

Painted, spoken

edited by Richard Price

number 25

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Caroline Clark

Itinerary

It will read: nowhere, woods,
desert, city, house. From here
you'll collect furniture, pieces
of crockery, an ivy covered stair.

Research yourself
well before and after. Look
in other people's houses.
It's not change of course,
just the chance of it. While
there be silent or speak.
What you come away with
is what stays. You may remember
details, memories, we say.

This is self.
An exchange of letters.
Handwriting's recognisable.
Something stayed throughout.
No one will ask anything of you.
You will ask the most. You'll protest.
This is a protest.

Home

I am coming home
and it's snowing
I'm coming home
and no one knows
what I'm good for
I'm coming home
no lights lit
I'm coming home
silent is my tread
I'm coming home
may no one wait.

Farewell

Tomatoes
from
Uzbekistan
wait salted
on the table.

Kelvin Corcoran

Along Commercial Street at homing time,
the air sits a certain way in November light;
at the dance school door she said to her daughter
- Oh well you've remembered that then?

-Yes I did, it would be good, don't you think?
and the words hover on the air eternal;
above the grey circuit of the tilting world,
raise my flag here, unfurled with the turning leaves.

The music clattered down the stairs and out the door,
she released her mother's hand and stepped up to tap.

*

Glenn Gould plays Byrd's Sixth Pavan and Galliard
and the winter trees seem to move accordingly,
spare transparent leaves of unremembered green
propose a season of satellites and backlit thought.

There's nothing to see here, just the earth turning
through an interval sustained, though I think I hear
the king shall reign for ever and ever, sense soon
returns and Byrd's bass line like the world breathing.

Sunlight steps up from the floor at the window
and I see everything come in and begin again.

*

We're so inland I think my eyes change colour
sea shanties go unrecorded in the local cults,
only the sky whispers maritime, cathedral blue
for the circling beasts over fields of mud.

After a low in the South West approaches
the country shrinks and the money migrates,
you can imagine the spineless tribe in charge,
telling lies about the poor and their care.

The weather is not a sign of the human condition
but attention to it is one way to let everything in.

*

At night the dead knock on the words,
they come in from the street and line up
with their black mouths open, they tap tap,
on the empty heart of the poetry of the world.

The struts and curves wear and break, case obscured
the breath leaks out of them across the table.

A dark inheritance, that tap tap, then nothing,
a voice about the house barely heard
the other side of the wall, at the next door,
all purpose fails in the senseless dust it stirs.

*

He sets out to work with object in mind,
the shadow ace in layers, slight at this hour;
one sound answers another in calm geometry
and the landscape's there, with or without us.

At this point Apollo takes flight again
and the idea of music invades the world.

It says what we think we have we don't have;
the thought of a voice singing behind the door
discloses at last the shape of it all,
before we spoke against the wordless surface.

Hannah Lowe

The Fox on Morrish Road

He's lame. One back leg dangles,
swings as he hobbles through front yards.
Above, two men in makeup
sit at the kitchen table drinking beers
with lime wedged in their bottles.
The one in the copper wig
takes a long last pull on his cigarette,
flicks the butt from the ledge
to the street. The fox runs on.
A girl waits on the corner, limps
to every car that slows outside the block
where on the sixth floor,
a woman fixes plastic vines
and flowers at her window
while the fox slinks around
the silver bins and finds a toy.
Down the way, the rootless boys
are out again, sat in a row
on the wall watching pink jeans girl,
plaited hair with purple beads
like berries. A police car
turns into the road, blue lights like gas
turned low and the boys stare at it pass
until the fox appears under a streetlamp,
small blue bear in its mouth
and they shout Fox!

Robin Fulton Macpherson

SO FAR OFF

The fjord can't move because it's glass.
The leaves that have not yet fallen
can't move because the air is glass.
There's no way for me to breathe out
or in. All my words are locked up.

When October got going again,
with me in it, who'd imagine
I'd been so far off for so long?

