

All my words

As a child I cracked languages like nuts and
squirrelled them away in my backpack. I took
to digging up roots and in a voice as bright-light
as helium learned to pronounce
the unpronounceable.

I imitated pitch perfectly, declined with
authority and wondered why people only
stared. I conjugated; no one wanted to
connect. I compounded, cut to the quick,
stripped away articles as if faith was all
I needed. I rid myself of colour –

until the remembered, melted, wolf-pounded,
baked, fried, mixed-with-Husky-breath,
halo-making, wet-flaked, used-for-exquisite-
erotic-rituals snow dazzled me blind. Then,
dot by dot, my fingers learned to read,
trace faces, feelings.

By now my voice has grown too brittle-
thin to speak what's in my heart.

I open my backpack, shake it out and let
the words scatter. The birds come calling
and here I am, under the trees, among the
bushes and weeds, feeding them my words,
all my words, a syllable at a time.

Flying Bats

I was invited here
I am sure I was
to read my poetry
That's what the email said.

I've been writing a lot about trees
Oh! there is this nest I found in a hedge
blue wee eggs. A Starling- *was it?*

Aye, well. I was invited
that's what it said.

Tonight, for all you lovely folk
I am unpacking my poetry suitcase – ta da!
The travelling poetry salesman. That'll be me
Roll up, Roll up, going, going, going...

And they say after, they say, I love
how you spoke about found nests
as a metaphor for immigration
truth is I've always been here

I was just writing about this wood
at the back of my house
about a nest I found.

How at night, I duck the bats
as if they might fly into my hair
even though I know, I duck.

Even though I know
they know this place
just as well as they know
I know this place. Still, I duck.

Hannah Lavery: <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/flying-bats/>

from Achanalt

The man who made the request stop
for Achanalt never left the train;
though we looked to see his foot or suitcase drop
upon the platform, no one ever came

from either carriage, not to claim
possession of the kirkhouse, rusted shed,
loch stretching out beside the rail.
Instead, there was an absence, 'Reserved'

flapping above seat, the fact that some had seen
him stepping on the train at Kyle or Plockton,
or reading 'Mail' or 'Scotsman' at Duncraig or Achnasheen.
But after that, he'd vanished. It was as if he'd gone

to gain absolution for his role
in how empty that this landscape was, a child of those who left
or cleared its barren acres, sailing either east or west,
but now travelling back on this line to gain comfort for his soul.

Donald S. Murray

Seven moons

The first moon is just past full,
and pale, high in the day-blue sky.

The second is a sword-edge
at midnight, Auvergne , slicing
the star-strewn velvet.

The third is haloed,
presaging snow.

The fourth moon is a round of butter
in a hot harvest night, stifled by desire.

The fifth moon, earth-eclipsed,
is a muddy red, omened with prophecies.

The sixth is shuttered repeatedly
by flailing clouds.

The seventh moon is the one
which must not be named.

Colin Will

The Hebridean Crab Apple

— *Mysterious lonely apple tree on uninhabited Hebridean island baffles scientists*

This, I understand: the instinct to cling,
at any cost, to the place you are rooted,
to see another season through, though
the others seed elsewhere. Even in this

sedentary act you push the limit: winter
becomes summer becomes winter
and you are steadfast on your crag,
your outcrop. No one knows the shape

of your limbs against a darkening sky;
you question the need to grow against
the wind. Despite what they say,
there's no mystery in simply holding on.

But what is home if not the choice —
over and over again —to stay?

Marjorie Lotfi

Worker

sweat the felt screed the cement

pack the joist level the cleat

eat the piece hammer the nail

string-line the future

raise the bones

build the skeletons

whistle the windows

into our rooms

hoist your brushes

sweep the sky

William Letford