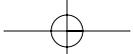
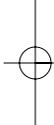
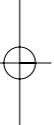


## Snow Calling

AGNIESZKA STUDZINSKA was born in Poland in 1975. She came to England in the early 80s. She studied Cultural Studies at Norwich School of Art & Design and has an MA in Creative Writing from the UEA. She has previously worked as a freelance researcher in broadcasting and now teaches and lives in London with her husband and daughter. *Snow Calling* is her debut collection.



# Snow Calling

AGNIESZKA STUDZINSKA



CAMBRIDGE

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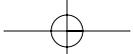
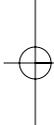
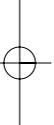
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*For my grandparents*

*Weronika Korzeniewska-Sergiej and Marian Sergiej*

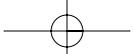
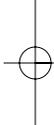
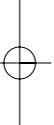
*Jadwiga Studzinska and Adam Studzinski*



## Acknowledgements

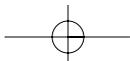
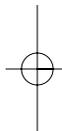
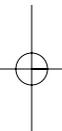
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“I was going to say something,  
and stopped”

—THOMAS KINSELLA



## Snow Calling

I

Winter opens to snow  
    blinds the field,  
branches splice like roots in a landscape

dead with beauty—  
    the timeline of a train  
slips through it, a cold vapour—

our faces steady themselves in windows  
disappear into the air of passengers

smeared across them like graffiti  
like the hairline splinters of passing.

I listen to the snow calling

as it settles on wood rising in water,  
    a signature of footsteps in ice.

II

Her sickness is a necklace of sores  
clicks of air at the back of her throat  
sentences between dying and death—

she is a wooden petal sundered

tells me *you are my medicine*—

the glance almost too clear—too lambent for this world,  
we sit there untranslatable like absence  
listening  
to the snow calling.

III

I stand in the garden at midnight, you sleep upstairs  
snow becoming your breath as if the invisible is made visible—

now anything feels possible—even a snow owl  
in this backyard, swooping low in a choreography

of swirls, its feathers like snow preying on my voice  
and somewhere storms of

drunken villagers cut this surge

a day's work in their mouth  
years in their hands gloved with weight—

the owl's wingspan like a cloud flying above their heads.

VI

We lose each other in speech, tongue turned to a pebble  
the pebble skimming the surface,  
water breaking into shavings of cyan  
snow light at an angle saying more than we can—  
the snow owl holding this light us inside it  
blanched by the moon and the workings of distance.

## Skating

Under the ice, the veins of water spread—  
white blood, white feathers, white roots

of history—You. Blade-steps  
chisel suspended water,

your face whittled with lack of control  
chipped with danger unlike childhood,

unflinching & blind, your body glacial  
in its six foot of skin & strayed time

numbed by an openness of direction,  
your feet afraid & yet so certain

to skate along the closures of winter.  
Vulnerability glides like a swan

into my arms— we hold on.  
Under the ice, the water balances weight—

the season unfolds into us     deftly  
inhabits stolen years, drawing them  
                                          again in ice.

## Seasons

The blossom is a canopy of doves  
tucked into themselves  
on the brim of turning      again —

A year compressed into petals.

They indent air with their return,  
bring evening into its own blossom  
of indecision —  
this sunlight of indifference  
to the worlds we've shaped  
by our conceit of ourselves  
as a *couple* or people  
ignoring failures  
which fall like an accidental snowdrift  
in the wrong season —  
perhaps this is the answer of sorts,  
    a corolla of a flower  
splitting  
    from its own core.

## Language

She speaks rain to launder daylight, to be green—  
decipher the relationship of light to half light,

liquid to stone, to herself, the unspeakable  
alphabet of someone's escape into more light.

She listens to the measure of a fall, lilt of its travel,  
the rhetorical pattern it cuts— She is untold.

She speaks rain with rain slipping  
on a pavement's tongue into a pavement's throat,

swallows the deception of this lightness  
mouths its bleached ambivalence

as it descends between territories—  
the discomfort, a wet splinter in skin.

