawn by a pre-schooler,
the other by an adult. The child's maze
is escape-proof, though a wavering line
leads right over the outer shell
to a pot of gold. The adult's maze
is impeccably dressed—it is deft
and difficult to follow. Though it is true,
and logic will bring a satisfactory
conclusion. Through it you might also
reach a pot of gold. The orchard
down the road is three rows
each with nine trees. There is a symmetry.
An open maze, you work hard to find a centre.
In Summer the trees are thick with leaves
and the way is obscured, Autumn brings windfalls
and you grow disorientated, and Winter a starkness
that makes it look easy but leaves you
empty handed. Out of town a hedge maze
like a sprung clock winds upwards to the light,
thinned like weak bones and sinew.
The heart pumps limply and is hardly enticing.
Somewhere a rat winds its way
towards intelligence.

Jackie 1

She could be all of us and more
without so much as cracking the dead animals

plastered over her face — eyes like cue cards
lavishing grief and martyrdom over the public space —

a leopard skin jacket styled for an electorate ready
to accept an environmental catastrophe.

Not that she *was* a political animal.
Unless it be in the sense that all French

blood is political. O, the politics of culture —
tears as passive as Rough Riders or the Cuban Crisis.

Time repeats itself and a whole generation
is sucked into the simulacra — turning a blind eye,

features implanted like the most valued strand of DNA:
so fresh, so human. Freedom, an open and shut case.

Jackie 2, Diana 1

Economically as white as a silver lining,
though the cover of the prestigious weeklies

declare it black, and the tabloids blacker than black —
almost glowing. Like a pastoral drama that's

lost the plot: the rustic no longer familiar
but as dark as a tunnel, as dense as concrete.

The trees were never real and the truffles
were made of plastic. The smile turned

upside down becomes sullen. And memory
fixates on laughter, a smile, a coffee mug.

The tv tube declares itself and implodes
like a culture that's been hit by bad ratings.

Of us, for us, this is us. And the price
of an issue is always climbing. Au revoir.

Hölderlin was not Mad

for Tracy and Martin

Prologue

Graffiti the indicative mood
as refugees collate a conscience
and the euro-jets fly intact
overhead, a stiff wind

coming in from the Atlantic:
the *was* or *will be* spun
like constitutional rights —
Sally Joy restive on a shingle beach,

the Tudor rose curve of Deal's
cinque port deflecting the ordnance:
Henry's clean monastic stone
upwind of Hölderlin in his tower,

flagrant and uplifted as Spring
conflates forestry and the majesty
of seasons: Swabian fortitude
ousting Jacobin oppression

as in the home of psychiatry
the ethnically cleansed
cling to logos and script:
we speak — Hölderlin was not Mad.

fragment 1

Seasons of matt or gloss
emptied of implication,
waterbirds swimming against the current,
occlusion of hills:
I might take refuge on either bank
but this stay is transitory —
a bright day opens pore-like senses,
unleashing compacted, out of reason

fragment 2

A light bulb ejects and shatters
North, glass embedded deep:
the tower white and light
and people picnic on banks
as others would:
it is always the next day
and dates don't fit autographs —
precision-guided photographs

suggest place is, and the broadsheets
agree — war won in outer quotes,
as current privileges the scarce,
an educated guess, front line
recollection — we are,
we will be

fragment 3

the steps wind down to the Hölderlin House
and I saturate myself in translation: keep out of the Balkans,
MTV, and dynamic equivalence — see, desperate they laugh
and laugh loud: the mongrel company I keep
in a crowded place, standing room only
though Swabian air is fresh and intra-nationalism
lightly acid rain.

A protest. A structure.

And a bringing down — this the gloom
dispersed in rivers,
Seasons, Hölderlin's room —
Autumn necessary in damping down,
art made in Summer's success

fragment 4

Disturbing the perfect
glam tower's darkness
in earlier photographs
restoring tainted woodwork,
and satisfactory revolution
fuelled over
Wordsworth's satisfaction:
a flowering anecdote
and a long walk becoming archival
and multilingual:
assonance and tone
rhythm and mood
side-stepping the issue
floorboards glowing
just for the occasion

fragment 5

Home is where Tracy is.

fragment 6 (bright light)

Constantine trans:

"Day! Day! Now the willows can breathe again
Along my streams and drink. The eyes have light..."

This day so bright
the split river my divide —
too bright, this waiting
dull suppression and that hopeless
action. Sharp, avid, reminiscent.
Disturbance — dragonfly
cutting waters, understudied
guiltless. I don't take payment.
Damned contract. Nightmare,
bright light.

fragment 7

Octagonal dovecote
in Hölderlin's tower
nine windows draw water and light
at self-same density
as from a pinpoint tip
turret downcurves
in its three dimensional
aura
 divining curves
and flat bell balance,
body fluids emptied
like electric reactions
without response: church tower,
town centre, municipal Spring
at the mayor's grand function,
overcast on overcast
teal green flow
river tracking a brisk jog
sluing moisture and mildew
as the stone of the tower
beneaths a mood
mustard yellow, reflecting
itself, heavy
water, slurry

fragment 8 (indentikit)

sub-fragment (i)

growing up knowing then you are
and will be when it's convenient
for them — or anyone — to oppress —
like enemies and Kosovo ripe for helping
when occasion warrants beneficial
injection of collateral, damage hard-sold
and twitching so-soon to go out the door

sub-fragment (ii)

I
complicit
complicate
little Aussie Bleeders
black arm band and court jester
booming out, like creole
in the breath and licking the lips
o how noble, oblige tainted or perfumed
in-circles. mission accomplished.

sub-fragment (iii)

Not exile — international
self imposed citizen. Posted.

