

Mark Ereira-Guyer
Mark-Making

Prose Miniatures & Poems
Miniaturas em prose e Poemas



Inspired by Paleolithic rock art mark-making (Penascosa, Côa Valley)



Azinheira - Holm Oak - the largest in Portugal (Alcaria Ruiva)

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For nature, family, friends
& shared futures together
*Para a natureza, família,
amigos e futuros
compartilhados juntos*

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Mértola Hounds

01.

Cockney Diaspora



Uncle Harry

Last born,
cut adrift in Dagenham
hunched at the kitchen table
Uncle Harry stirs insipid dregs
slides around stained tea cups
fixed searching eyes on the chipped back door
wedged ajar for the most efficient expulsion of tobacco fumes.

Arthritic and broken,
his father smokes industrially, seldom moves
words barely cut through the plumes of pungent smoke
and rotting fish smells.

Left behind,
on a visit home
upwardly mobile brothers and sister circle
allude to estuary possibilities further out
that fanciful Essex they're all pouring into
less cockney, more spite
hopes pinned onto frayed lapels
wobbly fashionable hair-styles
insincerity stitched into twitchy smiles.

Auntie Josie

The forgetting was the easy part
jumbled scattering stories tumble out
random collections of once considered important things.

First born, only daughter among sons.
Dark-haired, Sephardic, dab hand maker of cakes
sporting a Basildon pride.

Memories boxed up ready for charity collections.
Seldom visited she sat impassive
unengaged like a tattered flag deprived of breeze.

Unknown even to herself.
Names of loved ones hard to conjure.

That Rude Essex somehow managed to entice
waylay another bright fledgling
into the no-more-down-the-old-Bull-and-Bush wastelands.

The East End was the home she'd never really left -
grandiose new towns acting like shiny false friends
more often, little more than ugly sinking fishing lures.

Squirreled away neighbours more spread out
cakes ready-made and over-sweetened.

Inexpert conversationalists
round robins of half-baked racist chants.

Her last leaving passed us all by
part of her slow disappearance
family oblivions lost to their diminution of faith.

Nan, Dagenham's Queen of Beacontree

fingers ruddy raw with a sheen polish
worried nails bitten down to an inch of their life
blistered blue-veined tender hands

piled high early motherhood chores
stunted young girl dreams, even her first-date dances

clambering siblings cluttered the small Stepney flat
grubbing up Spartan furnishings

puffy, polished cheeks
pristine cleaner's housecoat
lacquer smells, hair glued stiff and nylon scarfed
perfect circle curls pushing for escape

more often a tear in her eye
like a religion she kept us all spick and span
pulling me along with unlikely family tales
old Christian songs, rhymes and endearments

anxiety stabbing the warmest moments
her rag and bone father made her shiver
even in floor scrubbing heatwaves

expert cleaning put everyone and everything
into the shade, shaking rugs to shake off workhouse fears

the red-hot doorstep glistened
ready to slip the uninitiated

working like a Trojan, the family blossomed
making for more elaborate future plans
piling eagerly onto the bus
leaving Barking market
edging further east:
towards that embrace of Eastern promise.

02.

Na Aldeia –
In The Village



Dearest Ereira

It's just over 500 years
since my cousin Tony had dropped by
the village refuses to forget the last time.
Memories reserve themselves for malingerers.

He'll probably be here for that modern fly by moment
hushed rushing as he skips elsewhere
perhaps onwards in the usual backwards way.
It's what we all tend towards doing.
Threads pull us onto the next phase.
Centuries bury themselves.

Those that stayed move more slowly
sit calmly, prop themselves up on walking sticks
protect their heads from the intense summer sun
take pity on the fast-trackers.
Imperceptibly shake their heads.

All this frenetic moving around
ends where it began anyway
best stay close to the starting line
and finish well.

Querida Ereira

Faz pouco mais de 500 anos
desde que meu primo Antonio apareceu
a aldeia se recusa a esquecer a última vez.
Memórias se reservam para fingidores.

Ele provavelmente estará aqui para aquele momento moderno
silenciosamente correndo enquanto ele pula em outro lugar
talvez em diante da maneira usual ao contrário.
É o que todos nós tendemos a fazer.
Os fios nos puxam para a próxima fase.
Séculos se enterram.

Aqueles que ficaram se movem mais devagar
sentar-se calmamente, apoiar-se em bengalas
proteger suas cabeças do intenso sol do verão
tenha pena dos fast-trackers.
Balançam a cabeça imperceptivelmente.

Todo esse movimento frenético
termina onde começou de qualquer maneira
é melhor ficar perto da linha de partida e terminar bem.

Strolling through Ereira

Our one-way street runs straight through
down and up, early morning well-wishers shuffle
congregate, stroll past jesting houses in colourful gaiety.
Easeful brushstrokes, rich palette of primary colours
settled resolute firmness in rejection of bland
or depressive greys.

Collarless dogs full of village chatter
mooch around, move loquaciously
they own these streets
barely glancing up as they club together in nonchalant gentility.

The still-pyjama-ed neighbours crowd round
croaking greetings to the mobile baker
as she practices her smiles with a warm bread smell
without irritation
she actually seems to like small change as she counts it out.

All around sparrows sing their destinies
joined heartedly by family friends, finches, linnets, warblers...
none with any pretence, swagger or grandiosity.
It's hard to hear yourself think.

Walking along, upbeat omens merge
into a chipper springtime beginning to present itself
emerging tight-fisted greens, lush grasses
strengthening light gives way to enticing paths.

Still hibernating
the Pomegranate Tree
last years ruined fruit
shrivelled but hanging on
pokes back to long winters.

The village scene nestles
rain-nourished thistle meadows bright yellow flower coated
vibrant and full-growing, pulling the villagers forward
pass the white-washed church
into a stillness and still dormant vineyards
tantamount to another year's awakening.

19-20 March 2024

Passeando pela Ereira

Nossa rua de mão única passa direto
para baixo e para cima
os simpatizantes da manhã embaralham
reúna-se, passeie por casas brincalhonas com uma alegria colorida.
Pinceladas fáceis
rica paleta de cores primárias
estabeleceu firmeza resoluto na rejeição de coisas brandas
ou cinzas depressivos.

