

Five Poems from An ABC of Reading



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AS I WRITE

the River Po deadpans & the forests of Alberta
burn
gloom & solemnity are entirely
in place in the poem whose aperture
is to look back
at what you had

to open the channel

meanwhile I'm just trying to feed the birds
& stay upright while this
abrupt & disordered syntax is
just trying to be straight
with you

the words
'social justice' are banned
from textbooks in Florida

& the race is on
for costly materials at the bottom of the sea
(manganese, nickel, copper, cobalt)

monuments to industry &
war include
a nine-hundred foot hole in the ground
once a copper mine
in the middle of the desert
an aircraft boneyard

the rubble of our cities the future artefacts

the poem keeps pulling
toward the guardrails
of elegy a solitary place
in fading light

WHEREAS

in Walk Wood
an embarrassment
of bluebells celandines cowslips &
overhead a skylark
hovering in syllabics never still
in the opulence of all this
space

spring comes & rearranges everything
beech trees for instance
neanderthal dna folded around
ChatGPT
into a universal fluidity
where all the lines
between collapse
into the growl of a fast car
on open road

WEARY OF THEORY

the house
 is a machine for living
 yes there will come
 soft rains maybe in 2026
 or some other time
 those rains will come
 but today is Tuesday &
 a festival of starlings arrives
 to feast on leatherjackets
 bathe with the carp in the pond
 catch up on the gossip from the canopy
 how can this not be
 a good omen
 you ask & just as suddenly as they arrive
 they are gone
 getting along perfectly
 well
 without us

PETT LEVEL

here just beyond the cliffs at Fairlight
 trees grew up
 alongside dinosaurs till the seas rose
 singing them to sleep
 & now a ghost forest
 visible at low tide
 witchy burls & branches of
 oak, elm, beech & yew
 repose on a boggy floor

here time like language
 spirals

if you lose
 the language

you lose
the place

the poem wants to say more
than ullaloo
do more
than rock back
& forth

as you approach
you can hear the wind
bear it
first as murmur
then the keening

GRASSESGRASSESGRASSES

when your breastbone
stood proud
in the hole in the wall
of your chest

when you could
not catch
your breath
the northern goshawk

flew low & slow
acceding her shadow
to hover
over you over

your body
with open wings & open
eyes you
understood her language

as your breathing grew
ragged I thanked
the grass beneath you
for doing the work

I couldn't do I thanked
the clouds for not covering
the sun shimmering the earth
in the glass beads of your blood

I thanked the goshawk
for leaving her shadow
while going to prepare
a place for you