

Colour

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Colour

Deepest Apologies

My poem has got out of hand
It's grown a dozen heads,
A bloated body, leaden feet,
And far too many threads.

It says what *it* decides to say
Not what I mean to write
And so, alas, it is not fit
For anybody's sight.

The colours mix, the thoughts entwine -
Not poetry, but verse -
It has declined, I'm sad to say
From bad to even worse.

And so, alas, I shall not write
Of colours (blue and green)
But hope some year to shape something
More worthy to be seen.

(And as you'll see, the curse has spread
I think only in rhyme
In doggerel, my thoughts, confined
A weird, unsettling time -
HELP!!!)

Sheila Cameron

Aurora Borealis—the Light Fantastic

I've listened to the science.

The sun, I'm told, is prone to violent storms
that prime its particles with charge
and blast them through the ether to our Earth
where, magnetized, they circle arctic air
as spectra, waves and frequencies.

But should you happen, in a solar storm,
to stand between the snow-bound land and
blind, black sky your up-turned eyes
will fill with trails of green,
with wreaths and veils of emerald
that twine and pulse, dissolve,
and form again ; and you will say
'look! the sky is dancing,'
or when, quite suddenly,
the green is intercut with
streaks of bounding red you'll
shout out 'Wow!' for utter joy.

Afterwards you'll turn away and head for home,
your brain alive with crimson, with viridian, with
hopefulness—emptying that space of all
but indents in the snow and electricity.

Ros Bleach

Seen, unseen

Kingfisher. A wish

Time and time again I press
my eyes to the viewing slot
that opens out to me
the hidden pond beyond the fence.

Time and time again you
are not there. I do not catch
that sheen of blue, that shock
of pink, the black stab of your bill

poised, before—if only—
your lit fuse flight might
streak my retina with green.

Time and time again
I look for you.
You are not there.

A Trick of the Light

Outside in the sun a small pear drop of a bird
has just appeared, olive wings a-flutter, bouncing
back and forth along the window ledge.

Flaunting his yellow crest he's tap, tap, tapping
on the pane as if he's messaging his mate.
I cast my eyes among my potted plants to see
what captivates him so but nothing's moving, no
it's just his mirrored self he's seeing, dancing on the glass.

I flick and flick my phone screen, tap in his identity,
check the picture: *goldcrest*. Yes, that's him.
To verify the match I glance out to the sun again.

He's gone...

Ros Bleach

THE COLOUR WHEEL OF THE YEAR

The Wheel of the Year turns constantly through its eight seasons, yet at each juncture it appears to mark time for three days: Candlemas, for example, lasts from 31st January to 2nd February. The seasons of the year are also the seasons of a life.

Let us begin at Candlemas: The deep black dark of winter: black is the absence of colour.

Deep in the dark there is a stirring: Dylan Thomas has it right: *Light breaks where no sun shines*: the bright point of conception; tiny, but unfolding a whole new life.

Mary, mother of Jesus, and all mothers, are honoured at this time of year.

Ewes get pregnant. White snowdrops appear.

The germ of a new project.

The Wheel turns. Spring Equinox.

More white blossoms appear, and yellow, and tender green shoots and buds, fresh and bright. The cold air is charged with energy.

The boundless innocent energy of childhood.

Projects start to acquire form.

The Wheel turns again, and May Day's a riot. The headlong force of life: the green colours strengthen and darken, blue red yellow purple swell the palette in the burgeoning flowers.

The energy of courtship and pairing, initiation; the launching of projects.

Another turn of the Wheel. Summer Solstice. The sun reaches its height, its brightness contains all colours. In the fields and gardens they are full and vibrant, and fragrance fills the air: purple lavender's healing heaviness; heady, creamy elderflower; sweet pink-yellow honeysuckle; lilac.

From now, the settling to maturity, the filling of the fruit.

Life's projects become established.

With Lammas (Loaf-mass) at July's turn to August, the golden corn gets its first cut, and in its reaping is the first hint of death. Colours darken to the red, gold and blue of ripening.

Life's projects deliver up their fruits.

