

Painted, spoken

edited by Richard Price

number 42

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Jane Duran

parkour in Gaza, 2011

'Wherever you go, it's closed off.' Abdallah Inshasi

The young boys they can do it	who leap over high walls who run up enclosure
and flip over backwards and pull themselves up breathless	who climb tall buildings over the roof, smiling and
who gauge the abyss below where the glaring sun	and walk along the parapet does not confuse them
whose friends tell them who shake off their friends	'Come down, enough, stop' who run through the alleyways
between the asbestos vaulting, wall-spinning	homes of Khan Younis who say 'Leave me alone
let me take the jump	I'm taking the jump.'

*parkour: Practitioners of this sport and acrobatic art learn to overcome obstacles rapidly by running, leaping, climbing. The poem is inspired by the documentary film *Free Running Gaza* by George Azar and Mariam Shahin, broadcast by Al Jazeera.

Separation Wall

after a photograph by Gary Fields

a child is almost stroking the wall

examining it. He is calm facing it
reaching out to touch lightly

just a small area
of the high concrete slabs

Behind the wall is the same
dry stony land he stands on

His curiosity is delicate
as if touch were a form

of questioning, understanding
and serene thought

*The Separation Wall was built by Israel to separate it from the Palestinian territories. It is more than 700 kilometres long. In some sections the wall is built deep into Palestinian territory, which severs farmland and divides communities.

Separation Wall 2

what happened to nearness?

I need to travel miles
on circuitous routes now

to reach it

sometimes a voice carries
over the wall

and soars

cameras

a surveillance, scrutiny

follows and encloses me
but does not protect

No sunlight enters here
to bring me relief

I can no longer see the trees
that would accompany me
over the wide range of self

the cries, Gaza

where do the anguished
cries come from

gathered into smaller
and smaller

enclosures

sometimes muffled
sometimes inaudible

Fiona Larkin

Overnight it is clarified

something has been born in the night something
insistent an outline of white light insistent
presence at the window-blind's edge such presence
frames what I can't I can't the time-frame's
suspended I reach for the cord how to suspend
lack of belief just give me sun on snow any lack
hardly missed as morning breaks open I hardly
care I shine nothing but transfiguration to care
for today I enter the dialect of light a portal for
longing crystals drift in the shape of my longing
light on the snow at the blind's rising body of light

Linda Black

Glass droplets

Ball-bearings a flame a cord a
pictureless frame caprice
knocked-back tethered
a stair-well *slip sloping*

Bristle berate call the destination
off bare insitencies infinite
causes *cleft left tear-a-way*
irascible irreversible

The first place I left left me
wanting the second escaped me
humility temerity bush-berries a
rabbit scuttling away

Sentence-mender *Kathleen McPhilemy*

Claire Crowther's *Real Lear: New and Selected Poems*

(Shearsman, 2024)

Most people have preconceptions about what poetry should be which may provide a framework for reading but are just as likely to create a barrier to appreciation. I was going to write 'understanding' but the expectation of understanding is one of the preconceptions with which I myself am lumbered. Claire Crowther's prose collection, *Sense and Nonsense*, is a godsend to the flummoxed first-time reader trying to negotiate her writing. Her work raises questions about the nature of communication in poetry, about surrealism, hermeticism, writing elliptically and private reference. While Crowther acknowledges that her poems can be hard to access, she makes considerable demands on her readers. The first poem in this book can be read at one level as a straightforward reassurance by a mother to a daughter about moving house, from the city to the country, 'that large patch of green'. The daughter appears to have a prized London view from her bedroom, 'she squints at the Eye, / a toy Big Ben fixed, neat, inside it'. Chillingly, however, the mother warns, 'She is going to have to give up her view'. In a reading Crowther herself supports, this is equally a warning to the reader; in this work nothing will be necessarily neat, or fixed.