Cães sem coleira cheios de conversa de aldeia
ande por aí, mova-se loquazmente
eles são donos dessas ruas
mal olhando para cima enquanto eles dançam juntos com uma gentileza indiferente.

Os vizinhos ainda de pijama se aglomeram
saudações grasnadas ao padeiro móvel
enquanto ela pratica seus sorrisos com cheiro de pão quente
sem irritação
ela realmente parece gostar de pequenos trocos enquanto os conta.

Ao redor, pardais cantam seus destinos
acompanhados de coração por amigos da família, tentilhões, toutinegras, cartaxos...
nenhum com qualquer pretensão, arrogância ou grandiosidade.
É difícil se ouvir pensando.

Caminhando, presságios otimistas se fundem
em uma primavera animada começando a se apresentar
verdes emergentes com punhos apertados, gramíneas exuberantes
o fortalecimento da luz dá lugar a caminhos atraentes.

Ainda hibernando
a árvore de romã
últimos anos arruinaram frutas
enrugado, mas pendurado
remonta aos longos invernos.

A cena da aldeia aninha-se
prados de cardo nutridos pela chuva revestidos de flores amarelas brilhantes
vibrante e em pleno crescimento, puxando os aldeões para frente
passe pela igreja caiada
numa quietude e vinhas ainda adormecidas
equivale ao despertar de mais um ano.

In the ‘O Caçador’ bar

In the small village's plainness there's a spark of special.
Straight lined vineyards, small black grapes ripening.
A clipping cart horse that nips by.
Sunset warmth, firm handshakes.

At the end of the working week they gather
bottled beer their chosen beverage.
Some nurse a baked earth red wine.
Lips puckering.

They know they're lucky.
They can't believe their luck
but a few still bemoan the perceived lack of not being the luckiest.

But then in their back-slapping they recognise the mistake
the misplaced greed, come back around to the joys of a Friday
evening ordinariness.

Everyone keeps buying everyone else a round.
No-one keeps count, it just doesn't matter.

The weekend sits in front of them much like any other.

No bar ‘O Caçador’

Na planície da pequena aldeia há uma faísca especial.
Vinhas de linhas retas, pequenas uvas pretas em maturação.
Um cavalo de carroça que passa rapidamente.
Calor do pôr do sol, apertos de mão firmes.

No final da semana de trabalho eles se reúnem
cerveja engarrafada a bebida escolhida.
Alguns amamentam um vinho tinto de terra assada.
Lábios franzindo.

Eles sabem que têm sorte.
Eles não podem acreditar na sua sorte
mas alguns ainda lamentam a aparente falta de não serem os mais
sortudos.

Mas então, em seus tapinhas nas costas, eles reconhecem o erro,
a ganância equivocada, volte para as alegrias de uma noite normal
de sexta-feira.

Todo mundo continua pagando uma rodada para todo mundo.
Ninguém conta, simplesmente não importa.

O fim de semana está diante deles como qualquer outro.

Night traveller

little village owl
precision of cleverness
impeccable timing
for night shrieks
fitful dream piecing

shy, stealthy flier
through shafts of darkness
flitting across rooftops
bolt-upright weary-rouser

from less known places
he skates through blackness
unexpected, humble hints of being
disappearing in night time manoeuvres

into the void, retreating in crafted timidity
before popping up again
weeks, months later
with fleeting presence, re-acquaintance of intrigue.



Viajante noturno

pequena coruja da aldeia
precisão de inteligência
timing impecável
sabe o melhor momento
para gritos noturnos
remendos de sonhos espasmódicos

panfleto tímido e furtivo
através de poços de escuridão
voando pelos telhados
aparafusado ereto, cansado

de lugares menos conhecidos
ele patina pela escuridão
dicas inesperadas e humildes de ser
desaparecendo em manobras noturnas

no vazio, recuando na timidez trabalhada
antes de aparecer novamente
semanas, meses depois
com presença fugaz, um reconhecido da intriga.

Village caretaker

Some people simply get overlooked, it's rather unfair

almost wordless during the working day, Antonio who keeps the village so spic and span is one of them, each day he's busy recycling the everydayness, there's a shine to the village's ordinariness that seldom fails to impress

hot and flustering, steaming pavements licked plate clean, verges tidy hair cut short, gasping plants thank him for refreshing generousities

no discarded detritus escape his eye, rubbish chases itself in squally hill top winds, less keen here on being unsightly

he's so house proud he refrains from his own, for fear of bringing in the village dirt, the day's grime is best washed down with a cooling beer like clockwork his eyes sparkle, bringing nightly fireworks a rattling toothless chatter bear hugs for the unsuspecting

quenching refreshments in the bars are quite a draw after a day's sweeping welcome like the occasional nods of appreciation

he's always ready for a watering, oftentimes more of a baptismal flood much like a quotidian drowning

Antonio well knows it'll only be him clearing away the mounting beer bottles the next morning.

Zelador da aldeia

Algumas pessoas simplesmente são esquecidas, é bastante injusto

quase sem palavras durante a jornada de trabalho, Antônio que mantém a vila tão apimentada é um deles, cada dia ele está ocupado reciclando o cotidiano, há um brilho na normalidade da vila que raramente deixa de impressionar

calçadas quentes e agitadas, fumegantes, pratos lambidos e limpos, bordas arrumadas, cabelos cortados curtos, plantas ofegantes agradecem-lhe pelas generosidades refrescantes

nenhum detrito descartado escapa de seus olhos, o lixo se persegue nos ventos do topo da colina, menos interessado aqui em ser feio

ele está tão orgulhoso da casa que se abstém de fazer a sua própria, por medo de trazer sujeira para a aldeia, é melhor regar a sujeira do dia com uma cerveja gelada como um relógio, seus olhos brilham, trazendo os fogos de artifício noturnos uma conversa barulhenta e desdentada abraços para os desavisados

saciar refrescos nos bares é um grande atrativo depois de um dia varrendo bem-vindo como os acenos ocasionais de agradecimento

ele está sempre pronto para regar, muitas vezes mais como uma inundação batismal, muito parecida com um afogamento cotidiano

Antônio sabe bem que será só ele quem limpará as garrafas de cerveja na manhã seguinte.



