

W&WMF Poetry & Music Evening

Jill Elliott **PARADISE (just wild enough)**

The day they let you come to Paradise
you know that you have finally arrived.
Lately enrolled in Jess's secret club
you know the password, codes and special signs
but 'Paradise' remains a mystery,
spoken of by the others in hushed tones,
until today, when all will be revealed.

And now we gather in our usual place
a spacious porch outside the dining hall
where Jess, swinging ape-like from beam to beam
above the crates of warm, abandoned milk
gives orders for our lunchtime escapade:
'Act normally, don't speak to anyone;
If someone asks, we're counting ladybirds.'

So, casually, we stroll across the field
towards its furthest point, a wild frontier:
rough, thorny ground where prefects dare not tread
for fear of laddered stockings and scratched limbs.
In single file we creep beside the fence.
Then, suddenly Jess darts behind a bush.
We follow, find the gap and scramble through
into - so this is it then, Paradise!
Shrubbery clinging to a narrow ledge.
Treetops above, and also round our knees.

Step carefully between the tangled roots.
Don't trust these slender trunks to break your fall,
for yards below the London train speeds by.
We are more frightened, though, of getting caught;
facing detention and a letter home.

But we are safe! Having escaped unseen
we have no appetite for further risk,
but perch contentedly on rocks nearby
Beyond civilisation, and yet close
enough to hear the registration bell.

Merryn Williams **HEADING FOR THE HEIGHTS**

Why did she seek out the mountains -
January, force nines yelling,
the black bog, minimal tracks rained out,
the waterfall, iced solid?

When all sane people were boarded up,
not daring to venture far from
their hot pipes, when her children called -
why need she go? What drove her?

The same, perhaps, that drives me from
the car-infested valleys,
to climb, till only the ancient pack-roads
are left, on top of the world.

You see them, heading for the heights,
on most mornings this winter,
equipped, you think, for the long haul -
maps, snow-boots and compass.

Wander all night. Doctors and missionaries
untraced, lone farms inaccessible;
how easy, on the calmest day,
to lose your track and perish.

Each year the bodies lie unclaimed,
and some, never discovered.
Yet still they head for the high ground,
no child's crying will stop them.

Alice Stainer **A pheasant shrieks in far-off woods**

A pheasant shrieks in far-off woods
and at the sound I shrug on boots –
no matter that I know they leak –
skim down the street, span the canal,
traverse the hunch of railway bridge,
slip through the clanging gate, then slosh
through scummy tug of weedy flood,
follow the causeway skirting the mere,
cross the culvert, and I am there.
It's just a patch of scrub, you know,
cross-ribboned by hawthorn hedges
soon to blaze white. But rabbits dine,
and a sleekness of thrushes feasts on snails,
and there are cowslips, hollow-held,
and a green path beckoning me on.

Susan Reynolds **The Vodník goes Visiting**

(In Czech folklore, the vodník, or water-goblin, can be recognized by the water dripping from the left-hand side of his coat. Like him, the Swedish Näckén sits beside a lake or stream, trying to lure a young girl with his music to join him underwater as his bride.)

It hadn't gone well, the wedding – a wash-out, in fact,
Because the bride did a bunk – went back to dry land,
Leaving the Vodník alone in his natty green coat
With nowhere to go – so time for a change, he said.

He looked up the quickest route over land and sea
To his distant cousin, the troll in Cutteslowe Park.
His Swedish kinsman, the Näckén, said he'd come too –
He'd bring his fiddle, and meet him down there on the coast.

So off the Vodník sloshed in his Sunday best,
His damp left coat-tail dripping a tell-tale drop,
While under his hat, rain streamed through his moss-green hair.
And meanwhile the Näckén crossed Sweden, lake linking to lake,
To float on his fiddle-case right down the Gota Canal.