The collection is made up of poems selected from the poet's first four volumes and a new set, *Real Lear*, which gives the book its title. Apart from the first, each volume has been built around a theme: *The Clockwork Gift*, written as part of her Ph.D. submission, focuses on grandmothers, *On Narrowness* examines framing and constriction, *Solar Cruise* is an account of a ship journey undertaken with her physicist partner and a passionate plea for solar power, *A Pair of Three* presents the process of adjusting to a marriage in which the former dead wife is still very present, and *Real Lear* returns to the theme of aging and end of life, particularly from the point of view of a woman. Despite this variety, certain features are consistent, particularly the wordplay which springs, I think, from her close attention to the sounds of language. She describes a writing process which has remained unchanged where she first 'listens' or 'receives' the poem and then over time edits it into shape. (*Sense and Nonsense*, p.139-140) Added to the awareness of sound is a strong sense of etymology which leads to puns and sideways thought processes. In this, the second of her three 'thike' poems, alliteration and sound patterning drive the poem forward:

From my eyrie above
the *Medieval Fayre*, no homogeny to hair,
hair holds no hegemony for crowns.

‘The Wild Life of Goodbye’, p.48.

The thike, a ‘mammal, the small-lifed thike’, first appears in *The Clockwork Gift* as a womble-like creature, local to Hob’s Moat, a real place where the poet lived as a child, and seems to represent the possibilities and dangers of imagination or the lack of it. The last line, ‘We elect the animals we harbour’ is rephrased in a later poem, ‘They say: / ‘What you know is what you choose to believe.’ (‘Illyria by Rail’).

The second poem tells an elliptical tale of ending. The thikes are culled or eliminated, as the poet watches, in a confusion of human and animal ‘a / dog tugs a child’s paw with hands like / teeth.’ I have indicated line endings here although this section purports to be prose. The poem ends in a summer storm presented with apocalyptic intensity:

The grass! It’s lost its tread. Cruising thunder makes breeze
panic. Against the window, my arms are strips of silver,
run moon solder.

Several reviewers have commented on Crowther’s elliptic style, perhaps to indicate that sometimes they can’t keep up. However, despite the jumps in imagery, the incorporation of non-words or neologisms and the wordplay, most of her poems have a strong narrative thread, whether the voice is her own or another’s.

In the third poem, through the encounter between the observer and the female thike discovered sleeping on her trampoline, we are given the story of the perennial outsider essential to small communities’ sense of identity: ‘You’re thikey, not a woman, // not a man. A night timer.’ Although ‘thike’ is a nonsense word, it is an anagram of the poet’s partner’s first name, Keith, so it is used meaningfully both at the personal level and as a poetic device for a wider audience. Many poems have a private or restricted reference which can be baffling. Those which are most successful allow us to take away significance even when we don’t know what exactly is going on. One example is ‘The Sentence Mender’ which seems to be a marital row. The speaker storms out of the house at night only to return later to the garage: ‘At home, my husband hates the sound of me. // I work on it in the garage, // a sentence-mender.’ These last lines are typically ambiguous; there seems to be some shifting in gender role, and it is unclear whether the ‘sentence-

mender' of the last line is a machine or a person, and whether the intention is reconciliation or something else.

Crowther admits that she is attracted to surrealism, professing her admiration for Selima Hill, among others. Many of her poems do have surreal features, but this is rarely a major factor in shutting out the reader. Some of the poems in *On Narrowness* are particularly successful in conveying restrictions on women, although perhaps 'Captured Women' (portraits of women hanging on a wall) and 'Jehane d'Arc and the Angels of Battle' (Joan of Arc in armour) should be seen as powerfully metaphoric rather than surreal. Another poem apparently dealing with marital stress achieves its effects through a surreal use of language where the hurt of both partners is represented by the jabbing beak of the oyster catcher, imitated in the harsh repetition of 'stuck' in the penultimate line:

stuck, stuck, stuck, stuck, till we both are
woken by pain with its orange beak.

'Separation', p.67

Crowther writes interestingly about her approaches to form, whether in 'fatrasies' the eleven line medieval nonsense poems whose structure she employs in later poems, the use of syllabics or, indeed, the mixing of prose and verse. This seems to me to be a kind of generative rule making which allows the poet increasingly to throw off restraint in her use of language. Another freedom she exploits is old age; the figure of the older woman is already present in *The Clockwork Gift* but returns powerfully in *Real Lear*. Women writers from Germaine Greer to Jenny Joseph have elevated the figure of the crone. Crowther takes on the persona of a female Lear to access the freedom of dispossession which Lear moves towards in Shakespeare's play. In Crowther's case, this freedom is a permission to cast off the restraints of poetic convention, - 'Chutney sobbed glupglupglup glupglupglup glup on the Aga', 'bit grrr', - and strike out into fresh areas of nonsense where sense may be apprehended through association, wordplay and intuition.