The next turn brings Autumn Equinox and harvest time, with plum's purples, deep orange of pumpkin and carrot, russet apples, dark leafy greens.

Life's projects reach maturity.

October's turn to November sees the return to earth, the turning inward. That which has not been harvested will rot now. Vegetation fades, leaves shrivel and fall, turn brown and black. Dark colours predominate. We warm ourselves with red fire.

Life's projects reach completion.

One more turn, and Winter Solstice arrives. The sun is at its weakest, and Earth's energy draws inward. Evergreens, from yew to glossy holly with its bright red berries, remind us that life continues, there is that which never dies.

In the dark
We gather round the manger-hearth,
To greet the Light of the World
The Saviour

And the Wheel turns
It's Candlemas
And the cycle begins again.

Richard Comley

bowl of vegetables

Five ripe tomatoes hold hands with green, spiky fingers,
shallots nestle in nets,
a cauliflower explodes with a fountain of white,
red peppers bulge on the shore
the egg-plant glistens in black, starless night,
a cucumber waits quietly anonymous.

The bowl encloses them all on brightly- stretched skins,
a tight group of comrades
huddled together, in from the fields
washed, dressed up to the nines,
shining in harlequin costumes
ready for a salad night out.

Elegy for a red-handed tree-frog

The frog on the cover of this notebook
has emerald skin, red jelly fingers,
and white golf-ball belly.
He's clinging with bright green arms
to a branch somewhere in South America.

I can hear him croaking in his Amazon forest
with a roar like a klaxon,
though the notebook looks as if he's been in the shop
a long time gasping for air
but he's popped up full of life

ready to take a flying leap
to the middle shelf of the magazine rack
so I'd like to preserve him
on this page, a small tombstone-poem
for a frog in the Amazon

among brown envelopes, cellotape
and transparent rulers of this world.

yellow

Yesterday we walked to Great Tew.
following the wall around the estate,
crumbling drystone, yellow Cotswold,

down through a field of winter ploughing,
rough-red hewn sideways like logs
then yellow corn, full-eared, golden,

Oxfordshire suddenly opening
in front of us between the yellow and blue -
butterflies, tortoiseshell, red admiral,

and the old entrance, the wall slipping
over the land, unkempt pines, aristocratic
remains while a yellow bird –

linnet or yellowhammer – darted
over the cornfield like an elegy -
red poppies, purple flowers, the abandoned estate.

John Daniel

Celandines, second lockdown spring

Mid-March – and yet again
the celandines have taken over the garden,
invading every flower bed,
crowding round the pond,
marching towards the shed,
pushing up through the moss on the lawn.

Hundreds and hundreds of them. Miniature suns.

A couple of weeks on
they'll be limp, straggly, death-feigning,
needing digging up. Perhaps I'll curse them.
But for now, they're golden.
A constellation.
Consolation.

Wendy Davies

Green

Today I'm accompanying you – my cousin who's been
my sister ever since our time in Ghana –
to the National Hospital for Neurology
where at last you'll see your Parkinsons consultant
face to face. We've made a list of questions
– why has your condition been worsening so rapidly
since before the first lockdown, why does getting up
from a chair cause so much pain, what – if anything –
can be done to slow the progress of the disease and
help you gain more mobility? The mini-cab, booked for 10:00,
arrives on time, the Eritrean driver helps as you
struggle to get in, and we have to go a very
roundabout route as the traffic is heavier than I ever
remember before, it takes half an hour to drive just
three miles. But we're there in good time, we make
our way with baby steps to the first reception area
where we're screened for Covid, asked the usual
questions about symptoms and testing, then someone
arrives with a wheelchair – it's the first time you've been
in one – and she steers expertly, you comment on the
speed we're going. A long wait in another
reception area and finally we're called in. Professor Faltini,
one of the most eminent specialists in his field in the whole
country, is likeable, makes eye contact with both of us,
asks clear questions, listens intently. He observes
you walk, takes your blood pressure when you're
lying down and again on standing up, then,
when you're sitting down again, draws his chair close.
He says he thinks the reason the replacement dopamine
you've been on for two years isn't working is that
the receptors in the brain are not functioning,
and this means it's likely – though only an MRI scan will ascertain –
you have what is sometimes called atypical Parkinson's
but is known more commonly as MSA,
Multiple System Atrophy. He pauses.
You ask: is this 'more sinister' than typical PD?
He says there's a silver lining in that Amantadine,
the new medication you're to start today, will slow down
the march of the illness, and that people with MSA
do not tend to lose cognition or memory – but otherwise,
yes, it is more sinister. He answers a few more questions,
about diet and exercises and what help you can access,
then he emails a prescription to the pharmacy, which is near
where you're to have blood tests. And this doesn't take
too long, and we order a cab which comes on time