THE LOWLINESS OF SNOWDROPS

No view beyond winter's rubbish
no brash
proclamation, just a whiteness
(briefly),
a silence (easily trodden).

In a heaven-and-earth meant for
snowdrops
only, their birth would be violent,
their light
would sear us with solar excess.

TIMES OF DAY

A day starts with news, urgent knowledge.
In 1.6 billion years, I think
I hear, pink dust will cover the earth.
No memory will recall words like
"perpetua" and "sempiternam."

A day is spent with things mostly old.
Hours contain too many or too few
seconds. News withers. Late in a day
an ignorant wind makes time flutter
in different directions in the leaves.

TO TAKE WITH US

The little language we have skitters
off surfaces.
"Dunts" and suchlike, untranslatable,
"thunder clumps"
at night on windows and rhubarb leaves.

What can we take
with us out into the loud cosmos?
Songs without words?
Saved-up silences to listen to?

THE SCOTS PINES

take their time, are experienced.
They make a reliable edge
to my known worlds, those I dream of
and those waiting when I waken.

THEY STARE

As if
arrived in a second life
and not yet believing it

I see
the dead are not so many
as feared, they don't crowd round me

but keep
their distance, make allowance
give me time to imagine

they're trees
tall and leafless in blue air
standing where they've always stood.

They wait
in the beauty of sunlight,
stare at me from snowy fields.

Dorothy Lehane

Dimensions

We haven't said enough of the third dimension;
concealing its neighbours from us,
how we grow regardless, lancing incisors,
showing breast, mapping sweet epigrams,
in this dimension, you tell me the genesis
of your name, oh, lord of Ireland, from stardust
or bombshell, you might see me in essence,
watching the drunks in the pub opposite,
if it is really really late a commuter
walking home irregular feet for drink
regular feet for ambition

in a sixth dimension, I am a girlfriend
breathing fire, long hair pointy face, kicked out
from a black hole, in this dimension,
we are the sixth universe; January through June,
five careful kernels in the library, you tell me
in this dimension, I am your wife; your third wife,
reading poems your first wife hated, much less like you
and your second wife, how, in this poem
I am also android and how, absolutely
like your current wife, or that in-between Virgo,
in this dimension, for certain we are involved
in something

You and I held captive in the ninth dimension;
here before us, watching the flames
spit with a burned refractory, lichen, granite,
glassy sand. Over your shoulder shouting a final
post-script, an out of earshot, a sick unsound,
and you are a missing, leaving a lingering chroma,
motes of dust scattered in the air, like a wrap
of skin cells from cushion chairs in a village hall
after a talk on ornithology

from **The Syllabary**

Peter McCarey

www.thesyllabary.com

20.5.3

Eclampsia. Give me some light!
The body brown and bulbous, eclipse

Of the tallow sun in the clean mud room.
Cramp, and the eyes are at maximum aperture

It's a trench, this, a camp on the Somme:
Bulls-eye for the ordnance of corporate

Crapatopia. Last time, the husband cap in hand
And the baby fished out like a carp from a pond.

This time – has he left her a dose of the clap
Before eating the pesticide he couldn't pay for?

Clasp at the dark, lady,
A last twist of silver that held up your hair –

Your molars still clamp as the next one
Takes your breast.

20.5.4

The cam imparts an animal bob to the machine
And from the noonday calm, each vine
Will draw its own conclusion, each last
Sound will draw the full heat of the sun,
All a cram of self, a clam of death,
But nothing known: so near to am and om-
Ega it's a qualm in the deep,
A shiver in the chasm.

20.6.4

Keep the charisma
for Hitler and Kennedy.
Leave the charism
To Peter and Paul.
I'm wanting a chrism –
Not splattered with ghee
Like a statue of Shiva:
A little balm pressed on my forehead
With your thumb, to say
"You are here, and that
matters. Stay."

