

# Peregrinations



If you took a chance

And let those plates stop spinning,  
Stuck your hands in your pockets  
Or your fingers in your ears  
And stepped back –  
What would happen then?

After all that clatter  
And when the shreds –  
All the broken pieces  
Were shovelled up  
Wrapped away carefully  
And left somewhere for landfill  
What then?

All that falling, can only happen once,  
And then it's over. Done with.

As an alternative.  
You could gather in those plates  
Stack them neatly, one on top of the other  
File under 'something for someone else  
Another time', and let them sit there.

Or you could just watch the wobbly poles  
Come to their inevitable standstill and decide  
Whether to break them, so that puts  
A stop to this, forever.

One way or another – you could choose  
Silence, choose stillness, stop playing.

You choose.

## II

When Nuria tells me  
The Robin died  
Because it flew into the glass  
I know it is true.

It thought  
That what it saw  
Was endless sky –  
That this reflection of sky  
And the Bay of Biscay was reality.

Its neck has broken  
And it lies supine on the steps.  
I dare say  
Death was instant –  
I hope so, and that it didn't suffer.

## III

I know this one  
And will share with you  
Two stories of my own –  
Near-misses, if you like.

## IV

The first was a dream  
Of the Hummingbird  
In all its shimmering brilliance, battering  
On the window of my smallest most under-used room.  
Outside, I'd made a garden, full of colours,  
Into it, I planted tame versions of my dreams  
Underneath the wild flowers  
That greeted everyone who beat their path  
To my front door,

But it was the illusion of the garden  
Brought the Hummingbird  
To beat itself to death upon the glass.

## V

The second is the story of an interview.  
I faced a four-strong panel. They were back-lit  
With the afternoon sun  
And the scene outside was rich and wonderful –  
A river tumbled down a small green glen – all ferns and damp  
And luscious. I could hear the sounds of water  
Breakthrough the stultifying must inside.

The vigour of the river had, at one time,  
Channelled a mill – the force of it ground millstones.

I remember I wore funereal black –  
Considered smart and fitting  
For such occasions; an indication  
I was serious, reverential,  
Intentional about the task –  
It was a tailored form of knee-  
Bending, a genuflection to authority, to formality –  
A message that I would  
Concede, submit, serve,  
Toe-the-line, fit in.

Then, just as I gathered  
My first breath, to lift  
The register of my voice,  
A summer Swallow flew  
Full tilt into the image  
Of that garden paradise  
And was lost,  
After it slammed hard against the glass  
And fell into Montbretia.

## VI

At The Gower when we walked  
We looked skywards. You could  
Tell the difference between Swifts  
And Swallows, House-martins and Sand-martins.

They're all beautiful to me.  
I find that I am mesmerized and gaze  
Always into the blue of where they are –  
And it's enough.

## VII

This past year or so,  
I've tracked the Swallows too,  
From Ireland, to Wales,  
To Spain and Portugal, to Hungary,  
And all the way to Cape Town  
And back again.

## VIII

Was it you I told the stories of the Hummingbirds to?  
I've talked about it recently again, I know.

I heard Attenborough  
Talk about them on the radio – of how,  
Amidst the chaos of this world, and the catastrophic,

Devastation of our earth,  
There is one small hopeful story, and it is this –

How people have laid a corridor of sweetness  
All the way from Costa Rica to the North of North America  
And how in this symbiosis  
The Hummingbirds flourish against all odds–  
How they reward the wilderness  
Of our grey lives,  
Gem-like and shimmering  
Captivating the available light  
And give it back to us  
As they migrate  
North – South – North –South –  
North.....

They are delicate and tiny in the dying of this light.

### IX

And then, there is another story–  
In the poem of Sah-Sin. Tess Gallagher tells us,  
It is the Native American name for Hummingbird  
And she tells how, when she found one,  
In torpor, in the cold – she lifted it  
And slipped it in under her breast  
Next to her heart, to warm it,  
In the hope it would revive again.

### X

Finally, here's my last message  
to you, for now.

I found a montage  
Of Hummingbirds with the 'mirror in the mirror',  
And I'll play that for you sometime, but –

Between here and there  
Between now and then  
Don't fear anything.

### XI

And, if you decide  
To stop catching those spinning falling plates

And, if you need something for your hands to hold –  
Here's mine.

You might.

And if you take that chance,

Just think –

Then maybe, just maybe,  
We could dance instead.

***Maria McManus***