

FOUR POEMS



Charles Tomlinson

ST PETER'S CHURCH

White, gold and silver—
all this chaste excess
above the dark of pines,
the pastoral greenness.

Black Forest barns
stand ample for use:
vast, grounded, shipshape
under rafter and roof.

But this jewelled interior
outgrows the green haven,
its aim and its art
exceeding the given:

Saint Peter's keys
larger than life glow;
the putto is bowing
its golden cello;

and the shape of this melody
you cannot hear
climbs and curves vinelike
through the luminous architecture

up to the tip
of cross, crown and shoot,
fed from the one
darkness and taproot.

THE GIFT

A man stepped out of the field:
a hawk with both wings spread
rode at his wrist:
“She’s still learning”, he said.

I heard her bells
clash in the winter air
and watched her stare
unfocused on any human thing.

“Not long since,
she hit out at me.”
“You mean beat you with her wings?”
“With her talons and feet I mean.

Since when she’s behaved.”—
he let her
eat a morsel of game from his bag—
“Of course, she screams when I go to get her.

Someone offered me
real money—but we shall see:
I think I shall keep her—
four pheasants, a rabbit and a hare

this very week. Like one?—
a pheasant, I mean.” She began
to shift on the perch of his hand
while he dug from his bag the gift.

Then she eyed the bird
transferred to my keeping:
I was relieved she was jessed
firm to his hunter’s wrist.

And so there passed this gift unforeseen
beneath her unblinking sight,
under the easterly chill
of a winter twilight.

FANFARE

Not the full glare,
but the shaft unravelling
into rays—a soundless fanfare
that flashes from cloud and falls between
us and the field's loud green,
a swathe of light
extending its frontier
between where we were
and a future about to be
as we enter it and follow
this summoning into here and now.

DRAGONFLIES

Dragonflies
flock to this garden
like swallows in autumn
(it is high summer):
such glamour
in predation, scissor-jawed
and single-minded,
they radar their way
past obstacles,
flying in formation,
pilots who are their own craft,
speed their sole stratagem:
cold that means death to them
makes them begin
to disappear just as the dark
comes cooling in.