and it's a different Eritrean driver this time, who tells us
today is the 30th anniversary of Eritrea's independence
and you tell him you've been to Eritrea for the wedding
of a colleague and friend, whose son is your godson.
The traffic's lighter now and soon we're back home,
the driver helps you out of the car – calling you Mammy
and wishing you well – and we take baby steps
along the walkway to number 4, unlock the front door,
and go along the narrow corridor to the living room
where the afternoon sun is pouring in
through the big wide window, which is almost
the length of an entire wall. And you say: 'I love this view,
I love looking out on the garden, the trees, the grass –
the green of it all.'

Under Skiddaw

for Nicky

Early wordless morning and over by the window
your painting – which you call simply 'a study' –
breathes its subtle colours:
ivory, lavender, an almost hidden blue,
moss green, a muted lime green,
pale yellow and a watery claret –
all quietly giving way, each to each,
one to another.

I've never been there, Skiddaw,
Maybe will do one day, it doesn't matter.
You've brought the place to me. Your painting
takes the wide view, shows the arc of foothills,
the Old Man in the distance;
shows the grain, the specks of white,
the underside of raincloud, less than half a tree-trunk,
fence-posts petering out to nothing,
the sweep and pause
of your own hand; doesn't strain
to reach the summit, lets me see
between the ghosts of silvered branches
the valley in sunlight, not needing words.

Wendy Davies

Picking Carnations

Starting early, we worked along the rows
of single blooms, selecting only those
ready for market: the best-selling shades
like *Laddie's* coral pink, which never fades,
White Sim, bright scarlet *William Sim*, the dark
crimson of that old favourite, *Alec Sparkes*.
Snap them at the fifth notch and lay them down
in trays, to sell at six for half a crown.

At nine o'clock, the urgent picking done
we drank our tea, relaxing in the sun.
Then to disbud and weed for several hours.

More often though, continue picking flowers
till lunchtime, then on through the afternoon,
with *Dusty*, *Shocking Pink* and *Harvest Moon*
(almost autumnal in its golden glow)
White Sorgas, fragrant (and uniquely so)
Crowley was baby pink, and *Tangerine*
just that, while *Shamrock* was the palest green.
One more – white fringed with red, as I recall –
was *Arthur Sim*, the prettiest of all.

Jill Elliott May 2021

This is a more or less factual account of my summer holiday job as a teenager.
When, sadly, the greenhouses were pulled down for new housing I moved on to fruit
picking.

Rose Maddar

Rose MaddarWhat on earth is that!
nosing up from beneath the *Crimson Lake*,
sharpening its elbows on *Vermilion*?

Intrigued, I lift it gently from the tin,
inspect the label, try the crusted cap,
which yields reluctantly. revealing one
exquisite jewel, bewitchingly aglow,
the colour of a pomegranate seed
but richer, more intense, scorchingly sweet:
surely the very essence of a rose.

The battered tube, compressed in jagged folds
suggests extensive use – but how and where?
I scrutinise his pictures for a clue,
identifying *Umber* (*burnt* and *raw*)
Yellow Ochre of course, *Sienna* too,
Cobalt for summer skies, *Ultramarine*,
– nothing out of the ordinary there –
Chrome Yellow, *Cadmium Orange*, *Prussian Blue*
Canvas relates to palette, stroke for stroke.
Rose Maddar, though, eludes the probing eye.

