

## Mudlark Chap No. 67 (2019)

### Sand fire

by Tony Beyer

1

Rumi in one of his tavern verses  
enumerates the many wines men drink

hashish they take  
to mitigate consciousness

& the myriad ecstasies of love  
of sleep & even religion

the woman whose name said aloud  
resuscitated her fallen lover

the disciple so steeped in God  
he thought he was God

having sampled a number of these  
& the disillusion that follows after

let me pray I may become a good enough man  
to taste the wine of truth

that neither intoxicates nor mars  
but fills up all space with radiance

2

poetry is a language  
anyone can speak

in droplets like rain  
off the edge of a roof

or the brusque gush  
of a waterfall

in Rue des Archives  
the doctor's waiting room equipped

with a piano & African masks  
a shelf of literary books in English

Eliot Joyce Auden  
leaning shoulder to shoulder

—

currency used to be fixed  
to the gold standard

so the folding stuff in your pocket  
had genuine if notional weight and heft

times change & fashions  
replace each other or unconsciously

or consciously repeat themselves  
but in poetry there is still

the Greek & Roman standard  
the Li Bai & Du Fu standard

the Shakespeare & Tranströmer standard  
& the standard set by Bashō

—

so many of my heroes  
came to me in translation

Rimbaudelaire  
Apollinaire

their garlicky breath rendered first  
as poetry then English

Rumi too & Du Fu transcending  
not only tongues but time

of course only one kind of poem  
is made of words in any language

sometimes the incoherent heart  
might have to have a say

3

tea poured from up high  
so it froths in the glass

sound as well as  
fragrance in the room

a satisfied dog's growl  
a long-furred cat purring

the quiet companionable level  
of voices to follow

distinct from the pitch  
of a thorn fire on the sand

men squat around & talk  
in bursts like gunshots

helicopters & Kalashnikovs  
woven into the pattern of the rug

suited to the warp & weft  
of the desert loom

motifs perpetual as date palms  
camels birds of paradise

4

a blast as loud  
as an answered prayer

wherever the ordinary  
might gather

market place  
or place of worship

polling booth  
wedding feast or funeral

the future returns  
to the ground in shreds

so few words needed  
assonance of bomb & God

hard enough to swallow  
even in times of silence

5

*bring the sander*  
*round to Sanders Ave*

one of those phone calls  
complete with directions

resulting in atomised dust  
of ten thousand meals

circling minutely  
in the kitchen

as if our conversations  
reduced to vowels

consonants diphthongs  
were all to begin again

same sounds between  
different silences

but in our case  
the blast radius swallows itself

our normal  
is restored

6

try painting a ceiling  
without getting any on the floor

the consequence merchants  
will bring up omelettes & eggs

acceptable losses  
collateral damage

yet there must be a way of  
neither losing nor winning

of engaging in full  
the finite acuity of being

report on a scrap  
of paper in the dirt

*our intentions were good*  
*like our training & equipment*

*but we just lost it went*  
*blood-drunk as so often before*

7

the idea was to find  
a place close to the sea

then sprawl inland

like ink from the edge of a blotter

stopping only for impassable acclivities

until they could be dynamited

& road or rail

slick as Meccano channelled through

softer obstructions

flora fauna indigenous settlements

required no such

forceful decision-making

the earth & under earth

gave up their riches

anything else

a few place-names & an apology

8

in the bathroom of the ghost hotel

an ancient inhabitant

advised me on the minute particulars

of the shower taps

installed long ago

never inspected since

so hot was cold cold hot

like a man in two minds about everything

whose moment of decision  
approaches without remorse

a finger pointing from heaven  
or a side road acquaintances wait in

for their share  
of the contents of the vehicle

expertly assembled salads  
geometrically accurate sandwiches

vacuum flasks of milkless  
sugary tea

9

just as there are no rhymes  
in English for orange or silver

there's no colour to match the colour  
of plumbago blossoms at dusk

blue is a feeble classification  
of the cold glare they emit

in contrast to the dark setting of leaves  
more stringent than Lawrence's gentians

