

Icebergs in Ilulissat

In Disko Bay the growlers and the bergy bits
crack their knuckles, assemble for the birth.
It takes a musician's ear to separate the pattern –
the falling notes from the echoes and returns
passed on by the underside of waves. Not random
but arrhythmic, a natural if not melodic measure.
We call this an adventure, a reason to travel
but remain as abstract as the lines of saturated blues
and bone-dry whites, drifting together and apart.

First published by *Structo* magazine, 2017

Electricity pylons of Telemark

Businesses and residences depend
on the Grid; the electrical pathways,
back streets, arteries and an alternating
current in the range 350 - 500 kHz

the frequency at which dysfunctional
tissue is ablated

like snow and ice from a glacier.

Laocoön in the Vatican

Human agony has no redemptive power,
there is no reward. It is a votive offering,
concerned with anatomy rather than technique.
And he is only an athlete, in motion everywhere,
the panic made to fit each muscle, each band of tissue;
tension and compression mathematically modelled
to resist the contrapposto even as the serpent coils
around each child. Chest curving towards his gods,
he speaks of what lies beneath devotion, where wrestler
is the same as family. But in the end, he is a man
petrified and without skin, makes of his body nothing
in the fight, except its own peculiar purpose.

Breath as needed

She sleeps on sober ground,
insistent and in a continuous line.
Shrouded by the island's shifting tones
she is heedless of following the dead.

A natural reaction to the body's efforts,
she holds the air taken, arms above head
remembering his rhythm was abrupt.
Were she more resistant, who knows.

Nobody knows where he came from
Nobody knows who his father is
Nobody knows she was carried here
Nobody abandoned on this rock

with all his promises. Lift this rock,
take your sword and sandals, love.

Cover

In the half-light, she sits at the loom
the process one of mediation
and negation. Like the warp threads
she is hidden in the completed work.
The allegory is of the Holy Wars
when the land overflowed
with empty women, not of home
or church – mystics and free spirits
to make the magisterium tremble
and shift their disappointed eyes.
Holding the yarn in high tension,
the men with the keys laughing
somewhere in the growing shadow
of Our Lady, her misgiving drags
on the narrow work, its truth spoiling
the buried silhouette of friends
and visionaries. She observes the biases.
The outline is certain but incomplete
like her, their favourite heretic
and solitary itinerant; beloved
as the mirror of simple souls.

Between Old English *betwēonum* / Archaic *betwixt*

across the space separating a line connects
to simple words of a transient type I am losing
the language to explain why I am overwhelmed
by the need for humanity and so much reckoning
cannot speak of the truths I wish to speak
when world is concealed in the body of a man

I ask my body if I am immaterial
but my body no longer recognises this as self
to be filled by the taste of discord devotion
and desire the product of a common action
in the mouth and in the throat
not distinct but briefly true for all time.

Today is the Day

of the Ox –
the hottest day,
when they move
during the ebb
tide; a mess
of glassy ribbon
muscling a way,
perceiving the sound
of the world
as flat, almost
transparent
below the high-
water mark.
They bear a prayer
of mercy,
for the lake
and for the many
small restaurants
that surround
the heads; where
a glimpse of salt
in the channel
detains them
in the hours
before Unagi.

To say eel here
is to say *predator* –
the fisher, daring
to count tails,
covers their eyes
with his hand.

Chipping

In the end the fall was an abstract event, piece by tiny piece picked out with scissors and butter knives, enough to allow a view without Renate's kitchen chair. The People's Police were smiling, wanting to be part of this too – the clubs, the squatting scene – Friedrichstrasse Station no longer Palace of Tears. As free men they will take pride in the world, as Berliners overstep the mark. Hands pressed against the graffiti and the warning signs took years to take effect; winter on that side, summer on this, it was an artistic staging of occupation, perverse normality to formalise a generation's right to order and separation. When she moves her place of residence in '68, my mother erects a border of her own, is determined to treat it as such, with all its consequences, long after The Wall no longer exists.

First Published in *The Valley Press Anthology of Prose Poetry*, 2019