The first poem is written as a dementia memoir where powerful sense images and mimetic repetitions are punctuated by who, what and why questions:

Winter trees outstripped the briary fanged and ungardened
Roadside bumpbumped bumpbumpbumped along rut-runnelled field
Kerb kept a goshawk and harboured those car-deranged claws
What was it I wanted?

Crone freedom allows the poet to explore death, life after death, accountability, seasons, meaning and meaninglessness. There is pain ('Word Hurt', p.133) and love, 'when / we are held we fly.' ('Like a Wasp Crawls On', p.135) but so often the sense is coded or hidden. 'Soundsunder' the final poem in the book is, according to Crowther, about shyness, 'I'm used to sitting without speaking / to others' but despite the ingenuous opening, there is already hiding. Even the title is ambiguous: is it the sounds under or below chat, the sub text or even the poem wanting to be born, 'the noise I hear without speaking'; or is it the sound that sunders or divides self from other and which makes speaking so difficult. The ending is a reassurance, I think, an assertion of the us and the we:

I hear inside my silence

that it is the sussurround of us

we other:

sounds that shushhush the our of self.

I have found this collection challenging and rewarding and I particularly enjoyed the *Real Lear* poems. Nevertheless, I remain disturbed by the question of accessibility, an anxiety which reaches well beyond this book. Crowther acknowledges the fact that her poems may seem obscure, but rather bats away the issue of the reader, 'I'm conscious at every step of the writing process that I'm using a language, words, grammatical constructions, and those things are a group consensus, tools to communicate and half the fun is to wield language in subtle and unexpected ways.' (*Sense and Nonsense*, loc.cit.) No doubt, but sometimes the subtlety and unexpectedness leave the reader floundering, so that the 'fun' is not appreciated. In fact, Crowther speaks repeatedly of the playfulness, fun and humour in her work, but although her wit is indisputable, the play, such as it is, seems deeply serious.

Claire Crowther

Partners in Light

Only a window-healer could destroy this
tall rectangular see-through, lighting our room
for a quarter century. The panes have aged,
clinging to inner space, inspiring wet air:
glass must share with glass on cold dawns. Now a hole
gaps the wall. Sky leans in while the window-seer
fits a new unit. Glass is born unwieldy.
Heat teaches shape and place. New panes are married
but can't see each other, being transparent.
They hold a vacuum between them. In their breach,
there's light. Light waves let a pane touch its partner.
The one substance in their privacy is light.
Noon introduces them. They're fixed in their bed,
upright, harmonious, if not immortal.

side street /burning the bag

a tall boy black jacket white shirt /cloud hair /holds a small bag
boys run away /slink back /boys stand
still /surround /don't crowd

shortslickhair proffers a thin pipe /pokes it in the bag
cloudhair pulls the bag off the pipe
slickhair smokes the pipe

boys cross the road /cars look on /drive on
cloudhair strolls off /blows uphill
windows glaze over

the bag lies on the pavement
fired /scarlet flames rage
no sense of small

burns /is diminished
is shrunk

Alan Riach

Aubade

Lying here in the dark, before the dawn begins
To nudge the blackness out of the sky, before
The day will start to roll its lengthening roster of
Obligations into the mind, I'm listening, awakening,
And grateful: the warmth of our bed, the warmth
Of your body beside me, the silence of our home,
No: not silence; the quiet sound of your breathing,
And soon, the tiny rumble of the heating, water
In the radiators, the prospect of a shower,
Clothes, coffee, breakfast, the simple physical
Movement, into whatever is coming: it is arriving:
A thankfulness, and one deep breath. Here comes the sun.

