

issue 14
streetcake



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contents – issue 14



sean burn – dame de sade (cover image)

viccy adams – birds may fly

lula basing – amnesia now!

sean burn – salt-sell

ricky garni – phrases I found while looking for kerplump

howie good - recessional

adam holton – balance

colin campbell robinson – nil all

steve toase - rising

Birds May Fly

Falling off the wall had been the most exciting thing ever to happen to Jane. The doctor's soft hands, the crisp white hospital sheets, the smoothness of the empty vase next to her bed.

'I promise to be more careful,' she said, scrunching her eyes as the plastic tube was slid out from her arm.

'At your age, we advise a short holiday with family,' the doctor tapped his pen on his clipboard and looked out the window whenever he spoke to her. The view was nothing special, but you could see the colour of the sky in one corner. 'Complete bed rest for at least a month.' Jane swallowed and nodded. Together, they watched the starlings curve past.

The taxi driver dropped her by the pier. He helped set her up on the crutches, then she tipped him double to make sure he didn't stay to watch.

Amnesia now!

POW

and it was gone like a tooth pulled out with a door and string.

What it left was a

G

P

A

Not in your mouth but in your _____

Not in your _____ but in your mouth

Not *only* in your _m_o_u_t_h_ but in your hand

cradled close

Like a broken-winged bird

Like a fractured arm

Like an apology

Like a sorry

Sorry Stormy Sea Seizure Silly Stupid Scary Seizure

seizure

One Word. Seizure. Like. A. **Memory.** Or. A. **Mistake.**

salt-sell . salt-swell-and-selling, the sweet-song zero underfoot, lines and lies
/ another fat prodigal salting this, love white as saltholler, was, am, always
shall be / steaks fat with white-gravy, a bone too many & what price now? /
mary had a little oh-ho-ho / unimaginable lands, meat hands, destroyer of
recipes and / bonds between father & his, live & breed / wish you'd never set
eyes on noir lights, the what-ails-house / can we no swing from the same him-
book, yeah yeah? / icebergs calve / whales have calf's / salt is carved - great
rocks, heavy as rivers / see-saw marjorie-daw – as much truth in nursery
rhymings as in the great scar-faced block issuing, issuing / more depth than
you owe / right-angles plump this great saline heart / drip in intensive care,
machines releasing their / and there to hurt, to interrogate / others didn't
make, others never did / sculpt the salt carefully, chisel it softly, hammer it
unconsciously / subtle electric shocks unpick the locks / collide where no door
stood before / and stand, stripped of all but the / now aint times for rubbing in /
salts of anger, the salt of hunger, crystallized in cheap jobs, cheaper booze
and white blues / whose flag? who set loose? / banquets and businesses as
usual / you prepared for all the ogleclean slick cobbles / face down, bodypop
trigger-fingering *tomorra belongs to?*

PHRASES I FOUND WHILE LOOKING FOR KERPLUMP

she was a poet

a collection of many

when I spotted the...

I finally snapped

posted in bedding...

Etsy,

I just stumbled

zootime

piano nobile

but here they are

it still wasn't

after a different post

mixed

a pound of brioche

bacon

a poor man starts

with a sponge

and I did my best

to gorgeous

RECESSIONAL

The crowded elevator
disappeared between floors.

Pedestrians stood
weeping at the crosswalk.

She still loves you,
said the old man

walking a dog on a rope.

I smelled the salt
of the nearby tears.

It took two
or three matches

before the light
would stay lit.

Balance

Sleep at thirty thousand feet,

Dream of lake swimming and

France on the way to New York

After a night without sleep.

A night of adventure

On a bicycle with no brakes,

But the soles of your shoes

Will suffice.

'Bring me wine,

Bring me joyous conversation.

Bring me beauty in as many

Forms as you can.

Universe I hold you accountable,

Bring me my desires and

We will be at ease.

At least for a week or so.'

Nil All

Thesis

Nil all is no goal.

ni·hil·ism

total and absolute destructiveness

an extreme form of scepticism: the denial of all real existence or the possibility of an objective basis for truth

nothingness or non-existence

Being and nothingness

Act 1

I'm being nothingness.

I'm nothing being.

We're being and nothingness.

(canned applause)

Act 2

How did you become being?

How did you become nothingness?

Can you 'become' nothingness?

No nothingness is.

Or isn't.

But you claim to have become being.

No. I'm being, not becoming being.

(real applause)

Act 3

As being I exist.

As nothingness, I don't

Yet you're here for all to see.

No, not for all to see but for all to be.

Nothingness?

Exactly.

(silence)

Oil

From the deserts the profits (sic) come.

Flocks of birds prevented from flying.

The capture of turtles taught us the way is fraught.

No one will answer because it's easier to ignore the question

Remain well shaven and worship the draw.

Nil all.

noth·ing

no thing; not anything; naught: to say nothing.

no part, share, or trace

something that is nonexistent.

nonexistence; nothingness:

Nothing, something and everything

Act 1

I'm nothing

I'm something

You're both 'things'

Act 2

To be nothing is something

To be something is nothing.

You're still both 'things'.

Act 3

What are you saying to us as we proudly declaim our true condition?

Who are you to question us, we who are nothing and something?

I am everything.

Act 4

Why is everything not a 'thing' like us?

Why are you exempt from the charge?

I am everything and you are my children. Now go to bed or you'll wake the neighbours.