When they met by the Baltic, it all began going awry –
'I'm a fresh-water fellow!' the water-sprite started to wail.
'This stuff is all salty! It's awful!' the Näckén complained.
At last they made land-fall, and floundered up over the shore
To a rolling river, and drifted their watery way
Under trailing willows where damsel-flies dithered and danced
While a curious heron, motionless there by the bank,
Snapped a frog with its beak, and the pair with its sharp dark eye.
On towards Oxford, and under the bricks of a bridge
Where the fiddle's notes flew and bounced off the mud-dank walls.
But further upstream, the water grew brackish and foul,
Slowed to a trickle, all sluggish with slurry and slime,
They gazed in alarm at the surface – dull, coated with oil.
'Better get out,' said the Vodník. 'He lives over there...'

Next morning, the children saw crisp-packets clogging the stream,
An overturned trolley, a couple of bashed cans of beer –
'The troll's had a party!' they cried. But the Vodník had gone,
And the Näckén had packed up his fiddle. They wouldn't be back.

John Daniel **The Regents Park**

Yesterday I pushed my mother
around Regents Park.
It was a warm day,
there was green everywhere,
the Grand Avenue,
a fountain given by an Indian,
the big, white houses.
Everyone was lying on the grass,
office girls in groups,
solitaires reading,
lovers necking on the greensward,
men sitting amidst the flowers,
unsuitably dressed in suits,

staring at the ducks
which are unusual breeds,
standing on one leg,
heads buried in their backs,
one red eye winking,
blue herons in a row,
swans, a coot on a nest
perched high above the water.
We were all looking at one another
in the sunlight, I pushing my 96-year-old mother,
smiling at the mothers pushing
their nine and six-month old babies.
We were all pushers and lookers
in the rose garden,
where the roses dance in a circle,
with names like Angela Rippon
and the Mayor of Casterbridge,
and my mother wanted to sniff a rose
so we sniffed the Angela Rippon
and I looked at the people
sitting by themselves and thought
how we are all restored by the restored park,
with its blue roses and urns,
its fir trees and its ducks
and how sometimes it is good to be alive,
even if there isn't much left.

Mary Easton **On the African Wild Side**

Hippo

High upon the escarpment, where gleams the river below
Shelters an ancient caravan on rock of long ago.
A restful place, views unsurpassed, vast bush and reddish dust
Save for one patch of stark, green grass from bathwater and rust!
As the skies darken into night, strange shuffling sounds are there
So we lie silent in our van, just breathing but BEWARE!
This is our hippo come to graze on verdancy beneath,
She is Stella, our shining star, possessor of sharp teeth!
When satisfied she turns herself to rub against the side,
Shaken we call out "Stop it Stella, we don't like this ride!"
Grunting she wanders down the slope and we can turn to sleep,
Tomorrow she'll be here again, desire for flora runs deep!

Elephant

Barefoot and alone I am driving quickly before the night must fall.
Out of the dusk an elephant looms I had not seen at all!
Quick brakes applied, I sit and wait while the whole line appears.
Waterhole bound, both young and old they come with flapping ears.
Darkness soon follows, I move speedily on to meet my lover,

But happy to have seen so close those elephants cross over.

Leopard

Today we are off on a mission to rescue a young engineer
Who is stuck with his truck in the mud in the bush many miles from here.
Our chariot is a battered old jeep, considered a very good find!
But when in a skid, I'm flung out on the dirt, and the seat follows on just behind!
Found unscathed underneath, we ride on but too late for the river.
We've missed the pontoon, the night lies ahead so fearfully we shiver!
Out in the darkness a crackling sound, then the glint of an eye.
A leopard is here sniffing the air while we watch him go quietly by.
Fading into the night he is gone as we wait for the new day dawning.
Then journey over, we're safely there to hear lions roar in the morning.

Crocodile

In stifling heat we desire to swim in the newly made sparkling lake.
By the sandy shore there's a rowing boat lying freely for us to take.
To the island we row, then swim to cool down, returning back to the boat
We notice a ripple and then a trail, a crocodile is afloat!
Told it was safe but a glance shows he's there lazily gliding by.
He reaches our island, we're so glad to be out letting our bodies dry!

All Creatures

This then was my Africa, so many creatures there to see.
Like snakes hanging down from trees or curled up unexpectantly.
While scorpions scuttling tails high skim just past my baby's face!
How can we still care for them all within their own wild space?