20.6.6

Half-parrot, half-penguin,
All cuff and no quiff.
Into the quaff and the cough of the water
Like a calf on a trolley.
A flurry of notes coming off of the cliff
Then, beak full of silver, they're back on the clef.

y.6.8

Kith is thicker than water,
Thicker than porter, older than blood.
A crith of a life will last – a slither of
Gold from the lith of a finger
Into the zither of the tilth,
Found by a smith in the horse's mouth.
The filth is buried with us, and our rhythm
Dithers and goes. The pith of our decision
Withers out by the fifth or sixth "begat".
If anything survives the hither and
Thithering waters of – it's pure gold, pure myth.

20.6.9

Kin comes under skin
As cleave and cling,
A kiln of kind, refining
Ductile metals, kinks and kings:
A heat sink for the self, its sin.
The djinn revamped that copper coil
As poteen still and valve-amp. Drink!

20.5.9

Swimming through the ribcage of the whale
To leave the krang behind.
If you can, why don't you? Eh?
The snow recedes like a banker's hairline. Clang!
You have 30 seconds, starting

Now. What connects the peaks across the valley
To the price in the local 'tique shop of
A water jug, a yoke and brick
bed platform heater underneath? Hint:

Alpine real-estate futures. Wrang!
Two crate of lobster in the boot of a Bentley.
Oh to be – just somewhere else
When the gowfers motor in, them and their wee dug.
You'll mind the Clan McCann – especially Genghis.

Simon Smith

COLD

clouds of lapwing – empty sky to crowded poplar

seeing Spring about to happen

clutch a mug of dark Assam with both hands

the shelf in your room – David Chaloner's *Chocolate Sauce*

long – long – long ago

Minster —> Sturry – dead spot – no coverage

mute swans swept far away inland browsing

inundated meadows about Grove Ferry

risk the surf the shingle the cold

a crescent moon over Crescent Road

'Truth' too big a word

at close to midnight

tap water sweet

Statements on Lyric

As this issue emerged I began to think more and more about the nature of lyric. I began to write an essay about Lyric (naturally, unfinished, with significant lyrical silences). I contacted each of the contributors, asking them for a 'Statement on Lyric' and I added a sentence of my own. Only Peter McCarey was simply too enmeshed with other work to send an answer. These are therefore rapid responses – closer to first word than last. My thanks to all. *Richard Price*

Caroline Clark

-The lyric springs from the impulse to look back and trace memory's throw forward; we wait, forget, hope, abandon, then hear an echo. Do we? Yes.-

Kelvin Corcoran

I imagine it's a shared limitation that in trying to write about lyric we resort to it.

*This is it, this is it, sang Neneh Cherry
some sounds some burdens can release
answered Tjinder Singh – those sweet birds
launched from the stave into endless blue.*

This probably does not help. Poetry is everything language can be and lyric is poetry going full tilt, beyond de dum de dum de dum of the insistent mono tempo of our culture. I've recently had the experience of having several poems turned into songs, singable songs with congruent music. I know this isn't the total lyric spectrum but my sheer delight in it is unmeasured: to sit there and hear the song of the words you wrote. It might be a clue to the whole thing, that sustained moment of possession and dispossession sounding in the air.

Robin Fulton Macpherson

As I get older, my poems seem to get shorter.

Running out of steam? Well, I never was very inclined to huff and puff, and, more to the point, my earliest published poems, however embarrassing they are to me now, show a desire to be economical with words, to make each pull its weight. I have always felt drawn to masters of brevity, who could imply much while apparently saying little, such as Olav H. Hauge in Norwegian (at least in his non-metrical poems) and Harry Martinson in Swedish (at least in his later work). More recently I was much taken by the near-miniatures of Samuel Menashe.

As I laboriously typed out most of my published poems (with a slash here and a nip-and-tuck there) for my forthcoming *Collected Poems 1960-*

2010, I felt there was a tension between a compulsion to use words (if I don't write I feel uncomfortable) and a suspicion of or anxiety about the slippery nature of language. I like to imagine that a piece of music that we have lived with for decades will remain faithful, whereas words can't be trusted not to sneak off into oblivion. They usually sidle back, in their own time, but we can't be sure, and some words have a mean habit of absenting themselves just when they're needed.