## An Observation on Figs

Sycamore figs distended  
in a family garden —  
we picked them this morning  
or should I say  
you picked them  
in your determination  
& resilience against the fractured  
branches of your own being &  
I watched you  
vanish between these branches  
& emerge like a swimmer  
out in the green tarns of foliage  
& shout something about  
finding or damage  
& detain your breath once more &  
dive into the loose light  
of your life & this first summer  
alone, without him —  
gulp for air as you re-emerged  
releasing more figs,  
seeds of unwanted independence  
& not knowing where to put all this  
or to whom you should give all this  
& why this new light  
makes you feel invisible?  
Between the skin  
of fruit and pulp,  
you tell a daughter  
not to depend  
& choose cautiously

as you disappear into the contradictions  
of what is whole  
& what is left behind  
on the branches  
that you emptied.

## Swallows

The driver knows this road, scooped  
or licked in shape, branching in flight  
like the swallows above stringing  
one corner of our vision with speculation  
as to how, in the shin of the sky, where  
in its levelled chemistry?  
we find whatever it is which makes us  
want to remember how things started—  
the pleasure of this skimming against  
lost air— watching our daughter  
do exactly that, already forgetting  
every first movement she arcs  
the swift travel of it—  
desire in the new touch on a world,  
her teaching of us,  
as the swallows glide between their searching  
of all that is looped, needled, lusted—  
something moored  
deep in itself,  
a recovery of understanding  
who, we might have been—  
they arrow the way to take us  
closer            there.

## Holding

Holding her mother's hand  
the way water holds onto itself,  
the little girl is waiting to jump  
down from the edge  
of the derelict fountain —  
counting to three,  
holding her mother's breath  
in hers — as she jumps.  
I jump with her as she runs  
still holding her mother's hand  
two musical notes on the score of a pavement.  
I look at our hands  
your tiny fingers gripping my thumb,  
hard to imagine them touching  
someone else rather than me  
or holding the way I held  
your father that night —  
I notice hands, scorched fingers,  
mother — what she fights  
just to hold on.

## The Bee's Whisper

Caught between wing and petal,  
a gentle fugacious music

disappearing inside the ear of a flower  
or the opening of its china red mouth—

breath almost swallowing this nameless bloom:  
the lack of knowledge for the language of nature,

the inability to pinpoint the pleasures of a species,  
the curfews of summer—your voice from my own,

fingers like filaments behind a neck—that sensation  
and how it slipped into something else.

Look at the bee—  
as she settles from one flower to the next

lifting what looks like air into air,  
the mechanical nature hidden in the beauty of her craft—

a reminder of labour. Her own efforts always undone,  
that pattern seeming unbroken,

the way dried grass is broken by bodyweight  
and the bee hovering above      playing time.

## Mosquito

An eyelash fragility  
inside the iris of our room  
the stringed hum —  
    this unwavering  
solo, close enough to hear  
the lust           working,  
a ruthless desire  
like all desire  
willing and oblivious in a loom,  
weaving that indiscretion  
in flaws,  
the hairlines or hems  
of all that bends to a pleasing —  
You suck me  
and all that sucking,  
whaling of flesh and  
everything that comes before it  
like a clause  
    or an idea  
placed and easily moved,  
fecunds as you hook me  
with a bite, curling  
as a wet finger or your  
gaze of doing —  
we drift back to a younger,  
fiercer self — backsliding  
of blood — each others —  
we were the sluice of its matter,  
free,  
    in that entomology,  
preserved in the briefest of spaces  
displayed

as if on a leaf, the glass case of a bed.  
Tonight in your steadfast making,  
we've regained that sweet preposition  
that links us.  
Afterwards I want to find you  
clap death shut,  
taper this love—so that in its looking  
we allow ourselves  
this pleasure  
a chainlink of evidence  
the sepal trail of our living,  
exposed, endured.

## Fish

The fish like limp flowers in her salt eaten hands  
rubbing flakes into fish skin, as if to awaken them  
from a bottomless sleep, eyes sea-black summoned  
in shock, jolted into absence with a glutinous glare  
or troubled by one action leading another:  
like kissing for instance — an intrusion of tongue  
through a backstairs world — the fall which follows,  
like a gust of breath alloyed in its own loss.  
Growing older is like this —  
watching two carp swimming in the bath  
from a child's horizon, in awe  
of their synchronised flow of love,  
their ugly, dun beauty unaware, just swimming  
together in the stark water knowing only how to be —  
I wonder if we can ever be them, so complete  
and unhinged by fear of being lonely — or losing  
the other in the life we've driven —  
if I too will stand in a kitchen, years from now  
with death in my hands elegantly held  
and think of skinning fish,  
desiring to return them to water.

