

## 13 Asperities

**TROKAAN PROJECT**  
Poetry by Gabriele DR Guenther

### Precious little

Was said that day about the plow  
And the furrow, the varying lengths of stubble  
Glowing like a whimper  
Whenever movement ceased

As on a wedding night  
When you watch the planting from afar, the curtains  
By the window parting almost  
Unperturbed by all the emptiness

Lying fallow behind that idea  
Old as a hand, in cahoots  
With the fields, the groan and ache  
Of a sunset plunging  
In great strides into a woman  
Blindfolded by the '50s perhaps, her sleeves

Terribly convincing until they spoke on her arm  
Like a leather strap  
Making flowers, a pink sky forked; and he turned  
His head in utter disbelief.

Remembering the toolshed.

## Paradoxically

nothing will ever remind you of this  
again. Instead you will remember

the proclivities of detail  
you gathered near

the walls of the broken after  
too much heat was applied. Generations

later, burnt earth will cover all  
erstwhile words of warning

luminous as leaves once  
glib with rain.

No heroes mar this scenery.  
No designated thoughts, no mountains recalling

thirst or anger. No children  
painting sounds they abandon

after all has been done and swung.  
No newspapers reaching as for fact

intractable as cigarette butts  
on this playground

of hope crushed. No  
absence that falls

like hair from a shoulder  
of memory.

No skimble-scamble of guilt that floods.  
No shunting hour

amputated by the slip and slide of occasion  
just inches from the fun.

## He tells

of a door opening within the Arno, a wide-angled  
lens that catches

a moment back in the 60s no one can listen to now  
without seeing the flow

of hawkers and whores at the threshold, the river  
bottom sleek with its lines

of darkness. The fish passing in and out like air.  
Often he'd gaze down at the riddle

as though it were a woman  
while boats rocked above her

broken latches and treasures, her body  
unwieldy in that world that waited, rising

out of water like a key. Like something  
to believe in, without drowning.

## A Lie

likes the long, slow comfort of a meal, lamplight  
measuring out wine in a glass, the idleness  
of olive oil like a weft of splendour  
where it meets the truth. Conversation

becomes simpler as the hours  
wear on – topics especially that enjoy  
the quick shape of a fork delving  
into a salad where nothing surfaces but rhetoric before

the shift to meat or fish. Or some vegan landscape  
that bleeds between the lines. Music and cream  
and wit spin it out further, each  
detail left in the mouth

a beat too long. Dessert is still up  
for grabs. Coffee a last resort  
far smaller than the sobering  
thought that seeks

until cognac conquers the gap  
in which the lie lives fat  
with pleasure, impossible to record, active  
with something resembling light.

## In Amsterdam...

A few days before  
The hunger, I came across a cockroach, flat  
As a sound under a wall socket. Nothing else spoke  
Of animals or drama, except the view rushing  
In through windows licked colic by something running

Up the piping and plumbing, rhythm of water in a low  
Bowl, terrible nesting place

Like gas under the mantel and all the way along the beam  
That, like a rumour, supports its forbears' infernal hide-and-seek.

Which, of course, is their secret life, their ancestral abode.

There I find a note from a previous tenant – *yikes! move all furniture to the centre,*

*Relocate, the human  
Genome doesn't have a chance.*

*Slaughter them with the flat of your hand! Mush and scatter and drown....*

Yet they touch all the rooms as with words, scribbling their tolerance to plastic  
On, in, under floorboards; in drawers, behind closets

Down mouse holes

Until surface is silenced in no other manner  
Than by optimism already sacked  
By robbers and other vermin. Often, long ago.

## **You stop**

Taking your lithium and fall  
back into the habit of seeking  
god in every phone

or pigeon that lands at the crossroads  
of your window that blooms  
like a wound

until perspective reassumes its place.  
You tell me all about what is not.  
All a matter of language, you say, before

another world takes hold  
of something your mouth cannot follow, tongue  
picking at the remains of speech.

## In Horror

Of empty spaces, every pane  
struts its saints and parables, multihued  
when the sun strikes  
the angle to which that body is bolted – ballet

feet dangle, the wound recalls an inner world, hair  
drips from a cross, celestine  
inside my coat pocket

like an egg's shell in which every moment  
is taken and vacancy achieved

convincing as the finger  
that passes through the hole balanced  
within context the size  
of my soul.

## Swans...

you say. "*Nö, das waren wir mal,*"\* I say, in the course  
of a fight. Nothing is ever  
quite like a mind  
stalked by another, the didactics  
simmering, while the soup cools, and some child  
at another table clamours for ice.

Later, when the alcohol stops  
short in the glass – and the spat's digested, and  
the world has again become a medley  
of billboards, crossroads, traffic –

the next turn  
in the relationship is clearly paved, like  
a concatenation of do's and don't's, delicate  
as a flight of wings improving  
with anger.

"*Swans*", you say again. "*In your dreams,*" I say.

\*German for "Nah, that's what we used to be."



## In These Towns...

In these towns of beef and fried chicken, sunsets  
Reveal beasts streaming  
Shows and videos. All night long, neon

Torments the roadside like an addiction  
And every few miles, another billboard prompts  
Faith in the wee labours of a fat world.

Education is the new religion  
Until the régime changes, and we all feel obliged  
To follow diets dominated by the lushness

Of commercials. Like joggers busy  
With looking stellar  
As saran-wrapped meat, we learn ways

Not to look beyond. Cars  
Come and go annually like a bad case of the runs.  
Yet we want more and look

For facsimiles of ourselves amid the bits and bobs of social media,  
Fraternise all year with a landscape  
Of *idées fixes* exposed daily to the rain or shine

Of scaremongers meandering like cows  
From the truth, their bellies  
Stupendous, carrying forth

Their well-fed need into a world intoxicant,  
Ham-strung, their arteries tightening  
Around the heart of all that matters, glistening like beef.

## From My Vantage Point

forefinger and thumb ribald  
beside the eye signify sorrow, a moment  
in the moon. Fireflies

scuttle around that hiulcity, signaling the most spectacular  
of soliloquies meant to break hearts. In the back row,  
Claqueurs alight. The plot bends, no door

is left ajar in the bestiary. Dreamers  
draw near like insects that need the dark  
more than life

when the curtain falls, and the pine tree continues  
into the next scene, and the next  
like a river, slow and unperturbed, before the actor

throws himself into it, his vestments  
preaching abstinence, the sworn  
enemy.

## Three Storeys

Of scenes: a pregnant woman in a kitchen, all those  
rounded edges perplexing as a friendship.

Elsewhere, someone has taught herself

the secrets of garbage, foreign and immense.  
At every corner, there is this great darkness

of thought whitening like eyes anchored  
between word and scent and sound. Listen

to the broken stones  
growing out of the earth wild with fever

so close to the hyacinth sky  
that occurs once, then thins.

## After Myth

When it was all still a fiction suspended  
like soap on a rope, I thought  
it was something long or rounded beside my disbelief.  
Summer after summer followed, an extended calm  
like minutes within the hour that understand, or  
seem to, the traffic ahead of me – on days  
that stood empty, as in a snapshot, with the object  
of love marching toward me from god knows where.  
Then came college; jobs whittled  
down to marriage within four small rooms

of complexity. All mess  
and quiet beyond whose crust  
the world irrupted like a future, and flew  
into change serious as water composing  
the moment before me. To look  
farther, the streets are lined with madness; the stoop's  
a glottal stop, the past  
the high road back to grammar, though  
the feet on matter have grown  
dim indeed.