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## Four Poems

Kevin Kiely

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## Four Poems

Kevin Kiely

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### I was not killing time in Pieterskerk: I wept for pure joy

It is that scenario in Leiden Centraal the windows of the express train  
flash past framing those who stand on the opposite platform  
awaiting their trains: they who must sooner or later travel  
caught in the shutter speed of a camera  
with broken silver lines like in old b&w movies  
where they move and speak on the diaphanous screen  
and by now are surely dead

It's the same cough-mixture, grape juice and bananas in a bag  
it's the same everywhere, the music is floating joy  
from the organ loft the silver pipes are faced in gold, the ingots shining  
above the black floor slabs that resemble marble doors  
to the underworld and the walls are red bricks rising with red bricks

The pillars bloom to the roof—stressed beauty in sails and wings  
of stone as interlopers move from slab to slab or glower  
at the inscriptions: *Hier Leyt Begraven Adam Scholart en syn  
docter Katryna Scholart*

It's the same astonishment astonishing eternally  
it's the same in every polished window  
to write this on glass beholding the earth and sky  
everything the same streaming flooded with light  
not the weeping angels but those with trumpets  
towards the glazed showers of sunshine  
like milk edged in gold mingling with yellow tinged cream  
and the flaming searches of light through every diamond pane

the bridges of Amsterdam are the same  
leading to the canals on a life journey  
the streets of each day the windows of each hour  
the bicycle-grotto as backdrop for the living populace  
and cyclists make their hurdy-gurdy onwards

Lady of my life carrying the sun, circling the moon  
clearer than water with eyes of living light  
more astonishing than all of this for without you

is to limp along icy roads above the grimy  
glass floors where the swirls of snow, the sleet  
gales of the abyss and knowing we approach the gates

outdoors the rain glosses the cobbles  
this gentle water drops jewels on the leaves  
in public parks and falls in quick sketch lines  
before me incomplete, gapped yet forging a finished work  
suggestive of the now of the everything  
of the forces unbelievable unimaginable that brought you  
across the horizon burnished heralding a golden dawn  
to the seaview apartment rotten wood and the walls  
with zany maps of damp until you visited in a high tide of light  
the torn curtains erotically ripped as pins and buttons  
metallic on the floorboards the musical overture  
the new stage set as ghosts rattle the windows

and threaten to timewarp through disasters of the past  
our step-children stare and are challenged by their script  
but the light beams more than anything are moving  
propelling the narrative forwards ending loneliness  
in warm scented air with heat mist above the waterways  
in the shimmering haze the drugged senses narrow our eyes  
as we breathe and meditate, our speech bubbles like smoke plumes

Chaos, confusion, killing real time back there  
in the no-go zone, stagnant without the exit keys  
until everything opened and became centred towards this scenario  
that calls the fumbling stumbling arguing human up and out to action

I shall not fall through as I race to meet you  
I shall not fear fear through this joy  
I shall lose the abandonment of abandonment  
in the presence of this joy which is everything

**Anniversary: 1 line email + colour photo at-  
tachment\***

The woodland is close to the charnel caverns  
trees are stark as if clawing  
the grey-blue watercolour sky  
it is written: let the dead bury the dead  
the isolate visitor to a cemetery  
reels in flashback  
hurled at the beyond

the photograph is too final  
I cannot think of you in the abyss  
I still demand that you stay with me  
when days crash

no one is to blame for these events responded to mutely  
and undercover, above mumbling, leading us elsewhere  
place is somewhere that changes little through aeons  
while time spins faster as humans are seasoned

we spoke in a devalued language  
the broken voices strove for unmuffled speech but  
some catch in the throat denied full expression

life in opera, the script beyond the facts  
seen as impossible to narrate, inability to discuss  
no one word ever accurate, not much talk about it  
we mourned professionally never out of character  
shadowed in gloom, our laughter almost a danger  
with no handbook of grief the improvisation followed  
the content too closely

you who are tenants of time  
from the watery womb, the watery grave  
you who live  
moving through a frieze of your faces  
with the same eyes, know the beyond is  
from here to there and you are certainly going

to your dust insubstantial to your eyes large as planets  
to your hands wider than rivers to your words whether they hear  
you, they are not here: why do you seek  
the living among the dead

*Go on. I'll follow thee*

*\*The photograph is of two bouquets of flowers across the gravelled grave  
with its Celtic cross of sandstone axles, the hub an IHS: pray for the souls  
of 'our parents'; their engraved names, dates and that they rest in peace in  
the Latin used two thousand years ago.*

## Our flight to-day...

I think of you at take-off—  
the great bird about to rise

over a hundred of us  
hushed in rows  
the empty cinema aisle  
EXIT signs lit

starring in our own motion picture  
the engines rolling and whirring  
rain outside adds to the scenario  
not now the romantic stars  
the candles that we expect to look upon

notebook open  
'I know of no other bomb  
than a book' (Mallarmé)

is there sustenance in these notes?  
a few naked quotes  
from *Empedocles on Etna*  
*Empedokles*  
(who jumped into a volcano)

the unthinkable behind the silence  
there can be no silence  
perishable as the damp clouds  
the icy darkness  
diastole light on the wing

I might embrace this  
confront the ultimate  
instead of anxious  
longing to go back  
or fast forward

to burn the tension  
I try to x-ray this craft  
of ingenious beauty  
and functional design  
that I must trust

the cabin crew, the pilot's harem  
will captain God tell the truth

and angels bring nectar

‘the death in which I lose  
one of my lives  
and the ultimate death  
in which I lose the game itself’  
(De Man on computer games)

time will not level out  
in this time of ascent—  
without an image of you  
I cannot break through  
I dare not think of you  
‘cogito ergo ergo ergo’

#### **On finding a book to read**

For the days that are left the smallest song:  
A wish for snow on your parted hair.  
The fire is warm but the nights belong  
To the days that are left, and the smallest song

—Martha Collins, ‘The Smallest Song,’ *The Catastrophe of Rainbows*

Well that is enough: the smallest song  
and some things words can do  
and did they cut deep, where the ooze of blood stings  
and how long to heal into poetry?  
it must do more or less, it must do if it sings

by the crackling fire with a lamp on  
when you know that such exercise cannot outweigh  
January beyond the window  
and sheep looking warm in moonlight

the road sloping down  
from the Heinrich Böll cottage and hill  
to the flowing cream of waves

and loneliness speaking from this collection  
left in the west

messages in an empty Cognac bottle  
sand stained, corkless  
we could have walked with you, been here

do I know you from your b&w thumbnail?  
the best smile out front  
beside the photo credit, ISBN and price

the only gossip in your wake: how you left for hours  
the doors unlocked, the underfloor heating full on  
you had gone shopping or walking or hanging in there?

and gave a reading in Doogort hall  
the local newspaper promo-ed it—is that all we know?  
a blurb: born in Nebraska, raised in Iowa

a shelf of disparate slim volumes that failed to engage  
except for yours.

It was the ache behind the words that caught me

—*University College Dublin*