Garden Lizards

our Portuguese garden has more than its fair share of tongue-flicking lizards
smirkingly they like to queue up and present themselves
blink dinosaur hellos
freeze-stretch and bask
their green and speckled suits sparkle

if I don't move they keep me company for hours
but one false move
then they're off
scattering
moving like turbo-charged reptilian Ferraris
across baked hot calçadas
vertically up cliff walls

bursting with quiet curiosity
they lick their lips
feign disinterest
ants quickstep by, braving the worse

scurrying for cooler cover
the assassins casually Hoover up
mid-morning snacks

in the shadows
the lizards use all of the available shards of light
to further strategise
plan the next ambush
on death-wish straying prey.

I imagine scooping them up to join me in English climes
then I'd not have to keep rushing back to see how they're doing.

Lagartos de jardim

o nosso jardim português tem mais do que o seu quinhão de lagartos que
agitam a língua
sorrindo, eles gostam de fazer fila e se apresentar
pisque dinossauro olá
congelar, esticar e aproveitar
seus ternos verdes e salpicados brilham

se eu não me mexo, eles me fazem companhia por horas
mas um movimento em falso
então eles estão fora
dispersão
movendo-se como Ferraris reptilianas turboalimentadas
através de calçadas quentes assadas
verticalmente nas paredes do penhasco

explodindo de curiosidade silenciosa
eles lambem os lábios
fingir desinteresse
formigas passam rapidamente, enfrentando o pior

correndo para a tampa do refrigerador
os assassinos casualmente aspiram
lanches do meio da manhã

nas sombras
os lagartos usam todos os fragmentos de luz disponíveis
para traçar estratégias adicionais
planeje a próxima emboscada
em presas perdidas com desejo de morte.

Imagino pegá-los para se juntarem comigo em climas ingleses
então eu não teria que voltar correndo para ver como eles estão.

03.

Journeying



Image: Gabrielle Ereira-Guyer

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Spring flowers splatter colour in water-soaked valleys
tucked away in this art collectors Eden
we drop by

Almond orchards and olive groves
terraced vineyards frame the outdoor exhibition
in radiant timelessness

There's a peace here held in by the stones.

Before us the Palaeolithic gallery
tableau of masterpieces
trapped in open air stillness

We flutter around the rock panels, all party-like
mixing easefully with birds in chase formations
chit-chatting with our nomadic artist ancestors
as they show their engravings
explain fine-line incisions, scraping and pecking styles

Stone etched lines
sketched and fluid
others roughly hewn and chiselled
gouged out schist designs:
shapely and plump animals racing through rock

Godly riverine gifts of vivacity
carved and crafted marks
captured in the silted centuries
frozen in gallops, lunging towards escape
darting away from sharpened ash-tree poles
flint arrow heads

There's a decorous innocence held in by the mark-making.

Abundant herbivores thirst slaking
in the shadowed coolnesses of a life-giving river -
once happy to be animal life models
for this early flowering of human creativity -
have faded far away

Taken fright, they now cower
forever hidden behind the river's swaying willows
and white blossom hawthorns.



Marcação (Mark-Making)

Flores da primavera respingam cores em vales encharcados de água
Escondido neste Éden de colecionadores de arte
nós passamos por aqui

Pomares de amendoeiras e olivais
vinhas em socalcos
enquadram a exposição ao ar livre
em radiante atemporalidade

Há uma paz aqui mantida pelas pedras.

Diante de nós está a galeria de arte paleolítica
quadro de obras-primas
preso na quietude ao ar livre

Nós flutuamos em torno dos painéis de pedra, todos como uma festa
misturando-se facilmente com aves em formações de perseguição
conversando com nossos ancestrais artistas nômades
enquanto mostram suas gravuras
explicar incisões de linhas finas, estilos de raspagem e bicadas

Linhas gravadas em pedra
esboçado e fluido
outros grosseiramente talhados e cinzelados
desenhos de xisto arrancados:
animais bem torneados e rechonchudos correndo pelas rochas

Dons ribeirinhos piedosos de vivacidade
marcas esculpidas e trabalhadas
capturado nos séculos assoreados
congelado em galopes, avançando em direção à fuga
disparando para longe de postes afiados de freixo,
pontas de flecha de pedra

Há uma inocência decorosa contida na marcação.

Herbívoros abundantes saciando a sede
na frescura sombreada de um rio que dá vida
uma vez felizes por serem modelos de vida animal
para este florescimento precoce da criatividade humana –
desapareceram longe

Tendo ficado assustados, eles agora se encolhem
para sempre escondido atrás dos salgueiros ondulantes do rio
e espinheiros de flor branca.



Stuck in perpetual hiding

you can all come out now I've gone

they're so good at hiding
at times they can't even find each other
under the bush, greenish-greys, even black
deep in the Algarvian undergrowth
fanatic about remaining hidden

tidal sweeps yanked them
from their African homeland, cut adrift
from all their chameleon families
they cling to branches, perfecting patience
munching on insect sustenance
waiting for a way back

their exceling expertise of not being seen
means it's hard to know if they truly exist
this search party runs out of steam
nothing is ever wasted
the only failure is never having tried

adoration can grow with absentee love
too much though not revealing yourself
causes problems, a pulling away into deep forgetting
out of sight, out of mind

you don't know what you've lost
if you've never seen it
how do you even know something has disappeared
forever, if rarely seen in the first place
the human sense of loss can be placated by the not knowing

not even in the dipping sun
in shadowing time
do they put in an appearance.

Preso em um esconderijo

vocês todos podem sair agora eu fui

eles são tão bons em se esconder
às vezes eles nem conseguem se encontrar
debaixo do mato, cinza-esverdeados, até pretos
nas profundezas da vegetação algarvia
fanático por permanecer escondido

varreduras de maré os arrancaram
da sua terra natal africana, à deriva
de todas as suas famílias camaleônicas
eles se agarram aos galhos, aperfeiçoando a paciência
mastigando o sustento dos insetos
esperando por um caminho de volta

sua excelente experiência de não serem vistos
significa que é difícil saber se eles realmente existem
esse grupo de busca perde força
nada é desperdiçado
o único fracasso é nunca ter tentado

a adoração pode crescer com o amor ausente
demais embora não se revele
causa problemas, um afastamento para um esquecimento profundo
longe da vista, longe da mente

you não sabe o que perdeu
se você nunca viu
como você sabe que algo desapareceu
para sempre, se raramente visto em primeiro lugar
o sentimento humano de perda pode ser aplacado pelo não saber

nem mesmo sob o sol poente
no tempo sombrio
eles aparecem.