## Amaryllis Nights

I am sorry  
for its slenderness  
pared blood-shot  
beauty paralysed  
in its own independence  
the flower-head  
immersed in redness  
your dislike of this colour—  
in the bathroom  
years before, light saw  
the diagrams on skin,  
a delicate calligraphy of cells  
hidden inside  
their own architecture.  
Amaryllis nights  
poisoned mornings  
the doctor writing  
on my shoulder blades  
as if I was his letter—  
the conviction of things not seen,  
this knotted bud of disease.

## Air

Tastes inexpensive—  
of coal, mothballs  
something outlived  
like the tartness of netted light  
between the gooseflesh of walls  
that bear you &  
the drops of snow that  
fall from your mouth—  
as if you were discarding  
your own presence  
in this family house  
or making it permanent  
white & intelligent—implicit  
like shutters of snapped air  
or loneliness—  
the way it falters & twines  
in its water,  
how you tread it  
with memory,  
in its definition of yourself  
it plays back everything  
to keep.  
I think of you  
in a tarn of patience  
for that air—a paring,  
the alternative  
it offers  
as it blows you invisible  
to the recall  
of its caw.

## In the Narrow Light

Of this garden  
it is fetid—shrubby curbed  
to modesty or self consciousness,  
the underpinnings of April  
all stick-thin & pewter.  
Things have been slow  
to flush this year  
unbuckled and vague  
like foreign words  
that paintwork the ribcage  
of this mass, in which  
something close to innocence  
once was its brush  
    the catch—  
how small the world in here  
recondite—no longer anyone's,  
tugging at the sleeve of skins  
asking, if we're ready—if  
we are hollow enough  
to carry what we see,  
destroy with our looking  
and learn again—  
history, a slither  
in the gust of perception  
changing before us  
as we make it  
in this garden  
in the growing of something  
    for yourself.

## An Observation on Figs II

Like bruises sucked  
from someone's skin—  
brushed purple clench  
hold the clustering seeds  
plashed together  
like the vulva of air  
about to spill—  
I can't help but think this.  
I wish I didn't.  
I can't help but pull apart  
the very thing in front of me  
as if to punish,  
to watch these roots  
loosen into that black earth of  
your speech—  
I want to say how  
little you've changed  
as if the making of your new world  
is the unmaking of sentences  
you strung before—  
we are helpless  
and still persistent—  
isn't this progress?  
How much of this fruit  
is fruit  
how much of this  
stays on the ground.

## Wolf

Rumours like rain fall on a meadowland  
in a village, in a country, in a town, a house

on a plot of earth—an ear drum  
pressed to the ground

the landscape flat enough to fold  
into an envelope like a letter

bearing what you didn't want to hear—  
people shredded like wood,

the wolf howling for his pack  
as his teeth sink further,

printing new borders with his paws  
licking his fur in the coppice of snow.

## Train

A woman holds a letter—  
waited all day for its coolness.

In my hands it is pale winter, driftwood.

She sits callused in her composure  
like the wind which took your daughter

to another country  
brought her back as a woman

and made you feel less like a father  
then any time before—

Reading under breath,  
each word a crosshatch of silence,

I watch her swallowing letters,  
if only to write my own.

## Mountains

Perfumed with wood  
she presses to her skewed lips  
a porcelain cup of milky tea—  
the precision of her movements  
beaten—blood-blue,  
*“I don’t miss home, just the mountains,  
in the beginning I could see the mountains  
in rows of chimneys, that was enough—  
I still consider myself a visitor.”*

## Leaving

I am watching silence  
                                 this violet light  
                                                 shackled to spring  
 &       widening like  
                                 spilt water,  
 its detachment like a perfect landing  
 of sunlight —

I am there with my mother  
                                 waving away  
 the thin hour    the interruption of it  
                                 at the bus stop,  
 grandparents in the background  
 my hands grasping  
                                 to catch fallen fires  
 & her voice in my ear  
                                 pulling us —  
 my not knowing why —  
 a life lost in a new language  
 or the body I now feel  
                                 buoyant in my own body,  
 scared of its leaving,  
 the risk —  
                                 like that violet light  
                                 coupling, yoked, its pang.