more compelling than the distant  
snow-coated facets of the mountain

these soft sticky nothings haloed  
like us all by growing night

are the secretive lamps customarily lit  
when a conspiracy begins or ends

10

smell of protective tar  
from a black net on the jetty

boats going out thread ripples  
through the teetering piles

a blue ship on a sailor's arm  
sets sail for Drunken Ness

unoiled gulls' voices  
hang still in the air & cry

curved silver bellies in the crates  
handed up from the hold

rain slow enough to count  
each drop as it touches the sea

there is the dangerous edge  
between light & water

where siren-seals stand in the waves  
& watch with molten eyes

our going out & our coming in  
our tarred nets swollen with silver

the floating bones of ancient ships  
dismasted & aground

11

walnut shells resemble  
the human scrotum

& contain a dry skinned  
oily fleshed kernel

not dissimilar in configuration  
to the human brain

they were thus deemed  
appropriate to be thrown

at the nuptial couple  
at Roman weddings

symbols of both the conception  
& education of the ensuing line

12

the combined secular café  
& religious bookshop

might have done better  
to exchange the two categories

wafers & wine in one  
bestselling tripe in the other

or would the usual dearth  
of customers continue

uncertain whether a daily fix  
or crucifix was to be the go

13

what with restorations  
transitions & strengthenings

going on up & down  
the country lately

largely the result of  
earthquakes or their likelihood

(surely in itself  
a sign of God's hand)

