Rivercrossing

Heather H. Yeung
The sea is no-one’s skin.
The sailor, bred in a tannery, addicted
to the repulsion of water and salt and air, sails.
The verb determines the effort: sail as close
to sea-skin as we get, hull (so goes the old riddle)
plough, net riddle, and enginegrease
an attempted transformation or rainbow
from which slick grey masks a venture
in which there is no landscape
to impugn.

Burnt pinepitch and oil soils pages,
blooms futures. The old poet's claim for mist
is mistranslated through too many miscegenations
to count: we no longer think in combinations
of mountain and air, remember in bonescript
cracks the goddess or excess, breathe and

the red feather falls.

The past crosses the Sam Chun River at the point where freshwater
and sea collide, saltmarsh makes new skin, lips parch, the city
imagined beyond reedbed the only horizon, the new mobility,
the new speech salted out from the lips
in this final effort.

Nothing is so deep swimming is fear.
There is now, each now new, each bird rising the first
and soon lost to a new first, each weed catching your ankles
and thread of skin stripped and lost to the swim the first and new.
You refuse the seed-metaphor, seek a different planting. Uncle,
you are the red bird, are the one

black smudge
among many (an old poet's claim that water drawn falling
must happen in a single brushstroke uninterrupted
but in various moments disturbed) I bear relation
to you only in untranslatable generation names.

We can re-
count what was into what is across breakwaters
stand on three peaks viewing the source
and unimagine the impossible: one great sun looking down
to scoop up each transient seed, replant, force growth, reap
in red and skin and flay with nets what attempts
to cross marshland (or ‘area of environmental protection’ where
scrutiny of the crossing, misty, prevails).

Recall: I ask you impossibly
why tradition burnt in generation books makes of the woman
waiting stone on a mountaintop.

Stones do not wait or want
nor woman either. What is forgotten also marks such a punctum.

What is we is a future and keens
backwards, does not know
what you are
except the margin
of a story

before
what decisive break
when mist like skin
fell over poetry

before
a single origin point

Again the marshland calls (the birds
call, rising from reedbeds and mangroves)

I wager on the breaks
to find the crossing point, desire
the point of no return, build life
for end times.
WALLBUILDER

The vision brought to a terminus
in one of the following ways (check
which are applicable and discriminate,
find thus a path)  darkness
landmass
skyscrapers
what horizon exists (its band of light)
such condition that disavows the manysidedness of things

Imagine now (address to the poet) what it may mean to
not abuse your wife with dictation so
indulge in cataract removal surgery
dislodge the cormorant who sits crowing on the rough walls
stop fêting old beginnings

With the black shadow gone and the light
we return to the saltmarshes
dredging (the mobile fisherman
sets out to work the assumed land exists below the water)
built the wall, ratcheted the dimmerswitch down,
sent in red notes a reckoning to the back of the cave
you imagine somewhere on the mountain you also imagine
but do not see, chew kernels to a pulp, key in observations,
return
to find bolted onto bedrock an aggression of rise and fall
not creature nor symbol giving power through synthesis to the settlement.

We are speaking at crosspurposes (evolutionary requirement)
beak bent as wing (each birdflight new)
and on skin fine stretchmarks show
the transformative care
you have afforded the metaphor  scars circuitous
rooftop corrugated iron
village brought to a stop
by city
which flows.
The vowels escape or the crossroads.
into flesh, refuses
the wind-up, the body
a kernel and the ghost
grates mobile and hearth.

Calluna
from pine, asks in pitch except change.
Motes
airs, smudge out words.
a cold hearth, smoor meant for leaving.
blackening plumage the stone

The vowels escape or the crossroads.
into flesh, refuses
which is perhaps the point
Plumage, cryptic, rots featherfall.

We forget invisible in the grain, remember of a figure, smell mulch.

An I
between hearth
burns, resin spits gold
what it is has been missed
in migrant patterns scatter

Stasis breeds of heart in a room
Birds nest in chimneys by association

stains with night.
STONEGATHERER

What dust there is is never only stone.
Imagine: the stone speaks. Prise open
the mind. Imagine (again): the stone.
Reprise. A is more or less B
polytropos.

We cannot be sure
what stone is (were never sure
of bedrock).