Ros Bleach **Wild Life**

Those were wild times on Burgess Field:
the bonfires and the saxophone
the whispers, bursts of laughter,
multicoloured dreams, all
flickered through the night till
morning when the revellers,
heavy-lidded, wove their ways home.
Now, the long-tailed tits, the linnets
and the wrens flick their tails
and gather in the alder trees.
Damsel flies spark through the grasses
and bumble bees colonise
the bramble flowers while a thrush
riffs on its favourite tunes.

Susan Reynolds **Water-Wanderer: Cormorant on Oxford Canal**

December dawn, and a kingcup-yellow sky,
Frost needling the grasses, the distant keening cry

Of far-off wildfowl. Watching from the bank
Of the chill canal, I saw where it rose and sank –

Dark shape, hooked beak that twisted, darted, lunged,
And rose a hundred yards from where it had plunged.

Its dripping wings like tarpaulin, raised and spread,
Mantling its body beneath the angular head,

A black enchanter, draped in a glistening cloak –
Once more it shattered the surface, dived, and broke

The mirror and with it, every rule and plan
That the water followed, bound to the service of man

In landlocked, rational Oxford – that decree
That cormorants only belong by the open sea.

Glossed with a mineral gleam, and poised to drown
The dry assumptions that lurked in this learned town.

Bill Clarke **On the Wild Side of the Oxford Canal**

So you think our canal is so quiet and serene,
As it travels to Oxford with dangers unseen;
That this water could not be wild,
Only peaceful and mild.
But even before it was complete,
Men died when digging out the clay to a depth of six feet.
This canal was built so that we could to Oxford coal convey,
And today along its length can play.
Stand, look and listen as the wild side is there – a kingfisher with a flash of blue,
Its prey to catch, dives out of view,
Rises from the water to a branch to knock a fish on its head,
Before it can swallow it stone dead.
In that same water hides a pike in dark depths of reeds,
To spring a trap on fish, birds or frogs with deathly deeds.
There was a plop, plop, plop from the water vole as you walked the towpath
that we can no longer hear,
Because some people thought to release the mink into the wild was a good idea.
Through the grass so skilfully goes the weasel or stoat
To kill a rabbit by going for the throat.
We marvel at the swan as it glides, so majestic, on the water top,
With feet working so hard, as by a steam engine that cannot stop.
In Autumn we notice the spider's web when the dew on it does shine,
There to catch fly, moth or beetle in their prime.
The robin whose song in Spring is so sweet,
Will fight to keep its kingdom, by knocking other birds off their feet.

The bat so silent and swift, weaves from left and right
In the darkness of night, gives your soul a ghostly lift.
To see the bright colours of the dragonfly and damselfly look almost unreal,
Hovering or skimming over the water, hunting for their meal.
Fox and badger underground their home do make to keep from view,
But if you are quiet and still you may see a few.
So when you next walk along our canal side by day or night,
Stop, look, listen, to its wild side fright,
That is above or below the water stream
And wait! – for that deathly scream.

Paul Surman **O Crow**

O Crow
pecking at the carcase of the field,
just so's you know,
I'm watching you.

I'm not dapper like you are,
but my eyesight's good,
and I'm stealthy. Don't ignore me
just because I'm softly spoken.
With all day at my disposal,
I'm watching you.

I might get my binoculars
to see your sleekest detail.
Don't say you haven't been told,
I've got my eye on you.

When you sit hump-backed
in a tree, watching me,
I'm watching you, and be warned,
the dark at the back of my mind
is darker than your sinister
stare, your funereal coat.

You are a corvid, but I
am human, and humans laid waste
to a planet. Know this:
some might think you are bad,
with your love of a corpse,
but I'm far worse, and I'm
looking straight at you right now.

Jane Spiro **Stroking a bear** (*Natural History Museum, Oxford*)

I did not expect to lay my hand on a bear.

Though we share a planet, the bear is in his part
and I in mine, and we agree to differ.
The difference is important; if mistaken
we have the skill, homo sapiens, bear
to tear the other apart.