Were he still here to ask, what would he say?
“*Rose Maddar*? Yes, a favourite of mine.
I use it all the time – see, here, and here!”
Or, maybe, “Hm; a mystery to me!
I think it must have got there by mistake.”

For none can tell how what we leave behind
will be interpreted: treasures ignored;
meaning ascribed to trivialities.
Ill-fitting shoes, gifts set aside for friends,
gadgets we never used and books unread,
curated, make us strangers to ourselves.
Legacy has a feeble hold on truth.

This much is certain: beauty knows no bounds,
refuses to be classified or owned;
bursts through barriers of culture, place, and time
to ambush our emotions; sweeps aside
concerns with provenance, intention, taste
to hack our minds, rewire the way we see
feel, think, create.....

.....so to begin again:
I ask “Rose, Madder – what on earth is that?”

Pigment (Winsor and Newton), pink, of course,
organic and cannot be synthesised.
This remnant, whilst of no practical use,
has sentimental value, I suppose.
Remove all context though, and what remains
is one small drop of colour, texture, light:
beauty distilled – refreshment for the soul.

Jill Elliott 2021

This poem is inspired by oil paints originally belonging to my artist grandfather, who died when I was three. Amongst them are some shades not found in your average child's paintbox!

Painting the House

We know just the right colour for each room of the house.

I see them in my mind's eye:

The exact yellow to light up brown furniture;

The precise dried-plaster pink

To calm the walls around hung pictures.

Colour charts lure us with heritage promises:

'Chinese Imperial Yellow', auspicious and grand,

Like dragons on emperors' robes.

'Dead Salmon', quaint country-house relic,

Revived and in vogue.

They miss the mark.

Later, search over, we paint the rooms.

Dark floorboards glow beneath yellow walls.

'Delhi Bazaar' – the name jostles with life,

Dazzles the eye with brilliant silks,

Hot hues of spices, heaps of pure pigment:

Our homely *hommage* to Anish Kapoor's

Defining epiphany of Yellow.

Filtered light falls cool upon bisque walls.

'Cracked Clay' – it speaks of Nature's

Comfortable imperfection,

The feel of warm earth underfoot,

The potter's thumbprint on an ancient shard;

Picasso's dusty, earthy, fleshy rose.

These are the colours. The house is done.

Phillipa Hardman

Trees in Autumn

Green degenerates to brown.
Days of dullness, rain and mud
Trudge one by one all through October.
Roses moulder in the bud.

Then pumpkin-like, the blazing sun
Transmutes drab brown to gold and flame.
Late Autumn promises a treat
Tomorrow, when we walk the lane.

Frost has struck and stripped the trees.
Odd leaves hang awkward. But below,
Our feet sink deep in thick piled gold,
A dazzling walk-through Autumn show.

Phillipa Hardman



The Colours of Elms

At the end of our garden three great elms gloried,
Heavily crowned, they ruled the brow where fields once rose to meet the sky.
We children lay on the grass looking up at the leaves,
sailing the clouds, taller than masts,
set at the prow of our ship.
Green Springs,
Dark, bird nested Summers,
Golden Autumns.
In winter, like raised arms, a thousand fingers fanned, black on white above.
Year after year, -
Until a worldwide virus killed the spring.
Spread twigs stayed sterile.
The felling took days.
A Huge hollowness was made,
No coffins were carved of their wood.
It burned badly, cold as bones.
An Emptiness of Elms
An Emptiness of Elms
An Emptiness of Elms
Throughout the Land.

Lorna Logan

The King of Commerce Street

The peach is not the province of the young. They have not
Sung the hard frosts that bud the branches. Let them rig
Summer from the facades and pulp words on the street;
For all their chances, their fruit will soon spoil. The quince
Grows sweeter in the bletting but never rots in the forgetting.
Ripen your bitter berries! You and I, a couple of old wineskins
For love, our bed of straw, our glittering crown! I remember
That peach, that day, every peach takes me there. One day
I will only taste peach on that yacht from your trembling hand.
They are over and gone like seawater and song, yet I gulp
Them down. All pith is restored in grief. I conquer the squab
Streets to bring you peaches. The city is an untrustworthy
Whore peddling beauty and money as the nostrum for all ills.
Would we care if peaches were blighted, if the old fell like elm
In the parks? Foil balloons bob in the cemetery. Time is no thief;
I am the King of Commerce Street, a vineyard in bloom where
Life consummates over choice figs, pears, persimmons, and I walk
Anatolian orchards and the orange groves of the Costa del Azahar.
Canvasses snap like sails in the breeze, someone sluices the asphalt.
The peach seller's call guides my feet; his face is the west wind,
His body a rod of usefulness. He bows in mock obeisance and I
Chuckle as I portion coins into his palm. I clutch the lucid peaches.

