

Louis Armand

Black Acid

Who's watching? You make yourself into a window,  
collecting motion pictures, cynically adroit.  
The popular theme for today is pixellated fish,  
eco-weaponised – comforting subliminal blips hold  
the walls in place: a room with coinslot air supply,  
small holes for thought bubbles devoid of  
proprietary content. The anaesthetist dreams  
of a Kafka-themed whorehouse – body's there but can't  
feel it. The cold begins further down, stuck  
in the anxiety loop, eyeball-to-eyeball with  
an idiot picking the anomalous asphalt from your ears.  
Someone arrives to fix the airconditioning –  
a blonde smoking a cigar like a piece  
of anatomy obscenely cauterised. You're running  
in a pair of lead-heeled stilettos, through the ash-fall,  
a grinning sales team egging you on:  
you're the little man overcoming the odds, the human  
success story, beating back the self-styled miasma.  
You'll still be there when they switch you on again –  
playing your theme song, about the one that got away.

## Broadcast Graffiti

A landscape, spied through the anecdotal keyhole.  
You keep it all barely  
ticking over – a one-eyed strabismus  
Roman holiday –  
how many times must X be said,  
before heard?  
The weather's grey – realism's last word  
creeping up the drainpipe.  
Another emergency  
ripples the fishbowl:  
death to quotation marks!  
People you know don't always like each other.  
Vague evocations  
of the mystified quotidian.  
The wilderness and foreignness  
of life de-dramatised? Preferring the counterfeit,  
the evening's amorousness settles in.

## Anxiety of the Hypnotist

Messages home into a separation.  
Life's full of unadmitted failures –

the glad hand, the welcoming  
committee bored with its lot.

And you already in your hole –  
a pocket-size dime store sarcophagus.

The spirit-level tips and jolts –  
all the contested middle terms,

like isolation boxes in third world  
coup d'état. Grist for the mill.

Hung above the square windowpane  
and the moon's four humours –

a child's mobile with hemispheres  
and stars bides time against

the little voices inside the clock...  
A host of circus dwarfs shouting down

from tightropes and trapezes –  
a synod of guffaws, Empedokles's strife

disgorging its half-chewed morsels...  
We were young then, a little tooth

for a little eye – if only the moon  
were a giant tse-tse fly. To redeem

the erotic joy of theft, or make  
a stringency of wronged obedience.

Confirming all the equally ugly  
myths about you – poetry has a license

to lie, doesn't it? Watching as always  
from the threshold – such anathemas

are not intended, the departed sleep  
of a room grown cold, the folded

shape of something out of place.  
And a black weight set upon it –

pressing down upon the surface of a  
dream that won't pass. Or the resistance

of a hand pressed palm upwards –  
against the surface of that surface.

## Allgone Shoe

Living in the allgone shoe, the five a.m. dustbin man,  
the traffic light, the sermon on the mount, the rain and nothing new.  
To you I've been that stone in a field you can't walk around.  
How many mothers does it take to make a man?  
The ground under the feet and the feet under the ground.  
Listen, something's trying to tell us something –  
*Swing low, sweet...* A penny's too much.  
Are these the ceremonial customs of an extinct race?  
Blisters in your ears, sand between your toes,  
and up all night, and all day, and the weather, and the sides  
and angles in ratio, and time ain't kind, time ain't nothin'.  
Oh my love, the sky trembles yellow. Oh my back, it's broken.  
And those were the best, the golden, now only mouths unfed.  
After all this, never asking, because already knowing.  
There are stranger things than paradise.

*Who who who* goes the hoot of the owl  
in the house in the allgone shoe.

## The Demon of Inessentials

It was evening, the tribe had lit their fires  
on the edge of the territory.  
There were signals, codes, to be silent,  
wait, bide our time. But we, the little ones,  
would sink the whole elastic world  
in prodigious gestures of insouciance –  
like a child in a sandbox  
pummelling its God into fragments,  
molecules, series of chemical  
transactions – unable not to imagine  
a giant at the door, with its  
ragbag, a bodied tumulus, amorous for blame.

We struggle on, under the night's big glow,  
returning the way we came,  
uncertain who stages these performances  
for us. A face all cut with glass  
behind a windowpane – words raving  
in a wild infinity. The ritual lapses  
into each of its parts, naked  
before the assembled crowd. Love,  
they said, and be patient – staring  
into the vertiginous transparency of night,  
wide-eyed at the great wheel's stillness.