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TRY TO PRAISE THE MUTILATED WORLD

So often these days we shake our heads at a world that can seem crazy and terrible, which we struggle to make any sense of. Poetry is at its best when it can help to make a little sense of what it is to be alive and gives us some of the meaning we search for. The poems in this chapter are hopeful, even against the odds.

Try to praise the mutilated world

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

Translated By Clare Cavanagh

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.
The nettles that methodically overgrew
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,

and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.



Lowedges

HELEN MORT

And if those doors to other worlds exist
you'll find them here: Lowedges, where the city
smooths its skirt down in the name of modesty,
picks up its jacket, calls it a night. Here, bichon frises
chase their tails all morning on the astroturf,

a biker lets go of his handlebars and doesn't fall,
a woman rolls the afternoon into a cigarette
and smokes it silently. Forget the Cornish sea,
the top of Nevis with its trapdoor light ...

If you're to leave this world, you'll leave it here:
this salvaged Friday, shop lights dimmed. Look up –
how easily the rain bisects the sky.

Quarantine

EAVAN BOLAND

In the worst hour of the worst season
of the worst year of a whole people
a man set out from the workhouse with his wife.
He was walking – they were both walking – north.

She was sick with famine fever and could not keep up.
He lifted her and put her on his back.
He walked like that west and north.
Until at nightfall under freezing stars they arrived.

In the morning they were both found dead.
Of cold. Of hunger. Of the toxins of a whole history.
But her feet were held against his breastbone.
The last heat of his flesh was his last gift to her.

Let no love poem ever come to this threshold.
There is no place here for the inexact
praise of the easy graces and sensuality of the body.
There is only time for this merciless inventory:

Their death together in the winter of 1847.

Also what they suffered. How they lived.
And what there is between a man and a woman.
And in which darkness it can best be proved.



Inefficient View of a Happy Man

ROBERT HARPER

I only saw him briefly,
as the train sliced off
a second of his life

to put beneath a pain of glass.
He carried branches
in his arms. On his face

a look beyond
contentment kept him
from sinking in the grass.