fragment 9

[halfway to the Hölderlin House]

You don't have to hold it all in
body or moment, not a container
 angry natures subdued
 as the sun is closer
 in particulars conditioned
 as motorways pool and Byron
 connects a generation
 somewhere in or thereabouts
 Greece always on his mind,
or near the tower, petri-dish stimulation
particular chemical responses
thanks to the woman at the health shop
who feeds the half-formed with salad —
 an idea, half my social self
 orbits alone bright in whose truth
 brightens beyond belief
 brightens with Spring
 as Winter must come
 Spring Summer and Autumn
 weighing less than it alone

fragment 10

[halfway, still]

but as I sit long
on the river wall
 fighting an illogical sun — pleasure

upsetting focal-length
dragged soothingly down

shattered glass circulates
like a local flurry
in steady mani-flow

each sliver a trace of Hölderlin
dropped walking or a line lost
by a visitor, wanting something

after purchasing a poem
each wraps in water; inner
and permanently Spring —

at night, phosphor
diaspora, coming Winter
nowhere is Winter
is or isn't

Epilogue

Hesperia — June — 2020 — 1843 — Ehrbarkeit — absence —
against the night sky — the burning village —

vested interest: staging hamlet in-time

for t.m. and s.y.

in bell-hook, or shakedown
verbal tussle — the adjective is perspectival
increasing the noun-value
of chair

& chime notation

exeunt seems not i know
i know
the grave eye annotating
this final say: this case
the fact
this case
i was
hard winter berries, we notice the desert
beyond this cold window

form visuals: field percussion
and companions noted: cento,
clastic instrument
ear-bite pranks the queen approaches
poaches dearly the poor phrase
tendered dearly
betting a ducat
betting a stack of staged re-
sponses, one sound

never moved hard-packed
mistletoe halo, disprized hymn
veils an eyelid, a lid of steam: i see
the case, the chair,
the snow about the dialect,
whiling words

heartily heartily heartily

perchance
a window a block
 of sound
 that's overfull
with space empty
all around

0

for Horst Ruthrof

excellent and skilled games slice
the skin that makes them temporal
time-systemed and terra-flopped,
as dedicated baselines read
to a packed amphitheatre — sollicitatio — and you know
how good the acoustics are
 in there,
intensely gradual, summum bonum
corporeal, corradiate in the guest-host
relationship, and a bit of goss
goes a long way over a cup of hot tea:
ah, deixas and modular furnishings
as if the terra-cotta were merely
a load of laminated table tops,
to spill, upon which, and other:
fragments of Fregean ex-
otica,

from **Variations on John Skelton's *The Book of The Laurel***

for Tama Janowitz

poeta anonymous

Directing their syght toward the zodiak☐—
small pack of riders filibustering, scat and Filofax
in the spoon play of colleges and sectarianism —
not a correct way, but lush in the party sense,
the bird sings monastic and a mayor prevaricates,
tythe-blossom litters rivers, finger-food
tempts visitors. In the art halls they consider
retrogradant games: twister, paintball,
testicular orbicular surveillance,
boys' stuff laboured to sublime hysteria;
it goes against good sense: hooray! behold afar,
subway aerosol, tags like scriptures, buildings
like myghtty tre(s), of nobile heyghtes,
their levis lost, the sap oozing frome the rynde:
take no prisoners, there's plenty of stars
stuck up there, loud between the towers.

in-discrete-harmonics

for Drew Milne

Serve the simple form
or spectrograph, direct-inking
deployed or posited expression,
mobbing the tongue's tuck
and tapping, informing
sun vocal on window-boxes,
and yes, they're watching.

Cant subsong component
in-chorus, speaking out
like balloons or banners,
quasi-tympanic and passive
in-canon: intrinsic,
replete with gutturals,
resonating in-senate.

Taken as law accuracy
variegates, a pied bird hesitates
about all music: releasing visual
purities and gutting harmonics;
it's locality and location and dust
on the larynx, deft parrots
talking up captivity — resonating.

Candle, Flame, Stained Glass and Prayer for Peace for Veronica Brady

Heliolithic, the taper honing the flame
ready for the passing, a plastic dish
of solid naphtha awaits its passive melting,
set rigidly as counterbalance, a wrought
iron candelabrum bracing ceramic insulators
left over from the town's rewiring — now
ensuring the thought is delivered safely.

The trinity unsettles and reseats itself,
the late morning sun cuts through the glass
and foot-notes the altar. Ezra moves through
the large print of text and looks far into
Babylon. A child unknowingly prays for peace,
enjoys the church as a house with thick doors
to keep the fear out, though he's not sure
about the glass. His father considers the candle,
the flame, how it fills the room, climbs
beyond the roof, outreaches itself.

From beneath the pews a liquid almost gold
seeks to flow freely over the floor — boards
parted by tremors preventing this. The father
knows it to be the candle, the flame wallowing
in its downfall, drowning at the source.
Legend would have it a bird passes through
a panel of stained glass to resurrect
the flame by lifting the wick and with rapid
movement of its wings cooling the naphtha.
Legend has it the flame hardens in its beak
and follows the release, that the gold
beneath the pews retreats, that the father
prays aloud for peace.

Obituary

for Yehudi Menuhin

A survivor of Belsen knows Menuhin
who was there with Benjamin Britten
a few weeks after liberation, delicately stirring
the spirit back to health. With temperatures rising
I find this poem almost complete as it is a piece
I would have written were he still alive. The choice
to sit among the plants with their breath of pollen
is something he'd have defended, the fallen
not forgotten but given new life, resonant
and stimulating growth. Despondent,

I have lost myself to sonatas and found
new points of reference: the sound
of bird song, traffic in the distance,
the violin tender when most intense.