

## Three Poems · *Martin Earl*

### LUANDA BY NIGHT

There was a closet at the back of the room.  
This was beyond time, or the breakable part.  
The words woke him and restored confidence  
in the closet's darkness. What would become  
of the closet without words? The rain chatters  
on the steps. In his dream his hands move  
to repeat themselves. The beautiful words  
take up no space. He repeats them, and  
each time he does, the image is sharpened,  
consolidated, extended, as a city is,  
a city growing by a river, centuries earlier.  
He remembered that London deepened, burned,  
then crept west, while Petersburg  
followed the Neva's left bank,  
stone houses lining the granite banked  
Moika. He would have plied the canals,  
a lighterman, as now, the shallow draft,  
and inchling wake, the pendulous flex and waft  
of the surface. Beyond the closet the darkness  
of the room was like a pond at night,  
or like wine in a dark green bottle,  
or like a spinach patch in a dawn drizzle, like cities  
dreaming of perfect cities—Jefferson's Hadley,  
or Filey from the north, with its bluff  
and rowboats. Below, the village,  
bursting out of sleep, spreads her awnings,  
the postman unslings his satchel,  
autumn leaves bounce beneath tiny boxes of light,  
housewalls warm like buns, the poets still dreaming  
in the barbershops, tired of fish sandwiches,  
and the sky clutching the city like a crutch.  
A chicken clucks in a tub. A wire salesman laughs  
at his money. Life hovers like a dirigible

above the radio tower. A city listening  
to rivers. A man dives from a pier.  
The sea falls asleep. Lorries flit through  
caves of light; traitorous sky,  
mornings shaped like desks. A whore  
shooes the pigeons from her stoop.  
The plangent chuckling of the waves at curfew.  
Ships leaning with their cargos like catatonics.  
Dockhands diving from docks into indolent slips.  
A broken taxi pleads with a tree.  
A bed stares at a bunker.  
A young boy named Paul Morel scuttles  
down a rutted lane on his bicycle.

### MAHLER'S SHED

The word order of trees outside the shed  
signals a silence inside the head  
of Mahler, a white door. A child holds  
an orb, palm-sized dream of holding nothing.  
We are each of us dressed in our quiet  
according to a noise, on the meadow's  
further side, where earth's narration  
is noticeable. How can we be human  
sitting alone in a rectangle?

The quiet is not  
the sheer quiet  
of sounds falling  
like pebbles through a shallow pool.  
A plop, and ripple, fall in silence, rest  
in silence with their brothers,  
foreshortened by the concentrating mind.  
I am not saying the mind at work  
is like a forest pool; but the forest pool  
is a mind at work, in the worded quiet of the wood.