Tiger air

Edinburgh Zoo & the tiger's enclosure was open
To the air, the beast kept deep inside, the space
About to be washed; approaching close, the stench
Rolled out, & you, walked into it: thick as a blanket
Of close-woven wool, a layer of tweed on a layer
Of tweed, unforgettable, that overwhelming fragrance,
Irresistible. Imagine: that's the last thing in your face
Before the jaws close on your head. So now,
Approaching 70, the sense that your death is so much
Closer than your birth, brings all the spooky tones
Of taste & smell, not touch, nor sight, but the invisibles,
To mind. Past & present, slipped since COVID anyway,
Now inform each other differently. Movements of symphonies
Fade out & come back in. New ways of savouring
A strange continuum. Only at one side, still far enough away
The memory, that tiger air, places you don't walk to any more.

Corncrake

Crex crex, in the high corn, out there, all around us,
Windows of the big Mercedes down, narrow road on far Tíree,
Winding behind us, away, before us, round that curve.
Crex, crex. Uncle Mac drags his slightly dandruffed comb
Over the car sill edge, and waits. A shuffle in the back seat,
The twitcher, has his binoculars out, looking into the cornfields,
To the left, to the right. We'd picked him up a mile back, driving
So slowly, quietly, intent upon the quest, with nothing more but
Watching, waiting, looking, to be done, and *crex, crex*, the comb
Upon the window, and the *crex, crex*, coming from the corn,
The fields, surrounding us. Then, for a moment, one tiny creature comes,
Crosses the road in front of us, looking both ways, never leaving the road,
Disappears, on the other side, into the cornfields. Once, then, only,
Just that one. We watch it, right to left, in our silence as it crosses, *crex, crex*.

The art of William Johnstone

Faces, – contours, plough lines on the forehead,
Furrows by the nose, cheeks rounded in full bloom,
The hair like long grass blown in great tufts & swathes,
Eyes like fish glints in clear water, stubble on the rocky chin, –
They fade into the landscape that they come from,
And the old land rises out of them, sun-weathered,
Rain-weathered, rough and cold, then soft to the touch
Or warm as a summer's afternoon, kindly or severe,
Accumulated wealth of years, experience ingrained,
Then face and landscapes both become abstractions,
The textures themselves, ink upon paper, a line or pool
Of colour, just to mark it, and an energy, in everything, defined.
The artist's work, the work of the observant eyes,
The cultivation of the fields: the farmer's calculations & compassion.

Guillaume Apollinaire *Ralph Hawkins*

Guillaume Guillaume how I envy your fame your accomplishment for American letters
Allen Ginsberg

Written in 1958 “At Apollinaire’s Grave” one wonders who at that time had shown interest in Apollinaire’s oeuvre? There is no great sign of his influence on British poetry other than as a by-product of American poets upon the so called British Poetry Revival of the late 1960’s and 70’s. Apollinaire’s effect on his contemporaries was immediate and on the *isms* that arose in European in that period. But Apollinaire’s influence on American poetry, as perhaps Ginsberg indicates, was surprisingly present very early on in the seminal texts of Modernism. Apollinaire’s work has passed down through a particularly American line and consciously or not has been incorporated into a variety of poetic practices.

Was not then Apollinaire one of the first literary modernists? He was certainly a catalyst. He was there when everything began and with those whose work provoked such interest. Paris, France was a hub of startling creativity. A time when the world was in the throes of changing shape, the inevitable successions of imperialisms once more being reordered, a new, modern technological world was busily defining itself.

Apollinaire wrote the first book on Cubism, coining the term. His was a milieu of writers and painters. Any reader who looks through Apollinaire’s great work *Calligrammes* will recognize that he changed the very shape of poetry. The compositional page took on new forms and procedures, not only with its letter-visual transcription, where a fountain becomes a fountain of words, *le jet d’eau*, where *la mandoline l’oeillet et le bambou* appear in crude handwritten shape, where flowers are flowers made of words and slanted rain falls down the page. But perhaps more importantly the very syntactical order of the page alters, line length becomes variable, punctuation disappears and alternate perspectives of time confront us. Not only the techniques of Apollinaire’s poetry but the very content explores and brings forth a contemporary world.