Where we have disrespected you,
you have been turned to a pelt, baited and used
as play

where we have strayed into your terrain,
we have become your luncheon meat,
soft for sinking in claws.

Now I am awed by your stillness,
as we face each other, nose
to taxidermied nose, and I dare

to lay a hand on your marvellously thick,
richly brown, curled coat, covering
the strong brute bone of your back.

I do so with the utmost respect
and the utmost apology for what we
have done to you, and what you,

with nature's inexorable force,
could do to us – knowing
we should not meet like this,

I should never know
with such absolute intimacy
how your coat reveals so much,
how soft are your curls to the touch.

Sarah Hardman **This cat**

This cat -
not mine: no, cats cannot be owned -
this cat, who tolerates my presence
with disdain and grace in equal measure;
who reels me in with purrs and slinking figure eights
and head-butts that, if questions, are very much rhetorical;

This cat, whose love language is gifting,
and who presents her misplaced gifts with detail and precision;
who rejects on sight any expressly purchased bed
in favour of a plastic shopping bag, or cardboard box, ideally still in use;

This cat, who lies in wait completely hidden behind objects half her size,
swiping through banisters with absolute accuracy
and discerning, with that same accuracy, which guest I most hoped to impress -
waiting for drinks to come out, and guards to come down, to let her wild side show;

This cat, who goes AWOL for days on end
roaming and crouching and skulking and stalking,
strolling in, with her studied air of insouciance, only once alarms have been raised and
neighbours alerted,
posters, ideally, printed and displayed on every other lamppost;

This cat, who makes it her life's work - all nine lives' work
to dangle her humans, perilous, in the balance
shape shifting at will, a sabre-toothed pompom sleeping satisfied, tight and tucked on the
pillow beside her marked quarry;
who disappears to call, fits into anything and out of everything
who becomes a rigid, hissing, slashing Fury at the slightest hint of a cat carrier
who is only hers, never ours, just passing through and ruling the roost,

I love this cat.

John Daniel **Starlings**

Above Slapton Sands starlings are circling,
rehearsing their tactics, hundreds whirling
in a transparent ellipse, elastic,
squeezing in and out over the lake
turning like leaves of a poplar, flickering silver,
a shoal of herrings flecked with October orange,
they bulge and distend, inflate and sink back,
picking up stragglers, hitchhikers, vacuuming the sky swooping as one, a clear rubber balloon
over the sea,
turning back, as if there's an invisible stop.

Perhaps they're in training,
Strengthening their wings, learning the tricks
of the wind before they head south.
They twist over the tank that's been pulled from the sea,
its tracks decorated with poppies,
expand in the light, a mobile alive in the sky
above the black weight of the tank.

Tigerlily Barlow **Poets always say blood is beautiful**

Poets always say blood is beautiful
but I'll let you in on a secret,
it's not.
Blood is not the glistening colour

of some precious gem.
Though it is precious,
it can still be spilled.
It does not shine either,
it dries sticky and stains,
the ruby echo of a thousand pains.
tears are not magical,
on the other side,
I must argue they simply are,
like all that is guiltily real,
repulsive.
And midnight swims alone in the river,
are neither euphoric nor thrilling.
Rather a cold wound,
from february's veins
that freezes and shatters
the fragile glass of perspective.
When I am gone,
let my life
not fall to the romantics.
for my truth
is nothing but the raw,
unpolished crystal
of the wild creeping darkness.
for, to be a tragic heroine,
I must know what's to come.
And while I may sometimes fall,
to the twisted desire,
the perfect greed
to pretend my world is quiet,
complacent
A pretty lake with oaks instead of willows around it,
and roses that don't tangle in each others thorns,
on the wild side,
the hurricanes ravage,
the waves roar,
and the bloody river rushes,
to the stone cold,
empty altar,
of my grave.

Phillipa Hardman **Wildfire**

Fire bursts like anger from the earth's red core,
Leaping in flare and blaze to match the sun,
Swifter than furies in pursuit of prey –
No mercy, no escape – all feeds its rage;
Godlike in cruelty, it eats the air,
Converting all to its own fiery self.

