

Stanza Poetry Competition 2011: Commended

Nina Boyd

Breaking the rules

We are forbidden to speak.

I drum on the table when the guard walks away:

dot-dot dot-dash dash-dash dash dash-dash-dash dash-dash

The others are curious, one even taps out

a jumble of long and short. I listen, hear nonsense,

keep my eyes down, shake my head.

I try each meal's new neighbours:

dot-dot dot-dash dash-dash dash dash-dash-dash dash-dash

“Hello, Tom!” He's opposite me, grinning into his gruel.

Our spoons introduce us on the scrubbed deal.

Sometimes we can't speak for weeks.

It's a slow-growing friendship.

The governor raps the edge of his desk with a pencil,

spells out by chance the name of a planet.

He can't work out how it's done, or even what it is

that's being done.

In solitary the walls ring with my message:

dot-dot dot-dash dash-dash dash dash-dash-dash dash-dash

I am Tom.

I am Tom.

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Maggie Butt

The Patron Saint of Poetic Words

He sidles close and slips
them like a drug into my drink,
so they escape my pen as freely
as 'f' words in a playground.

See them fly like pigeons from a loft:
luminous, iridescent, shimmering,
myriad, miasma, moonlit,
beauteous, wondrous, joyous.

I turn my back on him and cross them out:
myriad X, miasma X, moonlit X.
But ah! sometimes the world is
luminous, iridescent, shimmering.

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Kate Compston **Unregulated**

It happened quietly. Even the door
he went through each evening was understated.
Beneath it, a ruler of bluish light
measured its width. Mostly

nothing was heard. Perhaps the occasional
click. Once a voice, well modulated,
said, "This is obligatory."
Then silence. Was it *him* speaking

or someone else? From outside, no other voice
was audible during the whole procedure.
We're aware, now (too late), he broke them all
one by one. There was no coverage

at the time. Later a woman from nearby quarters
was questioned. She said: "That last night,
I heard a vixen bark repeatedly
like the wheeze of a dying man. It was very cold."

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Anna Kisby **Playground**

There was no grass.
Alright, just one small rectangle
contained by a wall five bricks high.

It was so green
it shone, absurd as a garden pond
in the outback. It was forbidden.

When Bobby Braddock leapt over
and sprinted circles
whooping in grey shorts

he was returned from Sir
to class with a face wiped clean
of its grubby smile.

Our lesson in do not
aspire. That year, he moved
across the world to Perth.

A postcard travels hand to hand,
shows mountains meeting an ocean
we're taught to call azure.

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Julie Lumsden Humanities

A frog is always a frog, a moth
is a moth, swallows
flying in their own manoeuvre.
Watch how it works. Insects
in and out of these garden petals
as Mum talks about my birthday
and how 1966 was the year
they stopped giving any girl –
Mum's own name, Myra.

Only people can break, change
or mix the rules. We've seen
that young woman smiling
on Saddleworth moor. In prison,
her Open University essay
on the banquet scene in Macbeth
was 'a pleasure to read.'
Look at the photograph of her
gowned in her graduation pose.

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Katrina Naomi September

This is unknown;
my bright, berry blood comes late,
follows a new calendar.

Soon, I'll say goodbye
to this belching red,
this faint anaemia, goodbye

to the children
I never wanted. Last night,
walking back from the village,

I saw them in the waning moon,
holding hands, running
away from me.

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Simon Robinson

At Blackwater Tavern

or 'Lucky Polly's twenty-two be damned!'

New Year's Eve - driving along the minor roads
of a mountaineous south-west Kerry peninsula,
we'd yelled - Next pub! and a toothless giant
appeared peaked with cap, to direct us deftly -
You'll be grand there - through the hedge gap
to a field full of deserted tractors beside the
hostelry, thronged inside to suffocation, children
ringing rosies and jet black beers around the fire
as bodhrans rattled reels from its dark corners,
at Big Bertha's wake. The grand dame of bovinity
she'd died that morning just three months short
of her 49th, the mother of 39 calves, the leader
of the St Paddy's parade crowds - yearly fortified
by a nerve-steeling whiskey, now taxidermically
immortal and for view at Hazel Farm, Beaufort.

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Julia Webb

The Mound

We believed the concrete mound,
round and firm as a mother's breast,
had been put there just for us.
The slide was our anchor:
the base of its ladder
buried deep in concrete.
We ran around it like mad things,
went up and over, up and over
or poured ourselves into the mouth
of the neighbouring pipe –
wormed our way through its damp gullet.
And later, when we were juniors,
sent shaking but defiant
outside the classroom door:
we sneaked back there,
tried to make ourselves small again,
you peeling sticks
with the concentration of a surgeon
or making footballs of fir cones,
while I tried to squeeze myself
inside the concrete pipe,
felt the bitter lurch of disappointment
when I discovered
the smallness of the slide.

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Ruth Wiggins Adjustment

Come the apocalypse
and days of cellars
filled with the very
worst kinds of meat,
you and I, with our scant
supply of practical skills

will have to rely on these
healing hands of yours.
Oh I know you're bored, but
place them again over my
aching spine, feel the discs
shift and realign.

Oh there will be gifts
and furs in tribute, of this
I'm sure. And probably
usurping girls to boot,
who I suppose I'll just
have to learn to kill.

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Martin Zarrop

Planck

Plötzensee Prison, Berlin, January 1945

He didn't want it, you know, this universe
of fragmentation. He didn't even like the atom.
*Ultimately it will have to be abandoned
in favour of continuous matter*, he insisted.

In his dark suit, starched white shirt
and black bow tie, he looked like a Prussian
civil servant but for the penetrating eyes
under the huge dome of his bald head.

He yearned for the certainties of the past
but the century splintered into relativity,
Schrödinger's Cat, the possibility
of a state between life and death.

We went for a walk in the Grunewald Forest.
I was seven years old and he was full of joy:
*Today I have made a discovery
as important as that of Newton*

but he hoped the quantum would vanish.

Father, look closely at the world.
The rules have been broken;
there is no going back.

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