Mudskippers

Bedrock ancestral charmers
pull themselves up on their fin straps
glassy bodies flip streak
through a deep-muddied expanse
like defeated generals they scour
the mud-churned Agincourt battlefield

Bulbous eyes, hanging fangs
bulwark reminders of shared journeys
the sheer scale, hesitant memory steeped
still unable to divine less secure futures.

Older Young Self

Easing into reducing temper flares
settled quietening lands
towards spreading thin time
less stretched out

the chilled quickening sands
mind ping-ponging, fewer cares.

Tout le monde face the clock's countdown rout.

There's often, for many, that younger self
loitering, all seething resentments
hands in deep memory-filled pockets
full-Blooded, poorly parked in the inner recesses
bursting energetically with health
pleading for the putting down and away
for the older you to dismiss
lock it in dusty cupboards
to thereafter sit uncomfortably
alongside the rest of life's untidy messes.

Ageing Couples

we hold onto our hurts
like conquistador treasures
bloodied and despoiling
each dimming after another slaughter

war catches fire like an ugly contagion
fighting addicts curl into defensive balls

these hurts fill our days
every one painstakingly taken out
retrieved from deep within
meticulously re-examined for skirmish marks
recycled, exquisitely polished into forever true stories

only our own story has the narrator's weight
the heft to gain admittance through emotional checkpoints

displeasures carved into brutalist concrete slabs
all scowls and rigidity –
the most ordered papers
let alone random remark
fail to find favour with martinet border guards

unhelpful internal bystanders make pithy remarks:
that you only have my back, when you're stabbing it
that your fevered gifts are bitterness laced
that we should both know
years roll by
towards the certainty of endings and uneasy truces
that sadly
peace-making has fallen so terribly out of fashion

ageing, from which everyone tries to flee
slow fuses

Ground Zero angers flare

deep-time volcanic depressions
fill with molten ash and thick pitch
that mixture of our own making
served up like spitting lard
in all the world's war zones

Woodland Singer

Thank God for a Song Thrush
 Premier class singer of song -
 singing his beauty
 keeping winged competitors at bay
 trilling voice cornered in apexes of trees.
 Splattered pyjamas, a favoured camouflage.
 High up branches bodyguard
 with reassuring deep loyalty.

Close to, keeping to the muddied path
 shy and hidden, fully present in the now
 others bow to his majesty.
 Casually performative
 unbounded in mid-February greys -
 fading off, song still there
 long after the forest trail
 evaporates into the maddening
 rasp of car tyres.

Kindnesses of Ravens

Cloudy brown eyes
 stare at the starrer
 kept occupied with frolics and spinning heads
 the blue-black raven croak calls, bemuses spectators
 babbles with a bubbling over-confidence

any signs of unkindnesses
 sequestered away in nearby dungeons
 dank and lingering, possibly
 less black hearted than often credited

flying feathers clipped
 undertaker long-tailed suit, burnt black by the Gods
 sharp and pucker, in jigsaw outline
 against fortress walls of the White Tower

tatty-wire whiskers hold in place fearsome beaks
 cavernous, now firmly sealed
 but ever ready to gulp straying souls
 any size-able titbits
 victims pierced to the ground
 by Velociraptor talon-claws

Plucky, nothing eats a Raven
 as they march around, glean what pleasures they can
 canny and intuitive
 they intuit treachery and bad omens
 they divine the misery all around them
 draw it out, into long hopeful threads
 to stitch Raven message-boards.



Goldcrest

Last of the Mohicans

Circling spritely around the totem pole
in the darkening pine shadows
lush sanctuary from warring tribes

Quickstepping with leaping gaiety
golden head strip crack, tooth-brush stiff
like a gold rush farrow for the mining

Crown clean-cut with a nod of circumspection
surveying for hidden dangers, the Goldcrest lunges
becoming a paragliding guarder of precious metals

Impossibly slight, bundled up cotton wool greens
needing the tree's protection from even the gentlest breezes –
so easily blown back to the treasure chest from which it escaped.



04.

Timelessness



Lookout Tower Aldeburgh

July's sun breaks the day with promise.
Chipper, cleansed air.

Assembled pebbles
baby-skin smooth
gruffly graffiti messaged
boundary markers

Early morning amateur explorers
crunch the shoreline
Dogs, and young children's excited shrieks exiled.

Older mothers, with their only daughters
imagine large family beach days.
Summertime stuck in past time.

The swimmer's head rises and falls
in the North Sea swell murk
unencumbered with loaded thoughts.
Weeks, months, a lifetime measured in cold water dips.
The strong waves pulling back to the starting line.
Rarely notable winners.

Synergistic, long distance focused in the here-and-now
our curator checks in, accompanied by sharp-eyed gulls
as they meander lazily.
The morning's only noise-makers.
Plump, from atop the Lookout they raise their gull voices
like tired jeering football hooligans
the gravy sea soothing the less melodious.
They call us to order.
They know the meaning of deep time.

A severity of horizons
angular and narrowing.
A hiding of tomorrows.

The shingle shelf of the beach,
whithersoever's away,
into unknowable depths:
submerged and forgotten
grasslands of Doggerland's horse-filled plains.

Passing visitors glance across the pale green shimmer
stacked millennial years buried in memory sludge.
Frozen in present time.

Some nod platitudes, lament the passing of unimportant birthdays.

Uncertain clouds, darken and curtain
the stage now set for a stampede.
A galloping of returning.

Ghostly horses steeplechase through roiling waves
on their migration to yesteryear meadows -
they fall from heaven
clatter down the spiral staircase -
leap over the Lookout tower.