Then cries creation from the burning bush –
Fire blooms and billows, vivid with light and life,
Godlike in beauty, birthing new, bright forms –
Ecstatic dancers whirling in the flames,
Singing in white-hot glory, spinning the wind,
With wild, fierce freedom that compels delight.
 Hearts torn: as ash and embers sink and die,
 The firebird's triumph stirs the echoing sky.

Ros Bleach **Insouciance**

Down by the beach at Porthmeor
I watch the Atlantic storming in
advancing with the rising tide
wave after wave after wave.
I stand my ground as each
turns cold sea-green then gathers, curls
and hurls itself towards my feet
smashing white against the sand
then smooths itself, pulls back
and—moiled with sand grains—roars
fit to rip the air apart.
Cowed, I draw my coat in close.

Now, through spume, I spot them:
black-clad manikins in deep water
bobbing suddenly above each standing wave,
slanting past the hurling green of it,
arms in ballet pose—flipping under then, and round
and back again to mount the next crest—
playing catch as catch can. Surfers:
cocking a snook at the ocean, riding high
on time and tide, impudent in polypropylene.
How long will you stay, I cry,
and play before high-water and
the night engulf us all?

Chiara Focacci **Un paesaggio solo non mi basta (One landscape alone is not enough)**

Un paesaggio solo non mi basta
E dove le metto la rabbia il dolore
Se qui ci son solo colline?
E la cura e la pace se ci sono solo
Scogli di sale e rami secchi?
Uno due tre paesaggi tutti insieme o
Uno immenso che tutti li raccoglie
Perché la tristezza le metto in un posto
E l'allegria in un altro posto
Perché il sole mi piace quando sono felice

La pianura quando sono triste
I dubbi e le lacrime li metto lì
Animali selvatici — erba assai dura — montage di roccia
Ma l'amore e il senso familiare
Mi chiedono ruscelli e fiori appena nati
Uno due tre paesaggi tutti insieme
Uno solo non mi basta
Per contenere le disgrazie — i piaceri
Per contenere me piena di mare
Me piena di amare

One landscape alone is not enough
Where do I put the rage, the pain
If all I see are hills?
And where do I lay down care and peace
If only salt-cracked rocks and brittle branches live here?
One, two, three landscapes all at once—
Or one vast one that holds them all.
Because I keep sorrow in one place,
Joy in another.
I love the sun when I'm happy,
The plain when I'm sad.
My doubts, my tears—I place them there:
Wild beasts — tough grass — mountains of stone.
But love, the sense of home,
They ask for streams and newborn flowers.
One, two, three landscapes all together—
One alone is not enough
To hold the misfortunes — the pleasures,
To hold me, full of sea,
Me, full of loving.

Alison Macdonald **Black days**

The Corona virus has made me seethe.
I am stuck in my house and can barely breathe.
I want to go out, hear the cuckoo call
See the curlew fly and, above all
Finger the flowers beside the Thames
Swim in the Evenlode where it ends
Think of experiments while I walk
And of writing papers or giving a talk.
I can only hope that the floods come again
That the cow-grazed plots of botanical fame
Are beginning to flower and attract the bees
That nest in the ground and live in the trees
Where willow flowers provide them with food.
Writing this poem has changed my mood
It has opened my windows and met my need

For the open skies of Somerford Mead.*

**Somerford Mead was the site of my experimental meadow.*

Alice Stainer **The Call**

She skims city streets in light ballet pumps
trailing Lancôme and impractical skirts

but yearns for a tenting waterproof
snug thermals and four-by-four boots

She charms, over wine, vapid chatterers
while spearing stuffed olives on sticks

but thirsts for grey tea from a Thermos
with haphazard hunks of cake

She sits as a patient passenger
absorbing fumes and Classic FM

but pictures intractable sheep nose
to tail on a distant single-track road

She tolerates bus-rattle, horn-blast
playground shrieks, heavy bass from next door

but plays curlew ripple, peep of plover
upflung larksong in her mind's ear

She concedes to recalcitrant concrete
the hard ring of feet on tarred road

but pines for springiness of dune-turf
or the treacherous squelch of bog

And still she dwells in the citadel
and smiles and smiles in the glass

but dreams of the day on Ben Loyal
when she'll capture An Caisteal again

An Caisteal: 'The Castle' in Scottish Gaelic, the name of the highest granite peak of the Sutherland mountain Ben Loyal, on the North Coast of Scotland

