

Mary-Jane Newton

Good Fortune

Then the pasture —
blades of grass
were smiling,
'Four-leafed clovers?'
And they shrugged
with the wind
and poured out
sympathy:
'Good fortune is
so rare a thing ...'

Never attained,
the sixty-first minute
of the hour.
Always fading,
the last sad
star of a
pyrotechnic display.

So then —
amid the honeysuckle
and wild plums
I plucked
a three-leafed fellow.
Fumbled its
limp body
into my pocket,
heavy with
hope.

The Red of My Heart

In all Mesopotamia
they speak of me, Sargon,
'The Soldier of Soldiers,' they say.
My armour, my skin,
is my silent servant:
this is the red of my heart.

In paradise the ages are spent,
poured out like tired candles.
We drink to get drunk,
we sour our blood,
we trade in truths that are not ours.
My thoughts so rarely now
rise above these sagging shoulders.
This is the red of my heart.

You said, 'goodbye' or 'welcome',
I can't remember which
and you insisted, 'Sargon's sword
is the boldest and quickest.'
But who are you now?
Who are the passers-by
we call our friends?
Blunt is my dagger
that has seen so many backs.
I no longer fight.
I've grown old,
and this is the red of my heart.

We sleep, we eat,
we do as puppets do.
We smile our wooden smiles and wave.
We cloak our inner savage child
in thin sheets of maturity.
We pay with coins of
little value for the deaths
our teachers die.

Between two lungs
this breath was born,
between the halves of a single heart
this tragic love.
It is the red of my heart, you see,
the red of our hearts we butcher.

You, Becoming

To my unborn child

With you, becoming,
I bend, an easy equator,
Blow, a wind of blossoms.
You pod of slight energy,
growing for centrifugal force.

An unfolding in the softest city,
you move in the air above
and below and around me,
give birth to all colour.

You render nothing rounded,
but all radiant and edgy, fill
my days with divine
discontent and longing.

All are strangers, but the city
holds you in my hands of streets
and folds you in the creases
of my oldest rhythm.

With you, becoming, I travel
like the light, span the poles,
sway like hot mercury.
You are my furthest star,
my rocket, my spaceman.

The unthinkable:
I gather all the threads,
lost and loose, and get down to
the bare bones of it,
see intimately into the insides of

things, which expose themselves,
pathetically, pitifully, and yet
cheering, in exhilarating swindle.
Layers of finery everywhere,

strong and simple. With you,
I leave them, penetrated,
empty cartridges of
machinegun ammunition
that pulsate and glitter
as a sky of stars.

Kodama¹

They were days of theft, our days in the woods. Let's not
Argue otherwise. Days and days of an enormous, uncanny
Darkness forever punctured by pale and bulbous eyes,
And twig-like legs with knotted muscles, scuttling. No walls

Could keep us protected, no hope could keep us from being
Peeled of our skins and left there, in the sullen open, prey
To all those gaping eyes and noises, scufflings and hurryings
That made our heads turn and our bodies jitter. We were

Looking for something we could not find nor remember what
It looked like, when we spotted them, finally, on the branches
In the eerie forest green; their luminous heads turning, like
Small, round clocks clicking and creaking in the twilight.

We dared not venture close, so as not to confess our folly, but
The woods would brook no disclaimer, no counterclaim. So we
Stood, watching closely yet from afar, and they followed us
Into our dreams. Until, one day, the helter-skelter ceased, and

There were no more heads or green things to be found. We
Searched as we were left in wonder and surprise, for something
We could not look for nor knew that we remembered. And the
Woods remained tall and silent, and groaned in their lethargy

And dolour. The moss, the bracken endured the lack; the
Woodland floor cradled the last of the light footprints. We think
Of them fondly now, our days of theft, and the soft sap that ran
Down the pines and gathered in viscid drops on dark brown bark.

¹ Tree-dwelling spirit in Japanese folklore. See also the film *Princess Mononoke*, by Hayao Miyazaki.

Poem No 165

Wants to remain unknown, unwritten. Wants to cry hoarsely that this is not the death it has deserved.

Would rather inject its host with poison and turn pale and waxen, than assume shape, become 'meaningful', be forced into a pattern strange and peregrine.

Would rather age and rot an unborn virgin, be forgotten like an age-old monument.

Would rather drown in other stories, tales and poems, or be hanged with rattling emotion.

Would rather seek a private battle with its host, than be told, captured with words. Being captured with words means to search for the cross on the map, and searching for the cross on the map means to take the first step on a course inevitable. Broken, blackened stumps of feet would scratch the paper, and a thrumming sound would pump from every cranny, every letter. Marauding feet would rush. The journey would unfold in a thousand winding courses. In every turn and every syllable, change would brood like the dark twin of death.

Would rather crumble into fragments, black and ominous and blurred by memory, rather shift into a dream of greed and violence, or grow into a different being altogether.

Wants to pivot, tighten, growl in suicidal rage: 'Go on then, stunt, distort and warp me with your useless, little language!'

Wants to remain a secret, wants to remain true.

Safeguarding

Larger the trombones,
proud and bald-headed
shrieking yellow suns.
An owlish horn.

Drums, tight-lipped,
raging with stunning rapidity,
hissing dragons.

I, a frozen aural butterfly
struck, mid-flight, and against
my will pinned to a board
and held there, in stupor.

Bows and strings, tenacious
like the smell of sundown.
A single harp's
livid cry.

But through
the skulls, the noise and bluster
I can still hear them,
your words'
soft and simple
symphony.

You'll stop
my plunge, break
my nightfall,
draw a steady tangent.

Now
Lay your hand on my chest
so that I may survive
the crescendo.