

Thirteen Friendships - to Chris Torrance

1

El Toro
guarding its querencia
alert to a landscape of signals -
sheep bustling along a path,
the field gate's clink half a mile off,
put feet from slippers into outside shoes.

His stand made
at Glynmercher Isaf
beneath a tree-broken sky
defended by streams on three sides
the land picks up the pulse of itself
and world beyond.

2

It is December and winter
piles up either side of the track
the question to press on or go back?

A gift, my first on our first
Christmas of friendship, must be delivered.
Snowfall confounds judgement.

Sheep are shadows of whiteness
stood quietly together
quizzing my presence.

Whisky is all the seasonal
warmth I can offer
this quickly. The bottle
badly disguised, left, wrapped
and damp on the doorstep.

3

Paul Jones' radio blues programme our glue
on Thursday evening until it changed. The
emptiness took getting used to.
Monday night too sudden
in the new-born week. Eventually
the playlist won. The blues suckled our ears:
geography between us, pioneered.

4

It's about soil
 standing on it
 digging it
 strata informing it

It's about soil
 how wet
 how dry
 how rain falls on it and *when*

It's about soil
 what's taken out
 what's put in
 its lightness
 its depth
 its warmth

It's about soil
 getting it under finger nails
 turning it with ached hands
 making it say *Shirley Poppy*

It's about soil
 and we call it poetry

5

The last Glynmercher bushman,
you dreamed Viv and brought her back
by evocation. She toppled
from a bucket moon to look
over your shoulder as you check
the max and min thermometer,
Old Moore's Almanac and mice damage
to early garden shoots. Tender ones
always need the greatest protection.

6

The day the goshawk came the sky showed
no sign of difference, a matt-grey
blanket of low stratus stretched
drumhead tight over the Nedd Fechan valley.

Springtime's hunger pushed the bird out,
its eyes fired-up for food and flight
stitched gaps large and small between
branches and trees, with precision.

Robert Creeley knew this trajectory, his
single eye worked for two, running
needle-narrow lines of sound
his hands outstretched and ready.

The day the goshawk arrived, static
clouds were zipped white by its courtship flight.
Perhaps your mind flew to Carshalton, to
impatient flesh danced in a skin-tight dress.

7

New moon, new weather:
a red fox, rod-straight brush,
out to taste twilight.

New moon's peel, lights
the owl-flown night, silent
- holy as a carol.

New moon caught
in darkness of your window
smiles back at itself.

New moon
red fox
carol
a cottage window.

8

Hell in January after repeated rainstorms
silt the spring pipe, choking it.

A lightning strike shorts electrics
and wind picks up to test the slates.

Under siege it comes down to candles,
muddy tea and prayers to a roof god.

SAD, winter blues - call it what you like
it's as close as you get to giving up.

9

The weekly crusade to Cardiff
to adventure in creative writing - your
dawn chorus start from Glynmercher
to razzle-dazzle capital.

Bus changes coldly waited and timetabled
disappointment fought off, keeping yourself
from meeting an unwanted stare - you know
what it is to be a dove among hawks.

10

The envelope boldly written,
sellotaped for security, gloves
its letter bringing wildlife and weather
from the Upper Neath Valley.

Wind turbines have sprung up, thirteen
at last count, turning landscape space-rural
- tall, propeller-headed towers straight
out of a fifties sci-fi story.

Mice, slugs and snails had an after hours
garden party. Their noise stealthed
under the boom, boom, boom rave
at the countryside car park that throbbed
through an unslept night.

The mobile library service is axed!
Is this the way to promote reading?
Another thread tugged
from the frayed cloth of rural life!

The voice of activist resounds then mellows
into description of an evening sky,
buttercup-yellow light pencilling clouds
and there, the phrase, 'wheat-straw'.

11

We swapped curries
for cheese on toast
and spoke
of weather bombs
blue moons
and rode Rioja
with Don Quixote
winding across
La Mancha's high plains
tilting windmills along the way.

Jet streaming on Jaco
past a red kite Valentine
whilst electric bars blacked out
bringing back a cold snap
 - 'Never cast a clout'
a judicial blackcap chattered
and grabbing the ram by the horns
we dropped a cog and wound on
skidding tyres towards your birthday.

12

You want a hundred days
like today
 wired to sky
 watching swifts
 an Isla Negra on your lips
 and butterfly-kissed hands

You want a hundred days
like today
 flowers bursting like bathers
 on a bank holiday beach
 horse show dreams
 - an ice-cream 99

You want a hundred days
like today
 remembering the girl
 you never could forget
 forgetting each tender hurt
 She was summer *and* its burning sun

Sitting on Peace Lawn
 poems and song
 flashing wheatears, bobbing wagtails
 Beltaine wide open
 the heat dribbles slowly ...

 you say you want a hundred days
 like today

13

Eavesdropping on whispers held in seasons,
radicles splitting from seed,
placing firm feet in soil
to blindly push pallid shoots
upward, urging them to break free,
to gasp air and rise high,
tumbling those numbers
Fibonacci threw
spiralling in leaf and flower and fruit
whilst roots ever-search deeper,
 deeper,
 deeper.

Ric Hool