Palaeolithic Herds

at canter pace, sipping sea water
teaming herds roam
moved on by hunger craves

marshland plains drown
become saltier

gravel edged
hunted horses ride the foaming whiteness of waves

brave foals tossed on rising gradient beaches

these lands wish themselves lost

the fastest stallions swim
into Doggerland's furthest reaches.



Dead horses

I don't even know if I was there, flogging my bedraggled dead horses.
Reluctant squander of what little time I had.
Like all the others swirling about, busy doing nothing.
The usual happy losing.

It could have been during the Palaeolithic, or just the other day.
I mixed bright colours, seeking luminance in unlikely corners.
The in-the-moment experience, with a tangy, repeating taste, slunk away.
I knew I was going the same old ways, cocooned in the belly of my friendly
and warm blanket ancestral loop.

I saw them there, oblivious to my art-making and scrawls, magnificent
in their long mane-shaking. Before the chase, scrapped into stone.
Crunching across crackling shingle beaches, thick-set horses corralled into
the greyest of Aldeburgh waves, dodging flint projectiles.

Sharing extinction destinies like all the rest of us, racing across the chipped
keyboard of life, into stone age rock, most of their neighing notes plaintive,
with stragglers the most discordant.

Soaked, sinking Doggerland - the depleting herd frisk through the stripped
back forests - into quagmires carried along in the waters flow. Returning
as unwelcome migrants, the horses land, sighing in exhaustion
nothing, if anything, like always, had changed.

05.

Alegrias
Alentejanas
Alentejano
Joys



Alcaria Ruiva
Mértola

August Eve

in shadowed outline, the moon rolls down the hill
here in Alçaria Ruiva, in a red-hot sunset

then lifted up like a giant yo-yo
burning white ready for an expert footballer's kick

an outburst of chittering, quickly sketched birds herd
bidding adieu to another day in the furnace

A noite do Agosto

em contorno sombreado, a lua desce a colina
aqui na Alçaria Ruiva, num pôr-do-sol escaldante

então levantado como um ioiô gigante
queimando branco pronto para o chute de um jogador de futebol profissional

uma explosão de barulho, rebanho de aves
dando adeus a mais um dia na fornalha



Ifrikiya *

as near to being there
without stepping onto the continent it fell from
savannah plains, ruched golden carpets
lunge towards edges

the Golden Orioles
that make it through illegal fine-mesh net walls
set up shop here
count their blessings like we all do

they merge perfectly with native birdscape
held in rustling dried grasslands, burnt crisp
flitting between staging posts
conveniently laid out
across wide open Holm oak woodlands -
some tap messages into bitter bark

the Romans named their country of origin
plotting their scorched-earth conquests
as they arrived
marching, dried-mouthed

there were few unbloodied places
not on their roughly hewn tourist maps
since when
in decreasing circles,
in the dance of life
we've followed them around

*Roman province of Africa

Ifrikiya *

tão perto de estar lá
sem pisar no continente caiu
planícies de savana, tapetes dourados com babados
avançar em direção às bordas

os Papa-Figos
que conseguem atravessar paredes ilegais de redes de malha fina monte
uma loja aqui
conte suas bênçãos
como todos nós fazemos

eles se fundem perfeitamente com a paisagem de aves nativa mantido em
pastagens secas e farfalhantes, queimado e crocante flutuando entre os
postos de teste
convenientemente disposto
através de florestas abertas de azinheiras
- alguns digitam mensagens em casca amarga

os romanos nomearam seu país de origem
tramando suas conquistas de terra arrasada
como eles chegaram
marchando, com a boca seca

havia poucos lugares sem sangue
não em seus mapas turísticos toscamente talhados
desde quando em círculos decrescentes,
na dança da vida
nós os seguimos

* Uma província romana da África



Open-air cinema evening

people gather
in a sharing warmth

grainy films
on whitewashed walls
the past present in today

cultural heritage
agrarian struggles harvested
on the tickling uplift
of Alentejano night breezes

old jumpy footage
thin coloured
fades away
as we all fade

rousing calls to action speeches
soft back-slapping
collective pride sparks kept aflame
common humanity ramrod bred

deep in the meaning of meaning,
much more than the unease of now
in the endless, tiresome search for meaning

workers that knew how being together
would lead to a better Tomorrow
would overcome the pain
the effort of trying

raising the flag
tight fists of defiance
part of the promise of being
as one.

Noite de Cinema ao ar livre

as pessoas se reúnem
em um calor compartilhado

filmes granulados
em paredes caiadas
o passado presente no hoje

património cultural
lutas agrárias colhidas
na elevação das cócegas
das brisas noturnas alentejanas

imagens antigas e agitadas
cor fina
desaparece
enquanto todos nós desaparecemos

discursos estimulantes de apelo à ação
tapinhas suaves nas costas
faíscas de orgulho coletivo mantidas acesas
humanidade comum vareta criada

profundamente no significado do significado,
muito mais do que o desconforto de agora
na interminável e cansativa busca por significado

trabalhadores que sabiam estar juntos
levaria a um amanhã melhor
superaria a dor
o esforço de tentar

levantando a bandeira
punhos cerrados de desafio
parte da promessa de ser
como um.

Rua das Oliveiras

in a sloping street of sunlight-kissed olive trees
replete with heavily laden autumnal fruits

fresh each morning
resting on her walking stick
Maria Teresa asks breathlessly
if we've yet picked this year's crop

visibly empty bucketed neighbours are getting anxious

all around
annually ransacked trees get a trimming
sheep scavenge fallen leaves
there's a healthy village conformity to seasonal norms

some older men, sun-ripened and grizzled
scamper after stray bouncing olives
ignore on-coming traffic in their zealous hunting
each one deserves a careful rounding up

fractured ageing trunks, our two wise olive tree friends
rest secure, pit stops for busy birds
tucked away in the white-walled garden