This mapping of the poetic page, lineation, duration and content, can be found in the work of Apollinaire’s modernist contemporaries and near contemporaries. He was familiar to Pound, Lewis and Joyce, and Louis Zukofsky who would publish *Le Style Apollinaire* (1934). He is there in William Carlos Williams’ first steps into experimentation with *Spring and All* (1923). But anyone reading TS Eliot’s *The Waste Land* could not fail to recognise Apollinaire in the dislocated dialogues, in the time-shifts, in the interspersings and broken surfaces.

It becomes apparent with Ginsberg’s tribute that Apollinaire’s influence proliferates in American writing. It is noticeable in both iterations of the New York School. It is there in the work of Kenneth Koch (Koch rewriting *Zone* as *A Time Zone*) and particularly in the work of Frank O’Hara. It is present in O’Hara’s use of the seemingly randomised experience, in the insistent present of now, in the

naming of locations and friends and the demarking of time; *Je partirà i a 20 h. 27, and C'est 4 h. du matin* of Apollinaire to the *It's 12:10 in New York* of O'Hara. Indeed middle to late O'Hara is more under the influence of Apollinaire than O'Hara's earlier formative work. But Apollinaire's influence is apparent too in the second generation New York school in the work of Ted Berrigan and Ron Padgett. Padgett producing Apollinaire translations in *Zone Selected Poems* (2015) and *The Poet Assassinated* (1968).

It has only been through my attempted translations of Apollinaire that I have come to realise these things, suddenly recognising connections and links. But what initially drew me to Apollinaire, given our turbulent time, were his war poems and the particular emotions and experiences he conveyed in such imaginative form. I felt strongly that his poems are still relevant and should be perhaps read by a new audience.

Guillaume Apollinaire writing as *Louise Lalanne* translated by Ralph Hawkins

Chanson

The bilberries are for the girl
Who is not here
The marjoram is for my soul
Tralala!
The honeysuckle is for the girl
Irresolute
When do we collect the cranberries
Lanturlu
But let them grow on the tomb
O folly! O phew!
The rosemary's dark tufts
Laitou!

The Present

If you want I'll give you
My morning, my bright morning
With all my fair hair
That you love
My green
And golden eyes
If you like
I'll give you all the sounds
That arrive
When the morning dawns
With the sun
And the flow of water
In the fountain
Close by
And the evening will
Come quickly
The night of my sad soul
Weeping
And my tiny hands
With my heart which must be
Close to yours
To guard

Yesterday

Yesterday, it was the faded hat
That I've been lugging around
Yesterday, it was a poor dress
That's no longer fashionable
Yesterday, it was the beautiful convent
So empty now
The pink melancholy
Of the young girls
Yesterday, it was my badly given heart
One year, one more year Annie
Yesterday is no more, tonight
A shadow is
Close to me in my room

Geraldine Clarkson

Creamer

Milk all over him, a-milk head to foot, milksome, and then some—of milk he was the deepest milk-man, milk-boy, milk-toy. He was milker of memories, milky-blue in his long-distance eyeglasses and near-distance mask. He had a milk tongue and milk nose. His eyes like notes left out at midnight. *No whey, no whey*, he'd say. Full fat cheeks and shoulders. He could bend forward to touch his toes, present his bottom aloft and fill the air with dairy vapour, skimming joy.

Hit and Run

Nurturer
turned paingiver
malmothere
other than me
buffeting me

contact days
sizzle I long for
the delicious
lick of her love
seeking me out

a flower of rage blooms
brushes my jaw
flesh petals unfold
rosehip syrup
starts up

At Play

*Just popping back to childhood
for the afternoon, dear.*

He called and was gone.

She rattled the door
 remonstrated with the cushions
 angled her voice to skim TV hum—

no use.

 Left alone once too often
she griped to be a playground widow—

to have rubbed roughly alongside someone
 at each fat step, each lean turn
 and now— seven rooms of *no one*,

save the little boy who rocked
 and laughed
and ran ragged

between

swings and rugger
 and yard and brothers
 and river and class and her.

