

# *Simon Brittan-Ortiz – Four Poems*

## *Ars Longa*

When the simultaneous unfolding  
Of four thousand and forty-seven pairs  
Of wings along the sandstone cliffs at Dawlish  
In a freak year for butterflies  
Coincides with simultaneous warnings  
Of sunami off Hokkaido and Kyoto  
    Our instruments are very pleased

And terrifying armies of appeased  
Statisticians gather for the photo-  
Shoot; somewhere else a schoolboy yawning  
Seals the fate of science, and ties  
God's shoestrings together, though the smallish  
Angels still observe us with frank stares  
    From rococo or baroque mouldings.

*Hieronymus Bosch's first Therapy Session*  
(For Rolf Tschannen)

Perhaps something did happen, some cascaded violence  
Or bright migraine of sex; perhaps even a vision:

I can imagine but not remember a beckoning Christ or Virgin  
Just as I can imagine but not really remember

A childhood spent playing with clever symmetrical toys,  
Or watching insects mate, or trips to the capital.

I like the idea of Michael saying "Borrow my sword  
For a week" but no, I'm not obsessed with Apocalypse.

Besides, the past is always a country whose colours remain  
Unmixed till the present decides it's time for another go.

Jokes and God's bestiaries leap down from the margins  
Of beautiful books: when they laugh paint comes out of their mouths.

*The Various Edens*

In the just cities of the mind  
Thug Achilles sulks the war away  
    And nobody reads poetry.  
(Think how boring it would be,  
Like Mozart's sister's diary:  
*Walked again today. It didn't rain.*)

Elsewhere the tragic deaths occur,  
i.e. your deaths: sex too shall be unkind  
    To keep not metaphysics but  
Our verses warm. On Black Sea cliffs  
Exiled Ovid reads the waves:  
*Greatly instructed I shall hence depart.*

*St Vincent's Right Arm:*

Possibilities of my First Relic

A dying master-stonemason embarrassed  
by his role in an unimpressive cathedral  
exhorts his family to bury him in his jewels.

Claw your way back through martyrdom from something  
called history to something called credulity.  
Be a Havishamesque fragment. Always overdress.

I suppose I fulfil a social function,  
psychologists have interesting names for me.  
I do know I haven't seen hand cream in centuries.

Some people love illuminated books, some  
place rings on severed fingers - both interesting  
comments on the relation between form and content.

Dr Dulcamara has it on the best  
authority that the young virgin's last words gave  
the precise location of the dismembered martyr.

Regular congregation up twelve percent.  
Plus pilgrims. Then the tourists. I'll do an appeal  
for the roof and get those nice Italian bath taps.