

**Jan-Willem Anker
POEMS**

Blue signalling silver

High-frequency crickets transmit
from the tree line, waste bins
bulge, alley cats, an anthill.

The great hydro pylons striding
over dormant fields and bungalows
clustered agaves dress the roadside.

Seaside, later, blue
signalling silver, bronzed little skiff
clouds haul toward the horizon.

Men rake up a cartload of kelp
water plaits pressed sand
rime of salt on the bodies baking.

Sea froth dispersing to flakes in the dusk
upsurge of spume, like a dust cloud backlit
it keeps sliding away.

Evening collapses into dreams
jellyfish slur past in the shallows
phantoms of liquid glass.

As it gets dark
nails advance on my skin
a dull surf, the beach is blank.

Beard

Morning, noon, night, morning, the stubble pins through your cellulitic jaw, a beard beards your mug and keeps coming, runs wild despite you. A thing within you approaching completion without you. Mesmeric.

Someone tells of his father buying a dead matador's uniform. He'd washed out the bloodstains, helped his son into it, and photographed him like that.

Your face will be pine forest by morning; picture stables in Spain where fighting bulls loll in uneasy sleep. The arena dark, deserted still.

Hungry Fish

The smell of insecticide drifts through the train; you know this section of branch line by heart, can tell when the job-site lights have been shifted down track.

Inside your mobile swims a goldfish — the goldfish is you. You're morphing greedily, by stages, into a yellow monster. Without you in the game peace might obtain. But what game is peaceful, exactly?

Whatever, you're famished. There is no winner, no opponent to vanquish. Only a point score. You're showing well, or not at all — who but you would know?

The Keyboardist

Deserted stillness past midnight; mouse carcass drifts up at you on the kitchen air. The smell wafts out from behind the fridge where the animal died of hunger, or chewed through wiring. You think of the keyboardist you'd seen performing in a band from around here.

Like she was taking dictation at a rolltop desk, writing up the minutes from a meeting about music. The relation between the tones produced and her fingerpads on the synth's keys lost. Music emanating direct from her hands rather than the machine's workings.

When not required to play she'd disappear back in the wings. From that obscurity—a space like a Sunday warehouse, dark arena—she'd wait for her cue to perform again.

Her bandmate—she'd missed this—had hung his guitar, for kicks, from the overhead rigging. The sound guy hurled protestations down from the balcony seats.

Before the closing number began, the keyboardist secluded herself, as before, in the shroud of black curtain; then, again, picked her way down stage after the gig. Her face cinched up, drew to a point. Standing very still, she sought out a halo of that hall's spot-lit space; it held her gaze.

In The South

From this milk-run bus I watch helicopters do a fly-over,
seeding the sky with paratroopers like jellyfish
that sway toward their drop point, only later

a citadel, off-shore, in afternoon's light show
couples photographing themselves, as couples and alone
men in leather jackets, their girlfriends in pumps.

Kids' voices flash from the basketball court,
pneumatic drill, honking, clog of excavation trucks,
a motorbike going full throttle. I can see

the athletics oval, its track and empty bleachers,
the pier, its local fishing fleet tied in the slips
and the island fortress out in the bay, inaccessible relic.

On the quay sits a pedestal missing its monument,
scratched with the names of people unknown to me
dates conjuring thoughts of other places.

Boys playing backgammon at sidewalk café tables,
the girls with iced lattes, this year's sunglasses
sphinxes posing their riddles each to the other

cinched parasols, muzak from the pavilion
speakers where old men are recovering
after a half-hour breaststroke along the buoy-line.

The wind's getting up, ruffles my hair
I sip at the air and it's shot through with shellfish
light like a blindfold, gusts of sudden warmth

White glare—the sea outshines the limits of itself
the deep green like water colour washes to turquoise
transforming soft slaps in among the rocks.

At some point the sun will sink behind a backdrop
of mountains, broad-shouldered in the mist
the birdless light draining away with it.

The Neighbour Opposite

From behind the fence wall
suddenly the woman pulls

her blinds towards her
the Siamese darts forward

out of the darkness of the room
a shadow that doesn't move

then she herself follows in her housecoat
puts her hands on the window-panes

finger by finger by finger
as if placed under house arrest

it leaves a greasy glove print
when she turns to the cat

her lips mold themselves to
the contours of a word

our glances happen to graze each other
then re-enter our quieter rooms.

Translated from the Dutch by Ken Babstock (with the help of Liedewij Hawke)