When G.F. Dutton, another master of brevity, was gathering his work for *The Bare Abundance* (2002) he used me as a kind of wall against which to throw ideas, and one of his recurring ideas was that if the language of a poem is no different from that of prose then it ought to be written as prose. There are many ways of observing this difference - if poems are aimed at public reading, for instance, then a degree of prose-like discursiveness may be unavoidable - but my own version of the difference takes me, for better or worse, towards a compactness of expression that would probably impede the flow expected of good prose.

To some extent practical reasons may lie behind this preference. For four and a half decades I was "at work," i.e. obliged to spend a lot of time on unrewarding pedagogical chores, and these leave neither time nor energy for large-scale projects.

Short poems take place in one's head and don't need much time with paper and pencil. Yes, all my poems were and still are written in pencil.

Dorothy Lehane

When I feel as though I have created something too lyrical, I remind myself it is entirely possible to find the lyric alive on the page. The practice of reading might indeed dismantle the writer's intention, yet the poem can still sing, living out the conventions of the lyric without compensating the strength of text. For me, lyrical poetry is best when it hospitably and rhythmically renders its emotions and experiences in an innovative way. I am not concerned that lyrical quality might be subordinate to other more forms, nor do I believe that such an approach should apologise or try to explain itself. While it should not prattle on purely for the sake of the sound, the lyric should delight in its aural resonance, reverberating voice from the written to the read.

Hannah Lowe

I think I've often seen narrative poetry (which I write a lot of) in opposition to lyric poetry, but with more thought, I see they overlap. Like a lyric, narrative poetry can express thoughts and feelings, but it's driven by a story, by the movement of a narrative, whereas, for me, a lyric is more of a meditation on something - happiness or Brixton or a peacock or an ex-boyfriend - it isn't driven by story, but it isn't necessarily static - the movement might take place in the emotional landscape of the poem.

Richard Price

Lyric poetry is an intimate spell backed by ghost music.

Simon Smith

A baggy term these days. 'Lyrics' seem almost entirely associated with pop music, and if one accepts that is the case, then these are words set to music, but words that cannot stand on their own without the play and structure of that external melody. The old argument as to whether Dylan is a poet seems relevant here. He probably is the greatest popular songwriter of the late 20th Century, but strip out the music and the words (to this ear) fail. Why can't fans be happy he is such a great songwriter? I'd swop places, just for the money. The thing is, the music in poetry is internal to the poem, and this is why poems are so often, much more often than not, impossible to set to music successfully. The melody of the song will be at odds with the melody of the words, and the melody

between words. Lyric poetry now still, it seems to me, to be short poems, sometimes working in series by treatment or subject matter, but whose organizing principles are guided by sound (sometimes melodious, sometimes dissonant), rhythm, working with and against syntax and grammar, the 'argument' of the poem to create counterpoint and harmony.

Caroline Clark's first collection is *Saying Yes in Russian* (Agenda Editions). Her poems and essays have appeared in *Poetry Review*, *Agenda*, *The North*, *PN Review*, *The Reader*, *The Frogmore Papers* and *Smiths Knoll*.

Kelvin Corcoran is the author of twelve collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *For the Greek Spring* (Shearsman).

Robin Fulton Macpherson was born in Arran in 1937. He was senior lecturer at Stavanger University in Norway from 1973 to 2006. He now lives on the coast at Hafrsfjord near Stavanger. Marick Press, Michigan, is bringing out *A Northern Habitat: Collected Poems 1960-2010*.

Dorothy Lehane teaches Creative Writing at The University of Kent and is currently curating the Poetry Meets Biomedical Science project.

Peter McCarey is the author of the study *MacDiarmid and the Russians* and many poetry collections, including *Collected Contraptions* (Carcanet). He lives in Geneva.

Hannah Lowe's *Chick* (Bloodaxe) is an elegiac collection dedicated to her father, a Chinese Jamaican migrant who was a professional gambler.

Simon Smith's collections include *Fifteen Exits*, *Reverdy Road*, *Mercury* and *London Bridge*.

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