

Wir sollen heiter **RAUM** um **RAUM** durchschreiten,  
An keinem wie an einer Heimat hängen,  
Der Weltgeist will nicht fesseln uns und engen,  
Er will uns Stuf' um Stufe heben, weiten.

— Hermann Hesse

*Exuerint sylvestrem animum, cultuque frequenti  
In quascunque voces artes haud tarda sequuntur.*

—VIRGIL, *GEORGICS*

With this issue, **RAUM**'s first volume sees a close. All four installations of the magazine have been preoccupied with a sense of closing, topically and formally: the end of times, the end of an era, parenthetical couplings, and elliptical endings. The cover art of each **RAUM** too encloses itself; a sloping shoulder fades into black; a disk obscures what might be a face; an ocean far vaster than the arms (and page) which try to contain it. This edition is no exception. Is the ominous figure turning away or towards? We have always been, as editors, partial to the abstract, even the abstruse; yet which is somehow, unexpectedly, contained in form. Virgil's *Georgics* comes to mind (translated here by Dryden):



[They] change their savage mind,  
Their wildness lose, and, quitting nature's part,  
Obey the rules and discipline of art.

That art has rules has become a quaint notion. What I am struck by in this selection of poems is how the disordered becomes orderly; that, in some fashion, closure is sought, or arrived at by default, through discipline. This poetic closure is manifested in form. Out of the twenty-nine poems published here, four feature the two-lined couplet, two are unrhymed sonnets, and many allude to the sonnet whether in ghostly proportions or in shape. Four poems are in tercets, and at least four are concrete. Form is built on the idea of a turning back; it creates its own patterns and returns to them. When Pratyusha Prakash writes:

in the unlit motel so I made it back, stole  
over the keening cactus deserts. I returned

for the turn of your ankle again,  
ossified by mirage

the wandering imagery is fixed by the two-lined stanza. The enjambed 'returned // for' hangs on an ankle bone, and what might have been illusion. Though what makes this tangible is the selection of adverbs, ossifying mirage into the real. In some kind of Nietzschean 'eternal recurrence', one gets the sense we have been here before.

Similar repetitions, in form and sound, occupy Joan Lennon's 'Block' and Lindsey Shields Waters's 'Retornyn Hame.' The routines of life are marked by formal patterns; as Lennon puts it, we are 'boxed in by the old rules.' Yet we are compelled by the old rules; familiarity of breath from a sleeping lover; the dog's tired path. Here, form is convincing because it is in its very nature to be habitual. Providing a structure to what otherwise would be slack may, as Dryden's Virgil puts it, change our minds. There can be something cathartic about repetition;



but did Sisyphus have any absolution once the boulder reached the peak? A sense of futility is inherent in nature, though somewhere within this lies its own repeating beauty, as R.M. Francis's 'Herring Gulls of Gornal Wood' suggests: 'Soon, taupe spans / soar to another spot - do it all again.'

'the white calf sleep' by Federico Federici, though, is masquerading in form. To the eye, the poem appears taut; on first glance, you might think it a sonnet. What become conspicuous are the poem's syntactical eccentricities:

some rabbit's iambic leg  
back bent in its tight articulation  
keeps hanging few inches on the jamb

A rabbit's leg becomes iambic in two senses: as an iamb is a metrical foot, and as a leg has a foot. The fact that 'rabbit' and 'iambic' half-rhyme is no coincidence. While Prakash's ankle in 'Sonora' is emblazoned, here, nature, the rabbit, is poetry articulated. The alliteration of 'back bent' seems to snap the poem into shape, all hanging together on a delicate, though deliberate, jamb (and, also in this case, enjambment). We have bent-back in a sense. Language is at play, 'with sharp strokes of tongue', making new the myth of the White Calf. Something ancient becomes neoteric.

We see this also at work in Paul Summer's 'the riggindale eagle' and Peter J. King's 'These stone...' where the wildness of a bird's call is captured in verse. Ellipses, ampersands, and conjunctions discipline primitive sound into artifice; at the same time, the complete lack of capitalization retains an impression of wild foreignness. Other kinds of foreignness make themselves known throughout the anthology by means of dialect, word art, and mock translation.

It wouldn't be a poetry anthology without birds. And without poems about writing poems. For Basil du Toit, art imitates nature, but at a further remove:



'we become eloquent / on behalf of shadows.' Is it true eloquence if it is in the service of mere phantoms? As in Plato's Cave, chained, we are unable to see who is making shadows. Because 'representations of the human are given / scripts', we are forever forced to mime the puppeteers making the shadows. This begs the question of originality. For du Toit in 'Ventriloquy,' the answer lies back in nature itself:

the world is the artic-  
ulate one, having so much to say, eager  
to tell about the latest inflections of light  
shimmering over a million catch-points

Are poems the puppets of poets? Pull the right strings and the world becomes articulated. Originality lies in turning back, breaking constraints once already established. The whole you-can't-run-before-you-walk analogy. And so we end where we began: turning. The word verse itself has etymological roots in 'turning.' And that we call poetry verse—the very word is a pun. The metaphor, again from Virgil's *Georgics*, is of ploughing, of turning from one line to another, resulting in the cultivation of wildness. The seasons also turn with the plough as in Catherine Baird's 'earth' and Samuel Tongue's 'Seasonal.' Turning is intrinsic to the pastoral, as are beginnings and ends. As the latter states in the penultimate poem of this issue: 'It catches up with us in the end. The well-tended lie.' Perhaps poetry is the well-tended lie.