I've been thinking a lot  
about church architecture

& what blasphemy it is  
given the promise of resurrection

to build places  
of Christian worship

out of any sort at all  
of so-called permanent material

after all the Second  
Coming could happen at any time

& for the first  
a cattle shed sufficed

14

following the wrong gods  
inevitably leads to trouble

of one sort or another  
sprigs of mistletoe

corybantic antics  
likely to endanger both

the acolyte & celebrant  
in some dull cave

where echoes too easily  
become voices of ancestors

or the Minotaur's bawl  
appealing to his human mother

to save him from the murderer  
sent from Athens to conclude things

15

if you think about it  
reticulation seems to be

the scheme of things  
blood through vessels

food & its waste through  
the body's soft tubes

then there are waterways  
of all depths & widths

branches & leaf veins  
sheen of a braided river

from the air like veins  
on a woman's wrist

formations of mountains  
& valleys rearranged

to deliver melted snow  
even human imitations

plumbing gas-fitting electric  
wiring follow the same course

& our concept of the vast  
invisible connection

is expressed as a web or net  
so whoever's idea this was

good on him  
he was on to something

16

how little has changed  
since you died

as if life moved as  
slowly as death which stays the same

confirmed by a date on a stone  
& in all references to your name

even our anecdotes  
recalling you with affection

begin to congeal  
as letters or diary entries might

but never poems  
those deliberate survivors

at their best  
outlast us all

& are never still  
remaking themselves

in the eye & ear of each new reader  
or re-read

for the first or third  
or thirtieth time

change  
& remain the same

17

the rose displays its secret  
yellow heart & dies

firm petals drooping  
softly to the ground

the colour & shape of drops  
that follow the gored matador

borne in the arms of two clowns  
to the barrier

while a third distracts  
the bull with somersaults

cartwheels & flips unencountered  
in the flower-strewn meadows of Andalusia

18

living in one of Calvino's  
invisible cities

one is exposed to all manner  
of affronts to privacy

porous borders transparent curtains  
blunt snouts of CCTV

& who is that man I've  
just noticed on the corner

pretending to read a newspaper  
which in turn pretends

to contain anything  
any of us would call news

19

thinking about the atom  
remember school science

the proton & neutron  
clinging together inseparably

because if they are separated  
all hell breaks loose

& how this nucleus is orbited  
by electrons tirelessly circling

busily invisible  
in the human form

made up of billions  
of such configurations

a pattern representative  
of desire in its restless

questing & inescapable path  
except that desire is requited

or expires while faith is indelible  
wretched at times

susceptible to ridicule  
as long as life lasts

& may even be  
what desire truly is

20

desire & not its fulfilment  
the engine that drives the world

we would be as nothing  
with nothing to hunger for

when the Three  
Kings found Jesus

he could neither  
speak nor pray

but he could  
make a star move

in the firmament  
to lead them to him

& shepherds kneel  
& oxen pause

the turning of their  
cud to gaze

religion like politics  
everybody talking it

no one doing it  
the poor stay poor

the hungry stay hungry  
the church just says be meek

those whose God  
is a burning bush

the flames neither  
wither nor destroy

underestimate those who say  
their God is love

21

a wrist-thick rattan  
steeped in buffalo urine

correction & cure  
for all misdemeanours

neither conscience nor remorse  
needs to enter into it

wrongdoers always make  
their punishers feel better

unless instead of a renegade  
the firing squad's target's

perceived as a man  
in spite of the mask not unlike

the twitchy comrades  
who fondle their triggers

& dug up & pardoned years later  
the bones have nothing to say

22

purple gladioli

the sword lily named

for their attentive curve

seemingly towards evening

in our part of the hybrid world

resulting from colonisation

acclimatisation miscegenation & miles

of bad road in between

history is simply the compilation

of what can no longer be suppressed

changing as governments

& hairdos change

succour for the unemployable

who are appointed to chairs

to argue its integrity or disinterest

is to identify another partiality

23

the medals are always

handed out after a balls-up

Rorke's Drift after Isandlwana

Zeebrugge (eleven before breakfast)

heroic failure so much more the myth  
than ruthlessly efficient victory

so we are left with the sour  
& sandy taste of Anzac Cove to define us

achievers of the impossible  
who die in the attempt

rotting beside their rusting equipment  
up & down the gullies

our ghost ancestors who never lived  
to become fathers & grandfathers

24

T E Lawrence's lesser known *The Mint*  
treats of the fascism

inherent in military life  
barking sergeants

officers anything but gentlemen  
who without a war to fight

fought each other  
& their hapless subordinates

learning nothing from the past  
their traditions fetishised

25

party politics

are inimical to democracy

sniping into the next trench

instead of confronting the real

foes of the people which are inequality

poverty race hatred despair

not all crimes in themselves

but harbingers of crime

especially for those

on whom they are inflicted

all men are brothers

all women their sisters

every child belongs

to the same family

if only they'd look in each

other's eyes & acknowledge this

26

red flag black flag

red & black flag

dystopia requires

very little organisation

you're in it if you  
sleep in the street

in one of the world's  
ten most desirable cities

or the house of a man whose  
voice & fists you can't escape

& the only flag  
is black & blue

27

from the beginning  
to the end of time

the lover speaks  
to the beloved

*if I could*  
*I would choose to die*

*not with words on my lips*  
*but your lips*

*not with silence*  
*in my ears*

*but the lasting song*  
*of your breath*

no one should seek to deny  
the truth behind this

28

like the princess whose face  
may not be revealed

the poem  
does not announce itself

as one form or another  
one matter or another

it is instead  
many things made one

by the persistent  
pouring of the voice

29

the small florets  
at the centre

holding together  
the four-petalled

hydrangea flowers  
are themselves

miniatures of the  
larger bloom

intriguingly this  
year (& possibly

all years) always  
blue whether or not

the main colour  
of the cluster

is pink or  
white or blue

a memory  
full of less

important things  
has neglected this

like a small bird's song  
forgotten but

heard again &  
immediately known

as in a poem  
the shaft of sense

rises through  
descending words

30

never believe  
what you read in a poem

the facts that is  
not the integument

because poetry  
has one subject

awake & breathing  
in the face of extinction

the heart preoccupied  
with blood & continuance

the spirit uncertain  
about its future

& the solace  
of others being likewise

31

In those days killing something  
made a man of you

skinning it out  
beside the cook pot

wearing the hide  
against winter cold

all quite useful  
attributes of the tribe

from the inedible you  
took the pelt only

from the scalp  
from the groin

the latter

an invisible trophy

32

at the beginning of force

replaced by strategy

the man of many

toils & travails

one to whom

all are strangers

rides his broken spar

towards the shore

hides naked in the dunes

while girls peg out their wash

& is discovered

by the chief among them

in beauty &

inscrutable guile

his equal whose

apparent likeness snares him

33

swallows mate on the wing

with the swiftest of kissing sounds

their cry like the cry  
of Odysseus' bow string when strung

full of sorrow at leaving  
exultant upon return

a touch  
& then gone

—

Rumi also reminds us  
that our yearning

for an answer  
is itself the answer

as a dog asks & asks  
with its eyes & tail

we do not know what we want  
except for wanting to cease

Tony Beyer operates out of Taranaki, New Zealand. His work appears frequently online in *Otoliths* and his most recent collection, *Anchor Stone* (Cold Hub Press), was a finalist in the poetry category of the 2018 New Zealand Book Awards.

*Never in and never out of print...*