

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