Buildings rise in columns of smoke, the city doves are cooing.
I scatter breadcrumbs like kindnesses and look for you. The foxes
Will come. I am a fancier of thoughts and lost souls. I annex streets
And squares. The borders of my home expand to keep you in it.

I rind my sovereignty at your door. How small you are! How rare
Is your beauty, how precious, bounded as you are by time.
All seasons are sealed within you. I would lay the riches of Persia
At your feet to hear your sweet voice again, your cooped body
In service to austere cliffs beyond the beating heart breaking
Against the window, eroding our past. Your hands repeat and
Capitulate like birds. My love, you held on tightly. Together, we step out
Onto the ledge and drop words above the city, watch them explode.

Leanne McClements

Witness

My body is your amanuensis, marks surface
At your words. Marks appear as my body
Uncasps, wrists and feet stretching, a reliquary
Scraped clean. Somebody heard you work at the
Hospital, left armfuls of tulips on our doorstep.
Rang the bell and stepped back. I was afraid
To witness their kindness. Afraid of the bright
Colours, uncontained, shouting into the street.

I saved them, later, defiantly containing them,
Soaking their cut stems in a jug on the kitchen
Table. Witness to my indiscipline. I daren't
Paint them. I was an artist, once. Patterns of
Disturbance welt, cuts bite belts of bright vermillion,
Rubricating your name. Red minium and rose
Verzino crest on swollen flesh. Later, drowning
In gasps of lamp black, I soften against the wall.

My body fights to still, listen, empty, I listen
Intently, sharpen my quill, scratch away imperfections.
Scribe your name on bones the way the other girls did

On tins, ruled notebooks. I never understood their
Casual allegiances, the necessary rites. My body
Is the tight vellum of expectation, a tuned thrum.
I split and drift through unlit rooms in muted selves.
The tulips won't shut up. I, alone, am your witness.

Leanne McClements

LADIES WHO DANCE

We all wear purple now.
Our pensions, if we're lucky,
Spent on gin and one last (looser) pair of Levi jeans
(The first - remember? Buttoned tight - rebellious teens).
Past mid-life, there is (perchance) more beauty in our faces,
Our vulnerability leaving tender traces
As, Anne or Sue, or Jennifer or Jane -
We all wear purple now.

Only in a memory overloaded mind,
Repeating tangled tales, mislaying words for too familiar things
Is age now quite emphatically defined -
A certain pale opacity of skin,
(A tendency to come across as slightly prim?)
We'll still attempt to dance to Jagger, stiffly -
Under the (merciful) illusion time just stopped at fifty.
Shall we still wear purple?

Regrets from wilder lives still holding fast
(as love did mean having to say you're sorry, at last,
and no, the holy dove would not move forever)
Battling against the cruelties that weather -
Figures now, more often baobab than willow -
The invisibility of white hair upon the pillow
Despite us wearing purple.

Singing Hallelujah in our kitchens now like baffled queens,
Yet still revealed a kind of triumph
In these defiant scenes of
Human frailty and wistful dreams,
Realising that life was never quite the thing it seemed -
While we all (you too?) wear,
Determined purple.

Jane Muir

Going for gold: a song for my sixties

I'd begun to feel like a plastic bag;
Useful, yes; but these days, obsolete;
The fewer of them seen about, the better;
Decorative, absolutely not.

Too late, the whisper dripped into my ear;
You should have started years ago; instead
You wasted, and were wasted by, your youth.
It's well past half-time now; you had your chance.