A note on Lennart Sjögren

Robin Fulton Macpherson

Lennart Sjögren has spent his life on the Baltic island of Öland, where he was born in 1930. With over thirty books to his credit, mostly of poems, he is one of the leading writers of his generation, a fact recognised by several prestigious Swedish awards. His later work includes two book-length poems, *The Bird-Hunters* (1997), based on a local tale of hunters trapped and drowned in the melting ice, and *Call Me Noah* (2014), a meditation on the biblical story.

He shares some of Harry Martinson's worries about the ecological damage threatening natural life, and some of Tomas Tranströmer's fascination with the Baltic, but his observation of natural life reveals a disturbing sense of the non-human otherness of the creatures with whom we think we share the earth.

Some of his late poems contain fewer man-beast confrontations and seem rather to try to touch parts of existence which defy touch. They are often untitled, open-ended, elusive, and with minimal punctuation, appearing as if out of nowhere like snowflakes materialising in the air.

Lennart Sjögren **Three poems**

translated by Robin Fulton Macpherson

A lighter mood

A lighter mood came over me
something frivolous
I hadn't known before

Today I'll write only about life
death now a word that fell away as I handled it

wanted now to speak of the three lives
I thought stood revealed to me

the life of the unborn
the life of those now living
the life of the dead

there are probably other lives
but those three disclosed themselves

c/o that instant not to be stored
in the records.

That there should be...

That there should be in the deep forests
friendly spirits too –

they secrete an odour
the nose can scarcely detect
they keep clear of heavy blood
but can move in the blood of lovers
and now and then also
in moderate sorrow

great sorrow is too much for them

they hide in inner hiding places
there they wait out time.

I'm not saying life is good
I'd rather say it was bad
yet I'm not saying that either.

I wish for only three instruments:
set-square, scissors, knife-blade

so that I can measure and cut out
the things that can be measured
and the things that can be cut out

leaving the rest for the night to measure
and the animals that then emerge.

Contributors

Linda Black is a poet, visual artist and dyslexia specialist. Her fifth collection *Then* was published by Shearsman in 2021. She is editor of *Long Poem Newsletter*. **Geraldine Clarkson's** poetry has appeared in journals internationally, including *Poetry* (Chicago), and she has performed her poems at various festivals and other poetry venues in the U.K., Ireland and the U.S. **Jane Duran** was born in Cuba and raised in the USA and Chile. Enitharmon Press has published five collections of her poetry, including *Breathe Now, Breathe* (1995) which won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. Her most recent book, *the clarity of distant things*, was published by Carcanet in 2021. She received a Cholmondeley Award in 2005. **Ralph Hawkins** has been writing poetry since the late 1970s when he was one of a number of radical poets gathered at the University of Essex. **Fiona Larkin** is the winner of the most recent National Poetry Competition for her poem 'Absence has a grammar.' Her debut collection, *Rope of Sand*, was published by Pindrop Press in 2023. **Kathleen McPhilemy** grew up in Belfast but now lives in Oxford. She has published four collections of poetry, the most recent being *Back Country*, Littoral Press, 2022. She hosts a poetry podcast magazine, Poetry Worth Hearing. **Robin Fulton Macpherson** is a poet and translator and long-time resident in Norway. Marick Press published his *A Northern Habitat* (2013) and his *Unseen Isles* (2020), and Shearsman Books published his *Arrivals of Light* (2020). **Richard Price's** latest are *Late Gifts* (Carcanet) and *Tinderless*, an artist's book with images by Simon Lewandowski, evoking the world of dating apps (Wild Pansy Press). **Lennart Sjögren** was born in the village of Böda on the Swedish island of Öland in the Baltic and to this day lives on the former farm of his parents, down by the shore.

Painted, spoken

poems

Guillaume Apollinaire

translated by Ralph Hawkins

Linda Black

Geraldine Clarkson

Claire Crowther

jane Duran

Fiona Larkin

Alan Riach

Lennart Sjögren

translated by Robin Fulton Macpherson

thought

The sentence-mender The poetry of Claire Crowther
by Kathleen McPhilemy

A note on Guillaume Apollinaire by Ralph Hawkins

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Almost Free (just send an A5 stamped addressed envelope –
the “large” 2nd class stamp will cover postage)