

# Peter Theunynck

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Dutch into English  
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## Engraving

The way people fly  
in old engravings, so clear-cut  
so credulous.

Between portraits of emperors  
and soldiers, vertebrates and  
whales, so irrefutable.

Did they lose the knack later on,  
due to a loss of elasticity  
in their fingers, too much lead

in their bloodline? Swallows  
in waiting, chattering  
on telephone wires.

# Mother

Far from the Indians in the camp,  
from people smelling of oil,  
the pencil behind the  
greengrocer's ear.  
Far from the undercoat on the gate,  
the sand in one's hair,  
from all that's alive,  
the little brother lies still in the cot.

The newspaper doesn't know what  
to do with its cod. The ounce of tomatoes  
blows its nose in the bag – sadness  
leaking everywhere. The paint catches  
flies and the sky looks blue.

The father keeps on blowing air  
and presses keys no longer  
generating sound.  
A walk on a tiled floor, to  
those looking back, is vexingly

slow. We put a doll in  
a box, leave small change on  
a saucer, eat some butter biscuits,  
bow to everything. No, candles  
aren't for us. The soil is hard  
to our spades. The neighbours behind  
the privet hedge are silent.

You can hear her  
cawing in the crows by the canal.

# Canadians

My father said: here they lie,  
the Canadians. I saw them standing  
by the canal, in their grey clothing.  
Endless rows, fit for the slaughter.

Shoulder to shoulder, they stood:  
the slightest wind and off they'd go.

In peace. Canadians on both  
sides. Here for too long  
to go back. Too deep  
in the ground to march away.

# Hippopotami

They reside in palaces along the Seine.

People dim their chambers' lights.

People hardly dare to cough, people  
gather heaps of statistics about them.

They are arrows on cross-reference cards,  
lemmas in full-colour guides, pebbles  
in the splashing streams of words,  
a catch in an exam.

It is forbidden to touch them.  
To wake them up. Don't talk,  
they only speak dead languages.

That they have passed through hands,  
through desert storms and graves, endure  
the wars, is not the point right now.

# Lay me down

She asked: change me  
into a stone. Or better still:  
a prehistoric bone.

Lay me on the edge of something.  
No longer deal with me.  
Mean nothing to me.

Lay me down. Cut out my time,  
let it graze in the meadows,  
let it rave on the prairies.

Do not blow me out. Do not overtake me.  
Don't dive for me within myself.  
Wait for me unwearyingly.

Grow lovelier each day because of me.

# Don't people just love bars

On that Friday in May - 25°C in the shade – the Frankfurt  
gorilla makes a decision, yes sir, the Frankfurt Zoo  
super-gorilla, without an escort, without permission:

«we're good to go». He just does it. Past the gate. As fear.  
It's spattered everywhere. It jumps about like kangaroos!  
Suddenly everyone a sloe, each heart jimbays to its nearest village.

With a handful of peanuts, by the skinny arm of a girl,  
sixteen, from which boot did her heart rise up, back to the cage.  
That's quite enough. Why this outburst?

Sudden flood of people. All peeling off their shrubby skin.  
Walk out of bounds. Reveal their gleaming teeth. What an ordeal.  
So cute, that helpless beast. Don't people just love bars.

# Little green spade

A little green spade is my hound.

I hold it tightly in my hand.

I hardly ever put it in my mouth.

A little green spade is my hound.

When I sleep, it sleeps beside me.

Without a sound. It digs,

to my surprise, far deeper than me.

A little green spade is my hound.

It swims as a gun dog,

guards as a sheepdog. Never

takes a jog without me.

A little green spade is my hound.

If someone wishes to hurt him

I bark for him by choice, because

my poor little dog has no voice.

A little green spade is my hound.

# Removal

We carried a part of your life outside.  
Piling up on the platform all you'd gathered  
under our roof. It lay in ropes, in piles,  
blindfolded in boxes: moving as much as possible

at once to a larger city where you'd live in smaller  
rooms with stranger folk. No longer with us.  
You said you'd often return. I knew how years  
before I'd promised the same while lugging boxes,

but I saw the flicker of another life in your eyes,  
in wider lanes with taller buildings, trees and terraces  
in many languages. The golden years of conquest. Time  
for us to empty out, let go, which always takes some doing.

We'd have to get by with less of you.