And then one day in autumn I looked up
At golden leaves suspended in the sky,
At cool blue heaven weightless overhead;
Colour came cascading from the trees
And, dancing, glowed its way into my soul,
And floated incandescent to the ground
And burned in embers all around my feet.

The chill of November had brought me new heat;
Defiant inside me, my heart hit its beat:
Don't write me off; I have unfinished business –
Autumn is *not* just the run-up to Christmas.

Gillian Somerscales

Spring

I love the sweet relentlessness of spring:
Indecent, swelling, oozing, bursting green,
Softly, with ruthless charm, forcing a way
Through every crack in winter's armoury.

Spring has no off-switch, cannot be reversed;
Unidirectional it presses on,
Shrugging off hail, and storm, and frost, and floods,
Undaunted, undrownable, unquenched.

Snowdrops, camouflaged in white, give ice
The slip, and cannot be returned to ground;
Deceptive modesty their cool disguise,
Green spears protecting softly petalled heads.

Then with their casual, flaunting insolence
The flash-mob daffodils, in braying crowds
Of yellow trumpets, open-mouthed and loud,
Shout their colours into the cool grey day.

And all the while the light is pushing back
The curtained dark, by seconds, minutes, hours;
The sun, more buoyant, bounding daily higher,
Exhales its warmth across the naked sky.

There may yet still be rain, and frost, and chill—
The birth pangs of the season biting hard;
But spring just goes on springing, out of winter
Into a year that's growing, fresh and new.

Gillian Somerscales

Being Matisse

Here is a picture of a picture
that is real.

The colours are remembered by the heart:

carmine, pitch, azure, lilac, cornflower, chrome, terracotta
(rooftops, women spreading nets, fishermen on the beach, spread sails).

They are notes on life,
as singing is to hearing:

lady in kimono on the rocks
boat framed by window
red flowers on balcony

They are the inside of the inside
of remembering colour,
when the picture is the light
and the light is the picture.

The picture is so light
you can see the wind lifting
grains of sand, brick-red sand
the way you think it in a dream
and paint it on first waking.

Jane Spiro Collioure July 2018

Blue / Dinner Plates

I love my dinner plates, lifting
out of their bubble wrappings
like a moon sliding out of clouds.

You can stare into their blue
and travel round and round the whorls
as if spinning into the centre
of a galaxy with distant spotted stars.

You can feel the way
the clay was held in the potter's hands,
spun into white light,
then slowing back into this solid.

I like how its face shines after washing,
how it sits at the table like a shy
but frequent guest, the table
lacking without him

and how, even when empty,
imagination fills its open hand
with steaming rice, shoals of beans,
a sweet woodland of leaves

Lilac tree voices 1)

The first tree whose name I sounded out
the lilac tree at the front gate,
the new colour, not pink, not blue,
as a child is of two parents, quite new.

Here the tree of teenage bliss –
and then I notice how the purple lanterns
as they sway, send out a scent like incense,
so violent-sweet

and when the winter stripped my tree -
back to its spreading arms, its spine
shedding its purple chandeliers,
returning to itself, recycling time.

Now another hangs its torches here, abundantly -
and as I cut its intricacies of bloom,
I see, like renewal of a work of art -
how its leaves are shaped, each one delicately, like a fragile heart.

Lilac tree voices 2)

how it was to meet colours for the first time and have no words
for them, feeling them as yellow for bright, navy for night, and
how to feel or fear them

how brief were those heady blooms
and how entirely they fell, broken on the ground into segments,
each one curled and separated one from the other,
as if they had never once clustered together into a single
thing, so easily crushed, blown apart in the uncaring winds of
late spring.

how then it was possible to see the spine switched back into
an S so sure of its direction as if it was aiming west,
then chose to turn and head instead to the rising sun

Ways of sleeping

like a dolphin, one eye sealed into dream
the other wide awake, vigilante of the underworld,
all its mountain of self, floating in pretence of a log

or a giraffe resting its tired neck upright
against a tree, or bending its head back onto
the pillow of its rump, in brief reprieve from length

or like a sheep huddled into a warm scrum
with the bony noses and soft fleeces of friends
bounding their collective ring of sleep

or a hedgehog rolled and cold
under a pile of leaves, hibernators
cossetted in fur like a wintered bear.

