

Pauline Stainer

The Convoy

Not the profound machinery
of gods,
but military vehicles
coming from great distance,
headlights scenting
the sandstorm.

A more intense country –
the light dropping its guard
on the great dust
of the world,
sand-vipers
in their hot yellows

and beyond,
as if there were no
rules of engagement,
racks of new-dyed sarees
billowing
the scarlet wind.

Ghost Writers to the Emperor

They still inhabit language,
caught between the unsaid
and the unsayable,
hands dappled as apricots
in the latticed light

making their mark
like elephants at a salt-lick,
until only the text
and its inspired omissions
risk the silence.

Mantegna's Hares

We looked out –
the weather whistle-blue,
hares running with the wind
above water
where the sun never reaches.

Give me
the pulse of a hare,
that zigzag between
breath and the moment –
Mantegna's hares, still boxing
beside the agony in the garden.