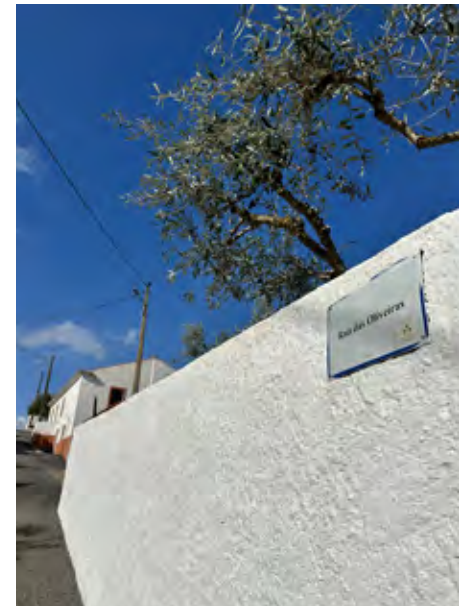
the sun dances on their leaves in faux relaxation of older age
nursing their ailments, bark crackling and cracking

the old mates sprout disobedient branches, impossibly angled
wave for attention, angrily await the lifting of burdens

in full rebellion, both have started to throw down their bounty
their ripe delicious fruit like large acorns carpet muzzled paths

along the road all the other trees preen themselves
neatly pruned and unencumbered, reaching towards order

the weekend's promised warmth
with its sneaks of blue-sky
encourages new commitments
the calling for voluminous vessels
to aid collection –
to nudge that moving forward
for a meeting
of the beat
of the olive tree street.



Stepping into the Steppe lands

steppe birds muster
roll call of sound
polite taking of turns to shine
practice their unique voice

all the Lark families are here
each with their own melodious accent
any misunderstandings unintentional

the steppe lands gently bloom after rains
to the side, loquacious stonechats chip away
on their old flints
exotic houseguests skirt the periphery
head-dressed Hoopoes blow in
just back from the hairdressers

wood larks skip between well-spaced Holm oaks
perform the best musical notes
each tree has a song from which song pours
sagacious acorns plop on stony ground

with its longest branches nestling the steppe
the region's greatest oak
sturdy and resilient, continues to rehearse
its patient sitting and waiting
in complete
contemplative
silence.

Image: Alentejo Steppe lands - the closest you
can get to Africa on the European mainland



Open House *Casa não fechada*

So here's a little story.

This old man saved up some money
bought a simple house.

With rustic charm
brimming of tradition.

Imperfect, like many things are.
Unwelcome, secretive guests frolic in the rafters.

Playground retreat
in need of re-awakening.

A place of intimacy
for sharing
for growing trees:
Lemon
Orange
Fig.

He rushed around crazily
making improvements
realising though it would take time.

Nothing good in life can be rushed.

Village Restaurant

Skeletally thin
she has inner elegance
and broad Alentejano oak strength

resigned to being sidelined
rarely missed until gone

she never stops working

her movement is constant and fluid
eyes down, a ballerina around bar stools

stoic and firm, she manages awkward
but head-down adoring men
they fawn to her like fattened lambs
rest engorged stomachs on unadorned tables
munch salty olives
always, they demand feeding

she doesn't stop
prizes reluctant, cheap cutlery from drawers
wipes, scurries, serves

nods in response to orders
without conceit, hands over her dense chocolate cake
miraculous in its every day creation

circling Manuela feeds in a delight of hungry men
knives and forks shrunk in rough labouring hands
boisterous, seated and oblivious

overlooked, she does everything -
the village's one true mistress of ceremonies.



Days full of Lightness

pouring light sashes the Serra
tamed and at peace
the few people there plough their furrows
dodge the sun's spotlight beam
search for cloud cover
tweak their hats for maximum effect

the low hill top villages affixed to their land
the friendship of gentle seasons
shepherds round up stray mischievous sheep
helped by skilled and devoted sheepdogs

doors open to the street
easeful conversations
life lived outside
Bom Dias, Boa Tardes, Boa Noites
lightness of step
neighbours who have time to stop
inter-weave simple narratives
long lunches for savouring
long late afternoons for lingering



06.

Being



H.O.P.E

I know that place
I live there
it nudges me up in the morning
shakes me from clinging sleep

I try to catch its warm embrace
but often it snakes away -
remains hidden in far out of sight
long drawn out nights

Coaxing it back is a daily daytime chore.

Brothers

one wandering brother appears lost
another lost the other

the sense of loss ripples
through grieving seasons
accumulated grievance, life's lies stack up
ready for a toppling

copycatting, Cain bounds down family trees
pops by to recount much less popular biblical commentaries

trust squandered, no burying the hatchet
warmth-drained, brotherly hearts stone dead

where are those brothers now?

Sharing

Here we all are, this Brick Lane Saturday night
 Bravely touching our shared vulnerabilities
 Each bringing themselves, their own special light
 Listening to people's magic, warming to the room's sensitivities

At the centre, pulling together the threads
 There's the right now timeliness of us:
 Building a shield wall against all the outside warlike dreads
 Clenching our shared loves, empathy and compassion, we must.



Promise

shoulders shoved forward
 British bulldog style
 something stored in his Roman legionnaire heritage
 staying on after the long abandonment -
 for defence or attack
 few if any in the family knew

in the pooling gloom
 ageing reluctantly
 precision counter of mistakes
 the robustness of earlier days mislaid

he finds in Norfolk gardens a manure-smelling peace
 seated and brooding
 he worries about weeds taking over
 the decline of once-common birds

the passing of years threatens
 to make the situation much worse -
 with fewer comforts as mood music
 too much unexplored empty time to nourish ailments

only the flippancy of a nephew's promise
 of wheeling him around the garden
 in the ancience of his days
 to inspect and water plants,
 to anchor him.

Sid and me

Sid is the kind of go-with-the-flow sort of fella we all gravitate towards,
not much can non-plus him, as a lap dog he eases into rest effortlessly.
He dwells in a blanketed circling cocoon of wellbeing.

Nose twitching, ears perked, one glance tells you all you need to know.
There's an endearing radiation of insouciance, then a flicker fluttering
nod pointing towards the door, if that's not too much trouble:
a walk would do us both good.

May birdsong, misplaced Parakeets telegraph encouragement,
we edge out. Other dogs muster, slobber sniff their canine greetings.

Rotherhithe beach's gentle waves chase the river shore in an enticement.

Our conversation is rather one way, but we enjoy the togetherness.
Noisy Thames river boats streak by. Rogue waves rise up to submerge
Sid's airy sniffing, then curtail our mudlarking in damp seeping of paw tracks.