A line or two from Shakespeare

Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player That struts and frets his hour upon the stage And then is heard no more; it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.

Macbeth

Creation/destruction

The opposite of creation is not destruction. It is the nought, the empty, the nothing.

'Nothing made sense', does not make sense. 'Nothing' cannot make sense. Nothing is non-sense.

Camus identified “*how metaphysical collapse often ends in total negation and the victory of nihilism, characterized by profound hatred, pathological destruction, and incalculable death.*”

This last 100 years. And the 100 years before and back until the first tillers defended ‘their land’ against those who refused to capture time and space preferring to live among the vicissitudes.

This land is my land, this land is your land, this land is our land.

vi·cis·si·tude

a change or variation occurring in the course of something.

interchange or alternation, as of states or things.

vicissitudes, successive, alternating, or changing phases or conditions, as of life or fortune; ups and downs.

Cain and Abel – a retelling

Act 1

Who are you trespassing here?

This isn’t here, it is nowhere.

No, this is somewhere,

How do you know this is somewhere?

Because I live here.

Act 2

If this is somewhere, where am I?

Nowhere.

But I’m here.

You are here now trespassing on somewhere, so I’ll ask you to leave and go somewhere else.

Which is nowhere?

Yes.

Act 3

What if I want to stay here?

You can't because I am here and you came from nowhere.

I didn't come from nowhere. I came from somewhere else.

So why don't you return to somewhere else?

But you said that was nowhere.

Yes, return to nowhere before I become angry and sacrifice you to the god of here
(and now).

After thesis

*And nothingness, as the prophets keep saying, brings forth only nothingness, and we
will be led once again like cattle to slaughter.*

Czeslaw Milosz.

Rising

The floodwaters had been rising for a week, turning the city into a landscape of opaque and dirty mirrors. The current lapped around the ragged men of November's trees. Three days ago the water had reached the tower's foot leaving offerings of tattered branches on the mud stained cobbles, each night pushing them just a little further.

This was not my city. Maybe once but now the streets weren't familiar. I did not belong anymore. Time eroded the memories so all that I had left was knowledge of my own paths; a tobacco flavoured kiss, the drunken brawl and walk back from the station in the dawn light three days later.

Only one route was left out of the city and not in any direction I wanted to go. I had given up trying to use my mobile, the network choked with concerned relatives and news reporters. Instead I spent the days sleeping in the cheap room, the sheets scented with sandalwood and someone else's sweat. You would have thought that after where I had been the hint of another person wouldn't bother me, but I had moved on and earned the right to have my own space. So I crumpled the bedding in a corner and slept under my old coat till the sun, as much dared show itself, dropped from the sky.

Walking the streets at night started as a distraction, passed through a habit and was now an addiction. People stayed away, tied to houses by the rising waters. I liked the silence. New born rivers dictated my walks, guiding me to fresh parts of the city. The freedom to wander was a blessing that I did not diminish. Everything seemed skewed. Static pub benches were transformed to shackled boats, cars became obstacles for the relentless storm water and shadows moved under the surface.

I did not have the nights completely to my self. Others whose work takes them into the streets passed me; soldiers on domestic duties, police to guard against looting, waiters who equate profit with a misplaced Dunkirk spirit. They ignored me in my army boots from the Ruhr, and greatcoat dragging tattered tails in the sludge and slime.

Time and time again my steps ended on one of the bridges that stitched the city together. These marvels of Victorian architecture no longer spanned the river. I leaned out, watching the eddies and cataracts form under the arches, swallowing detritus and spitting it back out further downstream. In the distance the tracer fireworks cut across the sky, interrupted only by the shudder of chinook blades.

The helicopter passed to the north, noise fading as it moved away. Standing here brought too much contemplation. No regrets, life was too short, but no direction either.

A movement shifted under the bridge but the shade was too dense to penetrate, the angle wrong to view under the arch. I moved off the span and down the slick stone steps, crouched and scanned the veneer of the water.

My fingers gripped the iced rail and I leant round to get a better look. The woman squatted on a bed of debris. Her skin shimmered and her hair hung heavy with duckweed and bullrushes. Sharp, curled, nails tapped a rhythm on the smooth dressed stone.

Each step across the drowned field brought the water higher and higher, the ground sloping down to the bank. I stood in front of the thicket of broken kindling. The angular face turned to me.

Her eyes were murky and the colour of silt. In those seconds she shared her secrets with me. I saw her on an Indonesian beach skin bejewelled with sand and grief; in a humid valley coated with a swarm of malarial mosquitoes; sitting on a bench in Mingora breathing cholera into the morning air. She smiled and for a moment I saw the goddess that coated herself in death and disease, and knew she would devour me completely. Her names came unbidden, Jenny Greenteeth, Mht Wrt. Maine Milscothach, Naamah. She was the Daughter of the Flood and the Mother Deluge. The bride whose byre stood on foundations of driftwood, and took a tithe from those cities in which she lounged.

I expected her voice to eddy and whisper, but her words roared with the force of a thousand gallons a second; a voice that eroded rock and life.

They found me the next morning caught in a pub bench, limbs threaded like a heretic broken on the wheel.

It took a week for them to pump the last of the brackish water from my lungs, another two for them to release me from hospital.

I stepped outside into the clear autumn morning and dialled the number I had nearly deleted so many times.

“Hi John. It's me. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything. Can I speak to the kids?”