An orange bird migrates, hops
from stone to stone seeking dust

finds
beneath one stone, trembling, voice-
wizened figures
caps
the open mouths with more stone
before they can utter

– how

we did not divine such a bird

the ‘dark’ falls
the comedy is over. We
are bathed in orange light, colourblind, prating
or nightblind (something chokes nightsongs in tonerows)
but no longer static on the screen.
moss
whets
stone
sea
saltlipped rolls
knife

The dark tripped and fell
from the universe once

which was before this action began.
NYCTICORAX-NYCTICORAX

canticulum (anima beata)

Observe the romance of the sprinkling of dust which must be avoided.

The threat display is upright. The man begins to count, in-two, the bird, the saltmarshes, falls apart, smothered croaks in segments, and yet is, does not
is essential.

Vision brought to a terminus starting with the one-
and the world in apostrophe. The ‘man’ in ‘modern’ ‘ruins’ and what was not
annihilate, and thus night is and

Serve man sprinkling dust. Be void.

The bird balances on what we interpret but which now under weight crumbles further. The bird in its wake is our vision ironstained.

(obsolete theory of emendation)

It is the eye which slows sound from happening.

It is the eye which is party to what the dual is

the eyes seek

(the red bird’s beak)

are clouded
GREYRUN

is different now the sound barrier is broken.
To send is to stain but in this supercool movement it is only
memory that strains and you who forces from fear
or knowledge of the liquid crystalline.

Too many
will not take grey over ground, let gooselag pain sky
with sound and disappear (strange weaving through cloud
and cloud alike).

Further down, murmurations attempt
the aerial, fail, are read as patternings.

We tread thin ice
as clouds do not wait, do not count. Imagine : the
stone. Imagine : the cloud. Fail to draw clouds
and with brushcurves on the dull of paper
watch grey surround a drying habit.

There is a certain salinity in it all, a certain avoidance
of reprisals, the ink haloes of the wager (no-one
wears it convincingly anymore and weaving
becomes the darning of thin patches in matter).

I dare you. Because there is always a city
on a horizon
the plain
(if it still exists) is a figure, is
the sea, development, capital

there are forms
of petrol that flame green, orange

the sailor spreads animalskin over
the sea
effects a crossingplace,
twists his tongue
at the stench of the tannery
of the letter, forgets
the line

of light
is vertical: the horizon bends: the clouds
are too thick to cut or knot: the clouds
are not –
Reprise, now, the story of the start of the red bird’s migration, what it carries with it, hooked on the cross of its bill with muted swifttongued trill even as there is no one sure saying any more. The letter cryptic as plumage bright in the pocket does not snag or chafe, break skin or sing through seams.

It is well known that in the story there can be no fault lines, only travel. Light rests in the ocean your eyes I keen toward.

Curtains immaterial to the moment are thrown open to the solar term marked by the possibility of big snow. Candles not lit on the night-time table set underneath the curtains in certain finery; none of this is nocturnal, nor whiteout, all yields posed nothing. There is no domestic reflected in windowpanes, the spheres have changed and neither star nor screech owl hurl cries onto the dark.

We walk towards what we know held by clock lag. Slowed, the book tells us we cannot wait for birdsong (Loxia’s red is irruptive as its figure). Snow does not fall, the letter still, the world’s sky gauze. The bird shines elsewhere, breaks bitter almonds to quench an inarticulate thirst, prevented from calling. There are no colours here, a cessation.

Past the city the ocean pays nightlight’s debts in a gold that floats dissembling, neither either nor or; the eye held captive by the band of it between city and sky sends out flares.

These, then, are the lessons we might learn should we see or ask for them, and as for the ocean, the bird, the negation that comes before dawn, one day we will have cause to swim there.

Tonight in this winter on this hill I have walked too many times unhampered by claw or beak shadows sough, fascicles twist, shortening, a summerheady currency of gorse is studied lack and pine no longer smoulders. Winter rain is not cold nor precipitate.
The hill clouds itself until there is ocean, city, absence of song. Unlearnt even in the dark our eyes see through it: it has ever been impossible to act surety for language.

The bird gone or never here is long adapted to crack the hard kernel its beak not one nor two, its unsung rubricate speech a cross-purposed supercooled lag time. Shared breath in small moments condenses crystal and cloud as the split tongue fails and touch of tongue’s tip to tip calls out the tentative longheld letter, the breath’s concert, these divided minds where I is retongued, remade. Reprise, now our lack of single origin point.