

ekphrastic and somatic verses

by strannikov

what Sorley saw

in clotted abattoirs where Sorley saw:
no animals shorn of their skins and flesh
could spy with envy the men killing them.

the view out back no good but only worse:
battalions of heads with men's missing jaws—
mechanical slaughter simple and pure.

had Sorley survived his sniper near Loos,
he'd've had to survive the Somme's perils, too,
for his wounds to've healed with violent scars,

metrics of memory in men's fouled flesh—
though soldiers' flesh and eyes must all be lost,
memory preserves in their frank missing jaws.

sonnetique

the moon's full light awake all night
from dusk to dawn butter to blue:
it left me prey to swirling ghosts
whose loiter the sun had not lit.
insomniac light lit my brain
and into pillows pressed its fits
each vacant in turn toss by toss
my moon-infected head dug in.

that light with only blue cool heat
moved memories to poke and stab
—but were those memories or dreams?
the pillows cannot stuff my head
my vacancies lit by the moon
wherever they live or roam or hide.

breathless hearing

in losing the ability to breathe
we lose our ability to hear—I
now have heard from Edward Thomas twice:

“I should like to be lying under that foam,
Dead, but able to hear the sound of the bell”
he said in stanza four, “The Child on the Cliff”.

“Rain”: “Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks”, said
with economy and rhythms I don't dare.

of all things to lose when we lose our last breaths—
slaps and splash of surf peals of bells breathless rain.

fraternities of men maternities of mud

their narrow womb of mud could not be left.
ordered over the top but there they're stuck
their ankles gripped in the muck and strained mire
their boots sucked deep in the mouth they can't leave
—their trench expresses its maternal care!

down that top they never mount bullets bite
machine guns gnash the entire mouth of trench
shells land in one length of womb and let rip
bodies and pieces fly metal explodes
men chopped and stirred in mud they could not leave.

their black wet trench expressed maternal care . . .