Jane Spiro **Rewilding** (*endangered wild flowers and Oxfordshire apple species being returned in the West Oxfordshire rewilding project.*)

broad buckler fern
moonwort
southern marsh orchid
moon daisy

*oh maiden's blush and warner's king
challenger and dumpling, pippin favourites
Phelps and Fearn, and scarlet painted summer.*

black knapweed marsh
thistle common cats-ear
autumn hawk-bit
rough hawk-bit

*oh maiden's blush and warner's king
challenger and dumpling, pippin favourites
Phelps and Fearn, and scarlet painted summer.*

devils-bit scabious
common mouse-ear chickweed
sheep's sorrel
self-heal
 oh maiden's blush and warner's king
 challenger and dumpling, pippin favourites
 Phelps and Fearn, and scarlet painted summer.
hay rattle
eyebright
birds foot trefoil
field forget-me-not
 oh maiden's blush and warner's king
 challenger and dumpling, pippin favourites
 Phelps and Fearn, and scarlet painted summer.

Jill Elliott **REWILDING**

We're rewilding our garden
to save the human race.
All stones are left unturned
and every weed is still in place

Reluctantly, we're giving up
the tasks which were such fun,
like mowing, weeding, clearing up
it just had to be done!

We welcome all God's creatures here
to feast upon our plants,
and smile to see the patio
quite overrun with ants.

In our endeavours to go green
we've been extremely thorough,
and the results are worthy
of Sir David Attenborough.

Yes, we're rewilding our garden
not that you'd ever know:
it looks about the same now
as it did a year ago!

Wolvercote Tree Group **Life Support**

The woodland changes, species come and go,
Coppiced and pollarded revert to wild;
We grieve to lose the graceful Ash, but learn
To love the sturdy Sycamore instead.

Look, this rough-barked Oak has sprouted foliage
Tender as the first flush on a sapling.
Towering columns of crack and crevice,
Branches vaulting, arching, reaching for light.
And you!—lush green crown, trunk so tall and white,
A haven for so many forms of life—
Why do they, then, chop down the likes of you
And plant in your space a LEGO-red roof?
I sit quietly in your peaceful shade
And wonder at your humble majesty.

Phillipa Hardman **Eve Contemplates Rewilding Her Garden** (*with apologies to Milton*)

It's all the rage now, letting the garden go
To wild (or rack and ruin, as Adam says).
No mow, no dig, no weeding – weeds are flowers
That bees prize more than any pampered bloom.
No tidying leaves from beds – rot and decay
Rejoice the souls of gastropod and worm.
In Paradise, we had our daily tasks,
Pruning and lopping, striving to prevent
The garden's vigorous growth tending to wild;
But here, in this earthly, postlapsarian plot,
We find a better Eden, where the work
Is Nature's, and the enjoyment of it, ours.
 Though Adam says, someone will have to mow
 Ways through the wilderness for us to go.

Sally Mears **Tread gently on the earth**

Tread gently on the earth. This, do not mar!
It is the Lord's and we His stewards (in rebellion).
Be mindful of the ground-nest of the night-jar.

Breathe gently of the air - shun aviation!
Follow the butterfly's undulating path of modulation
And observe the starlings' murmuration.

Lie gently in the water - No effluent bear!
It is the Well-Spring without which all life's extinction comes!
Newts are lurking in the shadow there.

Touch gently to the fire on your heart's hearth
And hear the whisper of the trees: In Love believe!
Listen to the woodlark trilling - all too brief - above...

