

Martin Robertson

For Cecil

Tankas and haikus

Aldeburgh

They burned drowned Shelley
on the beach. We on your beach
raised you a bonfire
to warm us, be you, burn off
the chill crematorium.

To one each turns, as
to a natural centre.
Now my centre's gone.

I am haunted by
a thought: might it have been meant?
I do not think so.
Too much surely to hold you.
But if it were, what courage.

I am old, and as
I failed you, so can only
fail to take your place.
Yes, but must still be something
more than myself, will be, can.

Thorpe white in the sun
against the black earth; lost in
the storm now; now here
too the sleet-wind darkens down.
Without you your winter shore.

Wind is a sword of
ice, under wild colours in
sun-touched or dark cloud.

A rare night. Beach deep
in snow. A ceaseless gale that
strips it. Night for you.

Cambridge

Warm summer cycle
ride. Home, in the garden found
you dying. Today,
bitter beautiful winter
cycling, past the hospital.

Silver spoon in the
bathroom. My outrage is as
yours. Some things slip though.
Change, knowingly made, all right.
Not, that's not so good.

Steve Davis knocked out
of the semi-final. You
would have liked that, though
Hurricane Higgins would have
pleased you better as the winner.

Things you only just
missed. Sophie of course, and Tom's
throwaway, that in
five years perhaps, working at
home, "We'd start a family".

After grassed acres,
here you chose stone to raise
your lovely garden round.

Did you suffer much?
Would to know the answer help?
Not you. Us perhaps.

Walking on the white
slippery track, face smarting
in the evening frost
—this monochrome stillness looks
like death but is something else.

Venus is burning
big and low, yellow through the
haze which hides the rest.

A young man in the
street was humming, whistling not
very tunefully
a tune, familiar. . . Then I
realized: Hyperactive.

I don't believe in
any afterlife, so must
accept that in death
all failures, like all losses
are irrecoverable.

On the radio
Schubert's Shepherd on the Rocks.
For me, you. For you,
Stephen. I wish I thought you
were listening together.

Always returns the
image of your face as mask,
closed eyes swollen.

The North

Snow under grey cloud.
Monochrome world from Cambridge
to the Border. Or
from here to eternity.
The train moves. Nothing changes.

What in this city
do we share? Best, Dominick
and the children who
had no fares but an old hat
he bought, wore to a *première*.

Clear, bright, very cold.
A hard landscape, beautiful
but hard. Very cold.

Why should a change of
date in our artificial
calendar seem so
significant? '84
you were in, not '85.

Children (bright-coloured
muffings against a white snow
slope) tobogganing.

Misunderstandings.
Can they be sloughed in the new
relation? (live—dead).

In car, bus, train I
want the journey not to end
even when the end
is wanted. I didn't, I
suppose, want to leave the womb.

Moving across the snow
towards the sun through bright mist.
There is nothing else.

Luckily I am
too often too silly to
be a wise old man.

Misunderstandings?
That New Yorker joke: "My wife
does understand me."

I failed you living
and what I do can't help you
dead. But it might help them
a little who loved you, love
you, love me, love both of us.

You were there, and I
hugged you. You didn't mind. Death
had happened, but was
release from work, and that was
(you said) relief. We made plans.

You felt I had failed you
profoundly. I don't forget.
But must not let that
blot out what were surely our
successes, our happiness.

Too much about me.
But I think about you more
and better. Light and
warmth that irradiated
us. Bonfire on the night beach.