

Christian Lehnert

opus 8

Im Flechtwerk

Suhrkamp

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In the Wattle

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Sample translation by Richard Sieburth

Montagu's harrier (Circus pyrgargus)

The harrier opens to the storm / without a flicker of emotion.
Climbs into a gust of wind and settles into motion.

The summer linden (Tilia platyphyllos)

The lung-tree / the linden / is breathing in.
The leaves quiver / and the wind drives home.
The tree was wide without and asleep within
Its roots / remembering back to stone:

There in its tousled hair the air has found a nest.
There night and day / both alike / have come to rest.
There the growth of things is no longer in doubt.
The lung-tree/ the linden / is breathing out.

Little Glowworm (Lampyris noctiluca)

I am blind of sight / I am deaf of ear /
At dusk / the bodiless dust / shines very near.

On Sea Cliffs

Get this / everything's already down in writing:
The rain upending a silvery leaf
And turning it over neatly / a root of a tree
Reading this and waiting. Chunks of chalk
Melted and erased / the tilted tree standing ready /
To ask for nothing more to know nothing more than null /
In whatever happens / nothing ever goes missing /
All there is to hear / is the shrieking of the gull.

Hollyhock seed pods (Alcia rosea)

In a vase time at rest / though the container not be its size /
A further blossom-wake / that the year / fails to recognize.

The creeping cinquefoil's seed (Potentilla reptans)

It knows of roots / it knows of pollen /
Of yellow mattings / that creep up stalks /
Of leaves unrolling as they open /
Of breath-skins / slipping into shadow-walks.
It's borne in mind and is forgotten /
It's a body / it's a sign.
It's an echo / scattered to the wind.
It's a hand / continuing to write.

The tinder fungus (Fomes fomentarius)

This drizzle / this humming / this crumbling of a world within /
This ancient tree listening / for the sound / that will do it in.

Parmelia lichen (Parmelia physodes)

Deadwood / pitching and rolling / does she know her place
Or the body / into which she might extend?

Is she an outer / sign / flecked with shade /
Or the rough tongue / of words lying beyond ken?

Is she conscious of the light within?
A balance of green / that forward slides?
Rank growth / resulting in time and stride /
Driving ever further into the foreign?

The Tulip

or

On Blooming Late

She arises in red / electric / a sea of clouds lit up by lightning.
A crack: she breathes in / the wind within her tightening.

Who is it / that fizzles out like magma / or a meteor?
A crack: she breathes out / becomes body / night and pore.

White wingtail (Motacilla alba)

Forgotten-- the steady wind / the flowerbeds lying waste.
Its stilts stir from the pond / elder branch bobbing up and down / in haste.

Brant goose (Branta hutchinsii)

Without looking ahead / the year within her burden /
The sea within her wingbeat / the once and future / world.

The eel (Anguilla anguilla)

The small pond at rest / only you on the loose / to become an inflection /
Moving along / a slipstream / to create your own direction.

The Apollo butterfly (Parnassius apollo)

She goes aground / and rests and now gathers into a cocoon /
A forgotten figure awakened to her night and doom.

Grass frog (Rana temporaria)

Like glass gleam and glass vase / like a sheen / that one forgets /
So the quivering smear of spawn upon the ground / becomes / what it begets.

Thyme (Thymus serpyllum)

Its scent / a shallow sleep / that seeps into the copse.
The weighty roots of light sink into the rocks.

The skylark (Alauda arvensis)

To soar upward into sound / until everything gets lost /
Until you own nothing / that the wind bears aloft.

Blue algae (Cyanobacteria)

Sprung from the light / in its streaks a dressing
Of breath / that in the sea discovers its inner best.

Sweetwater polyp (Hydra)

What does the foot know of ground? Nowhere does the just man stand.
There he wavers / shot through by the good and the bad.

E-coli (Escherichia coli)

As if it were saying:

“So cozy are space and time / vessels that live for my good /
and rescue me and carry me / to where I'm surrounded by food.”