## On Returning



What she saw was years wrapped in snow, breath melting  
it as she opened the door to find that everything  
was as it had always been: the snowdrift of television  
a room swaddled by intangible light—



He unfolds the years from his chair with a glance to the left,  
a decade collapsing in his body as he sees her— limbs once  
pinned to the cloth of the seat return to their owner,  
stretch outwards like a spray of twigs, his wife walking  
in slow motion toward them both— all three encircled  
like a hole in mid air—



From a distance their meaning is irrevocable, they are dead  
shot by bullets of air— evening almost stillborn in its shade,  
irreplaceable years between them covering their silences—  
light on the tip of their tongues,  
that soft gurgle as she looks up to take the tears whole.



This is the first time she has seen water pouring from a man,  
a defeated sound, unashamed in its frankness.  
Nineteen years of wondering how  
this might be, here now, drenched in snow hours—  
in their crumpled existence            they are born.

## Reunion

Inside this thin shaft of light  
 is another  
 diagonally cleaving  
     this room in two  
     clasping  
 its wholeness at the same time  
 boundaries & our belongings  
     rigid—  
 anatomy of light  
     fraying,  
 sounds which we cannot hear  
 or does it play tricks  
 with our hearing?  
 its pitch like a thread slackening,  
 surely,  
 we have heard ourselves before—  
 our mouths filled with  
     broken veins of light.  
 It is this hindsight of trust,  
 a reunion of one lost light to another  
 like a scapular sunlight  
     that promises  
 in its blades a mending—  
 such eloquence,  
 this back handed beauty      the way it blinds  
 & divulges at the same time  
 so that you think  
     you see yourself  
 free of meaning, erosion.

## Whispers

She wants to be a whisper,  
a titanium spool of air  
long & curling  
along the body of a habitat  
astute in movement  
like a snake perhaps  
through a fence post  
hooked—  
& wants his whispers  
to outline her shoulders,  
spine to stomach to arse—  
read across her  
like a half mapped history,  
wishes to believe the sincerity  
in the speckling of his voice  
as it carries her into  
the empty sound of light  
& like water drowning the wind  
immerse her in the need  
to become that soft hiss,  
that guesswork,  
gagged—  
the snake looped around the  
trunk of skin,  
forked-tongue  
snarled.

## Hotel

If this is the language of shadow  
 then darkness is something lighter than imagined  
                   disclosing like evidence —  
 the way smoke spells invisible  
                   a pendulum of broken web  
 hanging in his throat  
 as he counts minutes on the breath he rends,  
           like intimacy —  
                   a silence of no obligation  
 how that also rives —                   lightening

in summer                   in all the summers before this —  
 an us in a four walled-otherness  
 on a plight of biographies, backbones and wings

the span of           —off-grey of cotton

as you unzip your jeans, we extract this *stopping*  
 and *lengthening* of moments —

I no longer recognise your body —

even my own — like an echo  
 moving forwards, holding a future moving backwards

into sheets of skin — raw.  
 I make no apologies in this sleepless  
           magenta air  
 a bloodshed  
                   we hold like a moon in our hands.

## The Cactus

I buy him a cactus for his birthday,  
it is the idea that I bought.

He places the cactus on the sill,  
measures the light surrounding it and against himself.

You must promise, I say  
and he says he *will* even before he knows what he is promising,

—always too quick.

*What?* he'd say and I would say *nothing*,  
listening to this sound in my own voice

as I rotate the cactus for more light    thinking,

I should have bought another that demanded less light,  
thinking            about the consequence of a promise

or something like that.

## Tattoo

You are pressed down by something  
indiscernible but say nothing—  
your air splayed on the wall, dew in touch  
all the conversations you never had  
held in that starless gasp—  
and her hand on the eagle across your chest  
waiting  
    and my hand many years ago on the  
very same eagle, pretending to draw him  
waiting  
    for you to wake up  
wanting  
    to know why there was a bird  
just there— what did it mean?  
a silence on the blue line of permanency,  
*you're too young*, you'd say.



## Solanum Tuberosum

Tonight is a boiled potato, indefinable sweetness covered in salt.  
Tonight the potato is in the womb of our palms.  
Tonight she delivers lines of our descent.  
Tonight is a root dug from soil by hands moulding burrows.  
Tonight is the dearth, a near divorce in the bootlicked air  
of the 40's, it is all the stories you have hidden  
in the peelings of all the things you have lost.  
Tonight is a liver-spotted hour on a plate,  
or that apparition through a window  
that opens a decade like earth or a meditation  
which flits like a wing, resting long enough  
to catch the colour of white.  
Tonight, around this table I am digging potatoes for her.

