Ghazal: Touch Me

Yes, Covid, dementia, cancer may touch me ‒

to the whole damn world, I say: touch me.

Let the flight of starlings, the light

on the sea, like the lash of a stingray, touch me.

Hunger, wildfires, a black man choked by police,

a dead child on a beach, I pray, touch me.

Mother Earth, Father Time, shake open your arms ‒

like spring gales down the Champs-Élysée, touch me.

Oh you, my new lover, tested, untrue:

with your gardener’s fingers and feet of clay, touch me.

Before poems are illegal, kissing a crime; before

my pen withers, lips decay, don’t delay: touch me.

Should Naomi’s ghazal fail to melt hearts, at least

let it chorus that inflamed cliché – touch me!

Naomi Foyle is a British-Canadian poet, science fiction novelist and essayist based in Brighton, UK. Her poetry publications include *The Night Pavilion* (Waterloo Press), an Autumn 2008 Poetry Book Society Recommendation, and *Adamantine* (Red Hen/Pighog Press, 2019). For her poetry and essays about Ukraine, she won the 2014 Hryhorii Skovoroda Prize.

**Carrying On**

Now it’s clear that life is change,

virus, age, extinction teach

a love of stones is not so strange.

Schist, flint shingle, pebbles with a tinge

of green: we stack a cairn on the beach.

It’s clear now that life is change,

slow growth, erosion, not the binge

of sex and sun it once seemed. Split a peach:

a love of stones is not so strange.

We might build a house with stones, arrange

a garden, bring an island within reach.

It’s clear now that life is change ‒

I do not howl, do not whinge,

but heed the seagulls, crying each to each:

*stones . . . strange . . . stones . . . strange*

You drift, flick skimmers, challenge

me to repeat the seashore’s static speech:

now it’s clear that life is change,

a love of stones is not so strange.

**Outcast**

*After Rachel Whiteread*

I turned mine inside-out,

emptied it like a pocket

over the Atlantic. She filled hers

with concrete and it floated

like a turd or a stale pork pie —

how *British*, I thought:

all noun, no verb. Now, though,

I find she’s spent my youth

pouring resin, sherbet powder, snow,

into bee hives, toilet paper rolls,

Vienna’s Judenplatz, the space beneath

a chair cats claim as their own — ­

and the grey memory of *House*

feels more like home.

**Reading Ishion Hutchinson at the Jungle Rumble Adventure Golf Rooftop Beach Cafe**

*…the city axled down in the buried sea’s lilac*

 *‒ Ishion Hutchinson,‘The Lords and Commons of Summer’*

To the tinned strains of walking on sunshine and sitting on the dock . . .

I map your archipelago of themes: childhood, schooling, war,

the hollow bronze fantasias of continental gardens, poisoned foliage

of an island that was never truly home. Below me, on the AstroTurf,

men in Alligator shirts attack the Caveman Course with rented clubs,

Council workers in fluorescent yellow jackets scrub the rusted tracks

of the Volks Electric Railway. Out on the sharp horizon, the windfarm

with its rows of turning blades ‒ each white turbine a Mercedes trinity

of dominion over land and sea and air ‒ is another miniature reminder

there’s no plain sailing out of this, just back and forth, round and round

and round, raking through the ironies, casting lilacs for the drowned —

 until a small brown girl with a cloud of amber hair

drops her ice cream in her father’s lap, he laughs . . . and the last page

of your book flashes in the sun ‒ the morning light no longer

pinpricks on a shivering skin, but an oceanic dance

of bright unshackled stars