Lion-hearted Sid lunges for a hidden rotting treat, withdraws happy as Larry.
Beating a full retreat, wrenched along - squelching in sodden footwear
- Sid and me decide to call time on our blissful outing.

Older Dad

His advancing age is widely admired

stubbornly his thick hair declines to grey or fall out
with some degree of envy mighty Samson would have approved

there is resolute strength in the simple actions of keeping on

the youngest daughter piles his decades up like colourful building blocks
stacking them neatly in the well-ordered sitting room corner

in brazen electric coloured felt tips she sketches him as a heroic little boy
four fingered, with a shock of pink punk hair in electrocuted profile
laughing demonically

fewer in number
younger Dads even when not seeking advice, are gently guided
feign reluctance to consider clever pre-smartphone paternal homilies

the children bound around
jumping mercilessly up and down on old bones
eventually establishing a foothold on the lower slopes of aching knees

all the to-and-froing could hasten dizzy spells
stoic grimaces steady the nerves.

Vivace

Chunks of life
held in an arm lock
at times, painfully slow
ungrippable, twisting, pulsating
pulling free, the rickety train speeds up -
so fast that all the joys fall out
a maelstrom of catapulting here and nows
inevitably, now past.

One day, pushed on a swing
following day, pushing exquisitely made children on swings
the next, empty nest lamentations.

In the routine of migrations
short-lived house-keeper weaver birds
in seasonal pairing
beaks full of yesteryear cobwebs
cross-stitch their own recollections,
take flight.

In the squeezed shrinkage of clock-time
creasing and cracking like seared baking paper
we swirl and dream-swim towards end of story-time days.

The more greedy, most fearful ones, ears pricked
always somehow time poor
wait for it to all start again
perhaps, hoping next time
less vivace.



The Nieces, their droning uncle

Towering nieces
in the bloom of maturing youth
animated smiles reflect a shining magnificence
charmingly they converse with the shrinking man

future vistas stretch out
bright young women now half my age

instinctively, in a game of pass the parcel
the uncle passes on his own messages
words rattle around, fall out of his mouth
splattering their high heels -
maybe the odd stray wise one will have that extra bounce
land gently in fertile minds

grandparents measure the nieces' lives by thirds
relish too seeing lives unfolding, the march of younger days
as they unfurl hidden treasure maps
turn down un-treaded paths
use painted finger nails to feel the way forward

her three daughters in sisterly solidarity excel in team building skills
secure in their family fortress
each showing the other the care that they must show to themselves

like huddling horses they herd for protection
lined up at the starting gate
well prepared for the race

with the poise of champions
they follow their childhood dreaming
secure in the foundations well laid
to burst out of the shade into the sunlight
nourished by a mother's purest dedication

as we move on
when we are gone, as we all must
double my age, looking back
in stuttering family video footage
their lives full, like mine
we imagine their spirits still restless and eager
with only a light sprinkling of rust.

Worst dinner guests

I imagine the tidy laying of words on an empty page
like getting ready for a weekend dinner party

at the first settling in, guests sit politely, warm up
take sitting positions
before realising they're actually all in the wrong places
ill-at-ease to talk to each other, socially compromised
in evident discomfort

they require a good shuffle
in a throwing the deck-of-cards-in-the-air kind of way
maybe half a dozen times might do it
before coming down to land, none the wiser, still hungry
for some sentence structure, prose order
the hint of a poem with some merit –
even just an entrée lucidity
a trace of flow
at least,
before the routine regular argumentative main course

marshalling the words after another frightful digression
which takes super-human strength (which I rarely have, but do sometimes)
they meander into an exhausting stodgy dessert

I confess, often, I'm mightily glad when we stir towards the farewell rituals
and I just leave them, jumbled and irresolute, promising to pick them up again
with an early morning freshness, to see how they manage to look
on tattered and grubby not so white tablecloth page
dribbled and scribbled
forlornly miserable -
annoyingly indecipherable
so many words so much less appealing
than the night before

how is it that I keep returning, like a spurned lover
to reacquaint myself with them
to invite them, once again
to try sharing another
interminable evening meal with me.

Sad Sid

Being left again
he scuttles around
looking for his lead
to escort him out

Sid offers up his sad dark pool eyes
entreaties towards the outdoors
urgent controlled escaping

How many times can he be left alone
before he collapses into pet despair
exasperated by the length of dog years.



Fountains Abbey with Book Club friends

There's not much to say about days like these
neither hot nor cold
an in-betweenness of seasons
that annual crossing over into the dread of darkness.

Emotionally shattered leaves contemplate the tumble
their collapse into insipid dampness
the painful shortening of clipped hours
fearful of the yearly savage haircut of light.

Defiant, insatiable – a lone White Stag all a-swagger
snorts to steam the air
scatters his skittish but obedient harem
breaking their ranks in a who's next anxiety.

Passing by fast-paced, stretching out in resolute marching
the dearest friends have fixed views about beginnings and endings
swatting away birdsong on the way to unmoving ancient ruins -
laggard distaining.

Black suit encased jackdaws ill-prepared to beat an unceremonious retreat
crystal blue-eyed, often (mainly) overlooked
interminably moping around
lingering for any crumbs.

In their dour demeanour, they seem to know the value of patience
the cyclical longing for that jolting tilt, some months distant
when our shared planet home, brings us
back once more to where we started.



07.

Along The Campaign Trail



Deep Green Suffolk

Suffolk villages
blackbirds skipping
through pockets of paradise
sing-singing with playmates

friendly villagers beam welcomes
wave hands of warm wishes
before moving on
the briefest of connecting:
the busyness of calm politeness

others aloof
eyes downwards
hoarse caws
the darkness of crows

here and there
gardens for bees to live in
nature allowed a morsel, a look in
stocked bird-feeders proffered as compensation
kindnesses lurk behind hedgerows

here in places
our Green and Pleasant Land
for keeping safe
to cherish.

Endurance Test

Swifts cast their eyes down as I speed walk through bleak streets, shriek their passing.
Trip-hazard bins poke out, menacing letter boxes crumple and eat my deliveries.
I pass through light-heartedly in a hail of Good Luck cheers.

