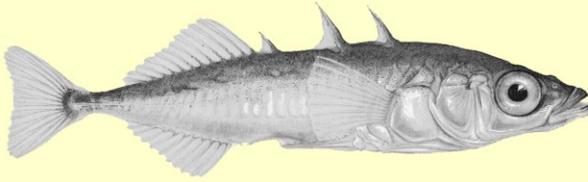




The Hedgehog Poetry Press

Stickleback



Stickleback

Peter Francis Peggall

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Stickleback XIV

Elegies

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First published 2019 by The Hedgehog Poetry Press,
5 Coppack House, Churchill Avenue, Clevedon. BS21 6QW

www.hedgehogpress.co.uk

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ISSN 2631-4126

A Penny for Them

the child in the wellies knows no more
who she is than the dragon fly tells the time
or the rock feels itself falling;
she casts a reflection,
like the mustard sun, like her mind.

O do not hurry, small one,
there are faces to make aplenty
there will be days you do not wish for,
voices far from your own.

ice may not chill, loneliness may not
appall your regiment of one;
but for now, hands in your pockets,
no particular place to go
I fear for your perfect beauty,
your body planted on this plot of earth.
Live to tell your story as our parents
charted theirs in the inscrutable stars.

Nothing is that funny (for Gerald)

those are not all laughter lines.
Like a pitiless artist, time
carves its folds and contours
in your face. Makes you human,
you tell yourself, each groove
a small odyssey. Pain is beautiful,
a lament by the waters of Babylon,
a suitcase packed for separation.

It's when you're puffed up with fear,
a fish cornered among the fish,
when you are so ugly
your enemies spit you out,
disgusted, that's when a nail
driven deep into your neck
is the only way. And you flop
to the floor, a burst balloon,

a pool of undigested plankton,
a stench. A bit late to re-define;
then again, you wrote your memoirs
at seven, were buried at thirty,
resurrected through a tube.
The jigsaw puzzle's blue all over,
there is no horizon, not a tree;
there's a blot of yellow. Where does that go?

2.

A quartet of actors in a playing field:
they are Pyramus and Thisbe,
they are Nick Bottom and Francis Flute,
they are an acrobatic leap
into loving arms. Table cloth picnics,
teenagers on bikes keeping their distance,
enthralled, not saying so. Above,
a cluster of bright balloons,
tagged with messages; they fight upwards,
hopeful as tadpoles. They may make it.
Most will not. We should crowd the skies,
scale the heavens with all we'd wish for,
all we'd never get by landing on the moon,
by searching for the wrong door. It's time
to step out of time running out,
to shed those tired feathers and start again.
We are below you, hands outstretched:
unless you dare to fall, you will never rise.
Better to die in the wind than live in a box.

Little Boxes

our last box, at least, a hexagon;
better still, a casket, a wicker creel.

Anything but a square, fashioned not to fit
anything human. A stamp, a cell,
an enclosure that clearly defines, grades,
disposes once and for all, a corral.

I am bloody odd, bits of me poke out,
I cannot answer questions in boxes.
On a scale of one to ten how do you feel?
'Minus one now, eleven before you asked,
settling to somewhere between the two.'

I drive in a box I live in a box
on top of another box, I tick a box
to contact the love of my life. I keep
tears in boxes, let them out at night
when they will cause less din and discomfort.

My favourite box contains cyanide,
the complete works of Jonathan Swift
a self-detonating stink bomb
and all my most embarrassing moments.

If you fence me in I shall square up to you
in the boxing ring, beat you to a straight line,
corner you and your wife in a love triangle
and suck honey out of your tessellation.

I mean business. Have the key to box thirteen.

Dearest Lord, When Will I Die?

(cantata 8, Johann Sebastian Bach)

I'm in no special hurry; simply wished
to check in, see if your plans
differed in any way from mine.

First of all, I'd like to keep a pig;
to see the Northern Lights;
to fuse sex and feelings
in a firework display
that leaves our bodies intact.

To trip down The Spanish Steps
with granddaughter one,
watch her fill her spirit
with Keats and Shelley
then drive off in a Porsche.

To be sat in the front row
when granddaughter two
throws Torvald's manuscript
on the fire. Is Hedda
through and through. Herselves.

To secure- in other words
for you to promise-
happiness and health
to the women who love me.
All two of them

Failing all that, it's no deal,
I shall be content to pootle
on, centuries of bad jokes
and small satisfactions...
The choice is yours, Big Man.

This makes no less sense
than your secret contract.
Dearest Lord, trust me, as I trust You.



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Peter Peggall seems determined to repeat himself, at least twice over.

At nine, he read a poem at the school bazaar, inveighed against hypocrisy at Christmas and was delighted at the astonished reception, as well as riven with fear. His latest volume will be launched at Norwich Cathedral, in an international festival. A harpist called Joy will accompany him. At sixty nine, he teaches Latin at Fakenham Academy, utters Juvenal and Catullus to astonished teenagers, who are delighted to show off their knowledge to their friends. He read English in Ireland, translates Gaelic lyrics into English; rowed the ferry at Sunbury on Thames when sixteen and has just inherited a kayak in Norfolk. Pneumonia at three, thirteen, twenty three, forty three, still counting, on one and a half lungs.

First love in Holland Park at fifteen, last love to be announced, posthumously. A son at zero, dad at twenty three, grandpa at fifty six and sixty. A stick of rock, he will not cease to spell out his name nor sell his wares.

The cellophane wrapper is intact, if crumpled.