We all find our places to repair, rebuilding
quietly in the dark, painted
in all the colours of our secret caves.

Jane Spiro

Alarm Call

I lie awake, waiting to hear the first bird
give the arrival of dawn the official consent
of its song.

Its plumage
is of no particular colour. The colour
of the night perhaps, that great gallimaufry
of the sleeping and the sleepless.

The colour of the individual
and the universal. The colour of the nation
of sleep, its dreams combined.

The bird doesn't worry about such things,
and is not awed by its coming task.
Knows that the perfect time for it to sing
is when it sings.

That everyone, awake
or asleep, waits for daylight, sure that one way
or another it will overwhelm them.

Poem from Seasons of Damage and Beauty by Paul Surman
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Windle)

Hereafter

We were meant to wake
to the sound of painted trumpets!
Fanfares of affirming gold
from musicians keeping vigil
on the walls: a forgotten sound now,
that in life was loudly self-important.

But time has stolen our ancient touch,
our fabled ways. The reds, browns,
and yellows of ochre on the walls;
the azurite blues, are lost to darkness.

Our unlit tombs are stuffed
with decorated jugs and jars
of meat and figs, bread and honey.
There are subtle wines,
but we have no thirst, only the hunger
the dead would have for life
if only they could live. Even our curses
fall like a refreshing rain upon your heads.

Paul Surman

Wren

The kitchen window was hardly open
when you flew in

and were lost
in a world that had changed to walls
and unreliable air.

I think you must have been a ghost.
I saw your chestnut-coloured softness,
but when I held you in my hands
you were not there.

The hardly anything weight of you
made weightless seem more plausible,
in the way that almost nothing
can appear substantial. As if the idea of you
was playing at being supernatural.

Our mutual anxiety was my only burden.
As I put you down on the garden table
you trembled and shook.
For however long it took, I kept watch.

Whole ages passed in the insignificance
of this somewhere in eternity. When you
shuddered I thought you must be dying.

Then you looked nervously around
as if in tiny astonishment
at everything you saw. Long minutes passed

until, on your thin-as-grass-stems legs,
you turned into an insubstantial phoenix,
a slightness that knew its way.

Paul Surman

Website: <https://paulsurman.weebly.com/>

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BOTTLE ALLEY

Bottle Alley was where I lounged in childhood,
within sounding distance of the sea,
walkway where a million glassy fragments
caught the changing light and winked at me.

Green or brown, more rarely red or yellow
(jewel-like vinaigrettes now ground to dust).
How I loved those glittering combinations –
chiefly purple, which meant Poisonous.



I am broken into little pieces.
2020 rolls towards its end,
one appalling year in which I suffered
smashed hopes, and the deaths of more than one friend.

Who now walks or skulks in Bottle Alley
where my schoolmates sheltered from the rain,
puffing fags or groping girls? I'll rally
slowly, fit myself together again

2003

That autumn the colours were exceptionally vivid;
everywhere, trees broke out in topaz, crimson,
flame; a huge moon rose over the ancient buildings.
And I thought I'd got over it, but I had not.

The colour scale stretched from snowberry to privet;
bryony, rosehip, spindle ran riot in the hedgerows,
rare shades of purple, too; meanwhile, the red candles
of Lords and Ladies lit my dark passage home.

But I was back in a certain intensive care unit
whose doors had closed; I no longer had any reason
to go there. Unripe crab apples strewed the towpath
that autumn, and sloe berries set my teeth on edge.

Merryn Williams

WYTHAM WOODS

They were the gift of broken-hearted parents, whose
daughter, Hazel, died. Anyone now can walk through these woods,
persons, cars swallowed up in the dark green silence. These
sycamores, oaks and holly have stood here decades, and there are
bluebell sheets in May, rotting leaf layers in autumn. I
come here to get away from traffic and headlines, and to think.
Foxes and badgers don't disturb me. I
remember all three, but their faces, their pain, I can't know.

This is a Golden Shovel poem.

Merryn Williams