

*Bertolucci*

The *magic vox*'s pale green disc  
 blinks like an airplane tail-light  
 or an astral event: a voice from the *Times*  
 is asking if I'd like to write  
 an obituary on Bertolucci  
 —the father, the poet, not the filmmaker.  
 Necrologue. Crocodile. Obelisk.  
 Which leaves a couple of days to bone up on  
 his life and works, to pry into his *Capanna*  
*indiana* (shed or tepee?) and his *Camera da letto*  
 feeling like a rank outsider  
 who's intruded on a family funeral  
 or a paid mourner desirous everyone should know  
 how much the departed meant to him.

I remember him well in the cover photo  
 before that hilltop Parma village he was from  
 (whose name I've forgotten)  
 in a sadly festive, broad-brimmed hat  
 that shades his eyes. He called his condition  
 Melancholia not depression, which made it sound  
 planetary rather than clinical.  
 Under the strain of obligation—of the “required”,  
 as opposed to what: the superfluous? the inspired?—  
 the more I read the less I understand,  
 the less I understand the more I warm  
 to the way his quiet voice is fretted  
 by “the hopeless fatal transit of time”,  
 the sense of loss that flowered from his hands.

# Hearthstone

The gods of the hearth exist for us still; and let all new faith  
be tolerant of that fetishism, lest it bruise its own roots.

—GEORGE ELIOT, *Silas Marner*

...it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.

—THEODOR ADORNO, *Minima Moralia*

We had the old gas fire ripped from the wall  
and see how they've rewarded us, the gods of the hearth:  
a ruined gap behind a makeshift, nailed board,  
a cold weather front where the back-boiler was.  
We found an oak surround in a junkyard  
and actually paid money to cart it off  
—no rebate, a torque to one leg, the other cracked,  
its mantel scarred by rusted nails and cigar burns,  
the whole thing awake with woodworm drizzling frass.

Next we chanced on a cast-off, cast-iron fireplace  
and a raw flagstone from a next-door garden.  
fretted with stonewall, claw or chisel marks  
—a segment of the planet's crust, a cold slice  
telluric and thick as a mountain's tongue  
and heavy enough to put my back out  
as I edged it into its resting-place.

The man who did the serious work said how  
he'd spent his youth taking out these fires  
and his old age fitting them back again...  
I plastered over the gaps I'd tamped with twists of news  
and filled the crack with cedar dust and wood glue  
and all we needed then was winter fuel  
to light the first fire here in fifty years.

Now we've journeyed back from digital heat  
—the spring that threw the spark that lit the gas—  
to manual graft and elbow grease  
as though to rid ourselves of years of ease.

Firewood and fircones. Two hirsute bricks of peat  
brought back on purpose from the boglands.  
What more must we do to make the hearth gods happy –  
carve oak leaves and acorns on the shelf supports?  
Daub bison on the cave walls with our bare hands?

## *Penal Architecture*

There are in London... notwithstanding we are a nation of liberty,  
more publick and private prisons, and houses of confinement,  
than any city in Europe, perhaps as many as in all the capital  
cities of Europe put together...

—DANIEL DEFOE, *A Tour through England and Wales*

With a touch of excess or overkill,  
George Dance the Younger  
had actual iron chains  
pinned to the rusticated stone  
on either side of the double door  
of Newgate Gaol.

Drawing the pediment  
he thought of Dante,  
just a consonant away,  
and Milton's gates of adamant.  
He was after a kind of  
sombre, frozen music,  
a literal metaphor—  
turning the flow of words  
back into things.

The mind is its own place  
and can stress  
the lock not the hinge  
in the idea of door.