

S. J. Litherland

Breath of the Virus

Frost on the lawn retreating
before the spring sun. It says I'm
not substantial I'm pencilled in.

The birds are at their happiest
courting in the sky they
have time for it. Spring undeterred

by blight on humans suffering
when disease is airborne
on the wing. The fate

of the planet is arbitrary
the weak will go and the strong.
The half life of the virus

on the breath pencil strokes
of life pencilled in a sketch
not quite finished interrupted.

A half soul seeks its page

to write, it's so old it has no
thought except commandment

to seed the earth messenger
not the message returning to
first days stammering, stuttering.

Wrote its incomplete script,
its forerunner pencil marks,
the ghost of a beginning

an error of linkage. Such are
stumblings of life the awoken
twist of symmetry division

the advent of the host to be.

In Abandoned Grounds

Evening light behind black trees and one bird
dark-winged glides across the beauty of winter.
I walk here through seasons, each bench enamelled
with a name. Art and war were housed together.
Benches left like tombstones in a graveyard.
A new housing estate will strip the scene
of memorials and the lake not spared.
Cold wind on New Year's Day, a dousing keen
air not to raise hopes high, keep them in place,
hands in pockets, head down, comfort from crows,
single black question marks stalk without grace,
they ask for truth on a wildscape of grass.
The crow unfavoured by the world or word
is writing the script today as Corvid.

Isolation

for my four grandsons

The sky's flimsiest clouds could not be
fabricated, not by all the endeavours
of finest silks or muslins. High winds
had spun and re-spun countless threads
in gossamer of different weights.

The clouds' finesse free to all,
the skies empty of planes, *look up*

the moon is rising in a veil, nature
is grandstanding, the spring of no games,
no cricket, no whites on grass, sky
melodies of palest blue and gauze.

The trees are turning green, a fuzz
of spring, the trees like young men
in their step, the sap in their limbs,

like grandsons at Eastertide, like them.

Nostalgia

for Linda Saunders

Dear friend we can't undo the lockdown

of nostalgia. We were young when we met.

We walked through the garlic woods of Durham,
the white streams, swam in fissures between rocks

on the hills, walked our lives and our language

into memory like a cinema reel which starts
without warning; the projectionist
in the high up office has a cupboard full.

Deep moments pushed up from bare ground.

They were phantoms vanishing as they came
like the sirens over the trees to the hospital.

What we learn, the past will insist

that memories live in rooms quite apart.

S. J. Litherland is working on her 8th collection while living alone and self-isolating in a new property during the pandemic. Recent collection *Composition in White* (Smokestack 2017) is her book of England: cricket, Brummie aunts, Bohemian artists and the war shadow, a state of the nation archive of a life-long socialist. She mentors writers and is a founding member of writing collective Vane Women and Editor of its Press. Collections include *The Work of the Wind*, *The Absolute Bonus of Rain* and *The Homage*, nominated for Cricket Book of the Year. Poetry from *The Apple Exchange* was selected for Bloodaxe *New Women Poets* and *The Forward Book of Poetry 2001*. She has won two Northern Writers' Awards and twice Commended in the National Poetry Competition. Born and bred in Warwickshire she has lived in Durham since 1965.