Paul Surman **Prehistory**

I love these things that help me think of ancient:
dragonfly, fern, a giant horsetail rising from its marshy ground—
three hundred million years their like have lived upon this planet,
and here am I, another of my species,
at an end of evolution's endless passing on.
I will not reproduce the faults I know as mine,
but live my life the solitary way, knowing that I lack
the simple beauty of things that function as they should.
Others unfurl fronds and grow, release the mystery of their seed;
they will not tell me what it is they know, the long since married
and the nubile young, who wonder why I write down all my spore.
I should tell them, look sideways, I am there,
among the darting insects and the tree high ferns.
I should tell them—metaphors may be misunderstood—
that I have taken the journey to prehistory
along a dark path of the mind.

Richard Comley **The Call of the Wild: the Creatures Speak**

TALIESIN THE BARD: Behold these totemic living creatures
Stationed North, South, East and West
Guardians of the primal wild ways
From ancient days.
What do they hold for us now
In our time of technology and sophistication?

HAWK: I am the guardian of the Eastern gate, where now I perch;
Riding the wild wind I circle high
My eye sees sharp and clear the scurrying voles
The blithely defenceless chicks; I swoop,
Pincer'd claw, strong razored beak: an end of them: my sustenance.
The majesty of my plumage betokens the sacred saving Sword
That cleaves between the worlds seen and unseen.

STAG: Royally I lord the domain of the Southern gate, where now I stand;
Bellow fiery passion, fight rivals, antlers locked, to keep my doe harem;
My magnificence is at one with that of the saving Spear
Which pierces to truth and brings response to your sincere quest.

SALMON: The watery Western quarter I command, where now I rest;
Oldest of the animals, with wisdom gathered down the wild ages;
Within me, instinct homes me across vast waters, up waterfalls
To spawn. My wisdom embodies the sacred saving Cup of compassion.

BEAR: The cold hard North is my territory. By the Northern gate I stand.
From the mountain's black night I look up to the bright stars and
The Great Bear in the sky. Visible from here in such sharp clarity,

They too are my domain. Through winter I hibernate, my cave
Safe within the mountain, yet part of my being is forever vigilant,
For I am Arthur, guardian of the kingly Stone of Wisdom embodying
Our ancestral energies; should ancient Albion call, growling and roaring
I will rise in an instant, and call a wild army to see off her enemies.

TALIESIN THE BARD: We have heard the ancient animals, living out their Wild nature. Respect it, unerring in cunning, in its instinctual knowing. Humans too, have bodies of flesh and blood driven by instinct and desire. Humanity is given the extra gift of self-awareness, reflective thought, To channel that wild nature: and creativity, birthing music and art; Apprehension of the Universe's mathematical and quantum infrastructure That in itself is god-like; yet across the Earth millions of dollars a minute Are spent on armaments: Mutually Assured Destruction, the MAD way To keep in balance the aggression by which we may destroy ourselves; For no creature is so cruel to its own kind as is humanity. In the playing out of these contradictions lie the challenges of human life.

Chiara Focacci **From the window I see**

From the window I see
Birds, imperial black — almost silver —
Gazing in silence, in uniforms of leaves.
Birds with bellies bluer than the sky above,
Darting like sparks on hazel twigs.
Birds with wings swollen and steep,
Filling thick jars of seed — upright!
Birds like queens atop towers of ice,
Ashamed of their faith — of their solitude.
One by one,
Alone or in clusters,
They tread the tree — as if a map,
Kneeling, they sip the berries dry.
They recall the day's bloom.
I watch them — and smile.
It is a flock.

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 **The Owl Incident**

In the shade of the lane late one summer afternoon,
years ago, I remember a little owl, its gaze wide-open
as a field. Since when, quiet as its flight feathers,
the moment has flown from memory.

I want to return to those owl-infused coordinates,
the bird their only only certainty, but all there is
is a mind-etched forgery, under a sky that might belong
to myth or legend. All that remains is owl.

The village's day was, I imagine, as ordinary as any other.
A mechanic in the garage finishing off a car, rubbing
greasy hands on grimy overalls. Someone in the post office
buying stamps. The parish in all its simplicity.

Time moves slowly as the shadows of trees, and the past,
sealed inside the mind, is far-distant as a god.