

## Oranges and Bell Tower

Paul Hetherington

The orchard was littered  
with fallen oranges;  
fear and anger  
fumed in hot air.  
Now we're told  
not to speak of such things,  
as if goblins have risen  
to stand before us  
with flattening accents.  
Our language tastes  
of black ink and wire  
and I turn in my hands  
a mouldy orange—  
as if it's tainted  
by congestive words.  
In my homeland  
a gunship circles  
the green, laden trees.

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Procedures march on.  
I clear my throat  
but no-one wants  
to hear of a bell tower  
shattered by bombing  
or the coruscations  
of broken vowels.  
In this tribunal  
the allotted minutes  
quickly pass.  
I'm escorted within  
a closed corridor;  
remove my belt,  
take off clothes.  
Addressed by a name  
that isn't my own,  
I'm told to step forwards;  
told to stand back.  
The vistas close  
like a storyteller  
arriving too soon  
at the end of a poem,  
swinging at silence  
like a tongueless bell.

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At last I take memory  
into an orchard  
surrounded by farmland.  
A five-year wait  
to stand among oranges  
in clearing air;  
to plant and tether  
some dignity.