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Four Poems

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Eel Met by Moonlight

Whose silver belly
recycles mudflats'

blaze light
whose silt-brown

muddy back
seen flee-

tingly dissolves clitoral
under wet pebbles

between roots
of wild celery

among dreams
of still-sea

slender mucus
remaindered

on wet hands
grafting badly

into the dimming
delve-water.

Why catch an eel?
To bait imagination,

untie some knots
maybe release

luminescing fish
into new mystery.

Eels in reverse
make no sense,

our Sargassos

rise evenly

at the centre
of measureless tides.

Measureless tides
rise unevenly.

Every unmeasured
thing betides.

Sketchbook from the Front

Out on the dusk road, sky as a dark blue shield; whenever you pass a diorama of deer in the floodplain meadows, as if placed there as an image of peace, never turning their heads in the direction of traffic but remaining intent on their quiet task of grazing, their soft necks curved in a gentle arc, their soundless footsteps dainty among the long stems of tall fescue and false oat-grass that shimmer holographically in the wind as they drop swollen ticks like a long slow wound, an ellipsis of blood, you're reminded again of Franz Marc. Not the iconic oils of brightly coloured animals posing archetypally in the middle-period works, but the "sketchbook from the front" of his last days—just pencil lines wavering along the vertiginous edge of the abyss, where the future seemed to coalesce as a knot of vanishing points refusing to vanish but rather staying brutally intact, as if the artist was hurtling into that wide disappearance, taking their place, and leaving us with this crush of horizons like a maze, a riddle or a puzzle adventure. But the pre-arranged deer remain steady, refusing the next move. And you wonder if this long long drive is just some misled and unfunded attempt "merely to by-pass / the obstruction caused by a burst / god."¹ And you wander until the curving earth swallows your split trail.

¹ Roy Fisher, *A Furnace* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1986), 46.

New Dragonfly Species Notes²

Novel yellow-black-seared yellow
settles twig-like on a twig
imploded cathedrals taut
over its back,
thrusters down, relaxed.

Prey fritter in pieces
across those complex
litmus-blue monitors
(it's too easy to think of
a machine)
pause
speed is not motion but
coalescing into new space
through a bright arc of vision
like emerging from your own
burnt-out pupil, the sun:
several moves ahead.

Hope is teneral female
gathering that darkening yellow
into robust black frames,
how an abdomen curves
when gravid, to emplace

² This “new” dragonfly is the Cazuma Pincertail, but the poem could equally well apply to any dragonfly new to science.

t'emplace, too place

...

on the devilled streambed
those delicate unique processes.

Travelling at speed
across the shed snakeskin
of this back country, there's no way
we could catch your bad moon blur.
But if a hammerhead drone
throws its distraction
crystal up into the air
anywhere near here
please tear it apart
with some ancient wisdom
shredded from fossil pages

pause

as a dry brush passes over
a flicker of dust.

It will be named after the river,
if we can find the river
and somehow look out its old name
by inferring from the silt archive
in its dwindling

its death-rattle

under a capstone the size of forgets.

All these features have ruptured our spreadsheet.

Tideracing

stepping over) our
selves (limboing
under themselves
wave runnels saved
until the next great
upheaval
wet spiracles
open like closed
anemones
post-constellating
the shivered beach
as a sanderling struts
in fast forward italics
stalls flickers
focused nearingly
on glittered
shards of sunlight
doing paradoxical
times tables
in some exclave
of a wintering mind
all the length of here
to fleetingly there
tracing the last
tendrils
of a fractal
unpossessed

looking for the muted
thing: a temp-
orary aura
of dry-gushing sand
around each step
retracting to level ground
as we leave it
perhaps/maybe
not really either
footprints hover
switchback
undecidables
to our long division
perhaps
of this deterritorialized
inbetweentimes
gathering itself
skimming below
those liberated sky
that vaunts
and gallops
brightly away
ice cube sun
in enormous
unprintable
sheets of blue

DAVID HAWKINS is a writer, book editor and naturalist from Bristol, England. Particular areas of interest are edgeland habitats, ruderals, bryophytes and invertebrates. Recent work has appeared in *Arc Poetry*, *Blackbox Manifold*, *Datableed*, *Interpreter's House*, *Magma*, *Otoliths* and *White Review*, among others. He was awarded second prize in the 2015 UK National Poetry Competition.