People open up, life stories tumble out. People stand their ground and live their truths.
Many speak of their uncared for unlovedness, alone in a pitchness of isolation far removed
from any longed for poetry solitude.

Emerging from cave gloom, older men run rage full into the road, a cock in their own
mud heaps, eyes ablaze, spitting and swearing, tearing up the unread election flyer,
before slamming themselves back in, with a flurry of shoulder agitation shakes.
The warm comfort of being held like a baby so long in the chilling.

I plod on, step counting. Legs jellifying. Entranced by the strange magic of the campaign,
the pain and richness of encounters.

Endurance test nearing its end, home and food refilled, set out in typed crisp clarity,
another offers sun solar solutions, a way to a place where light punches through darkness.

I'll keep this letter to look back at,
as years march on,
to measure any of the small gains,
we might make.

June's Greens

In deepest Suffolk
head over heels in love

Lanes like veins
run through June's greens

Streams into brooks,
from rains from above

My quick visits unseen
in all the tiniest nooks.

Desert Wanderer

Vast, pine lined, unforgiving -
the not so new decaying
Housing Estate circles into itself:
Ways, Closes, Walks
gobble themselves

Bramble Way:
had all the hedgerow fruit been already picked?

Hawthorn Close:
had the gaiety of blossoms long since passed?

Buttercup Walk:
perhaps stray dirty dandelions had usurped them?

Eagle Close:
birds of prey weren't at home when I dropped by

Kingfisher Way:
the smudge of a river long since dried up

scrapping starlings fight for space on rooflines
any wind that there is, sits there, disinterested

pins dropping hear themselves
ghosts shut up in phantom lives

tidy boxes in a desert:
Home Sweet Home.

The father, his daughter, her husband and the Kingfisher

Lives full of Full English cooked breakfasts
faces late spring licked.

Ruddy, hearty and hopeful,
an older father tastes the fishing day ahead.

Mayflies short living and clumsy, mooch
we stretch walk along with stumbling infant river insects
muddied, chewing the cud of election times.

Rare cuckoos siren the quiet worlds to come
less full woods, chastened and eerie.

Together we scour the chalk-river for rising Brown trout
guffawing at a son-in-law's big fish tale:
that one's longer than an outstretched arm.

The diligence of a daughter tidying
along the river bank, scooping up discarded Swan feathers.
The companions quiz the husband on his campaign plans
watchfully eager for an omen, a kingfisher glimpse.

Swim at the White Bridge, Santon Downham

My whole life feels like a lost person's urgent search
for a rare flash of kingfishers

rivers fresh with dancing dragonflies -
lunging into cool waters to satiate grit dry thirst

shoals of blue damselflies dazzle
in mid-summer sunlight splashes

azure strikes of magnificence motorway along the water's surface
the kingfisher trio ambush from right and left

paths cut through nettles, off in the distance the creak of a bridge
an envelope of birds chatting cheerily through trees.

Sedge Fen

It felt like a safe ending
 deep-earthed in childhood memories
 feral hideouts dotted around
 sinking flatlands fenced in by strapping poplars
 straitlaced, reliable gatekeepers of wheat fields
 rich and bronzing

senescent grey skies tugged to peak stretch point
 tearful, always the inevitable downpour

the few people there, modernity refugees
 in hiding, reluctant interlopers
 play at hide and seek
 not wanting ever to be found

lumpy fen tracks
 propped up by weed towers
 red hot lips of poppies parade the catwalk

everything tangled, enmeshed
 jumping out, ready to slip off the map
 sail away on the tide of a deer bark chorus
 follow narrowing tracks
 as they run into soft Breckland sands.

Over-looked Houses of God

Many report feeling forgotten, left behind
 dwelling in their last stand of abandonment

another flinted one pokes through dense underwood
 calls for solemn acknowledgement
 that bit of noticing, a wanting to be understood

companions rarefy in every settlement
 although in your village homes rallying to that enticement
 of an open church door find

losing count, I spin around on life's loop
 as each church reaches out to catch me as they should
 I scratch around the dank dirt, on the edge of my sound mind
 looking for those golden egg glints in a hen's coop

in my quest and determination to visit more
 drawn this time by a choral performance
 assembling with curious villagers with musical magic in store

and us the tramping campaigners taking our chance
 for a rush of calmness and the opportunity to snoop.

Culture Warring

A dedication to all those that seek to divide us

Depleted of ideas, stuffed with nonsense
 spoilt rotten toddlers brick lay grievances -
 in proud stupidity they scaffold racist lies.
 Unable to say anything nice of anyone,
 anything said poisons and taints –
 leaves sickly chewed blanket smells.
 Their unloveliness needs constant airing:
 Morning, Noon and Night.

Post-afternoon naps lead to vapid soundbite bleating -
 then to early evening brain-fogs,
 inevitably downwards to late night far-right tantrums.
 Everyone else simply begs for some peace and quiet -
 the calmness of tea cups, pauses for thoughtfulness.
 Culture-warriors can't stop themselves
 spitting out all the childish spiteful words they know.
 Childhood hurting is flung around the nursery
 noxious fat finger painted smearing -
 reheated dark-fantast tales,
 whilst the grown up minder's cheeks redden.

Pass bedtime, now for the trickiness
 of rounding them all up,
 getting beyond false nostalgia,
 into the warming safety of infant play pens.

Best lob them a sweetened dummy to muffle their befuddled rantings.

Another losing

Splintered and rusty
 lifeboats unmanned
 modern day ark building unfashionable
 requiring too much hard work –
 even the thinking is deemed tiresome

the merry few heave life-jackets
 haul in the depleted
 others scuttle busily to rescue drowning oars
 on their way to forlorn migrations

escapees from climate terrors plea for fresh narratives
 gentle hands to pull them from the waves.

The top end of the boat, still sinking
 plug their ears to the world's weeping
 redundant town criers gagged
 now gagging on decayed toxic hulks

days counted down like extinctions
 sedentary old men, nicotine-stained, screen-interned
 cackle with whine-some self-regard
 unable to salvage anything, not even their hearts.

Whilst something might be regained
 one bright day, from the loss
 the ship continues its descent to the bottom.



MARK MAKING
MARCAÇÃO