## Photograph

The skeleton-light of soldiers stand against a wall  
like a chain or a sequence of something—

they look as if they are pissing on human bones  
or wild flowers with their own oblivion,

laughing in that boyish, deserted manner—  
It's their confidence in the *fact*,

the unstoppable— the way they hold themselves  
decoding the sound of a moment

split from its own and the sound of air breaking—  
death folding into them: geraniums—

crushed—they hang—  
upside down hands over their genitals,

us looking at this unopened world,  
wanting something already dead.



II

Like shooting stars—you run across the vaults of sundown  
a pencil drawn map crumpled in a pocket,  
skirting between trees that hold the colour of earth's rust—

they veil you in their destroyed elegance  
snow capped, angled like sundials—

they are the recordings  
of this event and all other happenings

they are the absolute—

in their amputation

they remind you of all those people children,  
black keys on a piano—

they saw everything.



## IV

You imagine that you are living someone else's life  
it is easier that way

to accept your fate

geography of light

like a broken sky

over this room, over the farmhouse

hidden

somewhere in Grodno.

Night after night you drink a little, play chess

work out exactly how you got here

and sting yourself with forgetfulness

mime the playing of piano

your brother listening to this blind music

with his eyes shut

arms open as if to beg forgiveness

for being him

as if to embrace his silhouette and let it disappear—

Night after night you make promises

to recreate the sound of daylight,

sometimes you venture outside

imagining the night as morning

inhale the smoke and flesh of the fields—

think about animals.

V

It's not clear how many years were closed

how many moments wooded

winters cached in purple-dark

how many matchsticks disguised floors

how many butterflies turned into letters

how many hours softened in their inkling

how many meals eaten in a maroon silence

how many afterthoughts became a future

how many voices turned into birds

how many wishes redefined the self

how many snowdrops turned white

how much of nothing became the matter

how much waiting                      how

*for we are where we are not.*

## VI

After the war the ravens were the black pearls of the field  
glistening with unease like a century changing—

You lived in the impossible  
like the burning of snow  
— saw the impossible being done  
nothing from then— frightened

*I am the space where I am.*

After the war you left for Łódź  
in the nettled air of this city  
the buildings became free of the streets  
streets reinvented themselves in rubble  
rubble became new earth  
became your haunting—  
disguised you in its concertina of concrete  
the grey orchards of linen—

desire and necessity thickening  
a new kind of air—

This city became your mother  
who no one ever knew  
her body in the semblance of things.

VII

You wore suits

You listened to your wife

You were lucky

You gave little away

You had two daughters

You sucked the ghost of air.

*I am my own hiding place.*

## Cemetery

We stand outside of what is now—  
earth sinking with human weightlessness

the blurred breath of rain  
plunges blue like a clearing

or an estuary agape with knowing  
as it's pulled in like you

a spider weaving her own cessation and force  
with that threadbare silk stitch.

You have decided on your own position,  
as always measuring

the spaces between your husband  
self your lives,

this wall made of bones—protecting—  
impenetrable at last,

assurance frees you into a seamless  
web as you wrap your prey  
free falling on your own  
capability.

## Calling

She kept calling with all her breath thinning  
like a brook downwards until we surrounded

her— drifting clouds across the spine of its  
bearer, you call this living? she would say,

gesturing to the stucco walls of the self.  
You showed us solitude—

its pattern of waking to the drift of yourself  
in a distant room where you watch the trees

no longer weaving the open space,  
leaves unravelling nothing short

of their own mysterious descend  
as each one drops, you sink further

into their meticulous world of camouflage  
and steal your own memories—

a fox in the tulip darkness, her call  
is the shrill that wakes what's human

muffles this hearing with feathers  
brings all that is free, all that is particle

through the pores of midnight.

## Music

His fingers rising, dropping,  
removing themselves from him

my mother watching her father  
her own mother behind her,

the room a portraiture of work.  
Inside this flat, composition

the arrangement of all that falls  
like hailstones of truth break

into sound and my mother  
dances like a ballerina, her mother

is now watching the blue smoke  
of this indelible dance unaware,

that his death will be withheld  
from his daughter as she pirouettes

unaware  
of his afterlife in her mouth like a chord.

## Ending

A stopping at an edge—  
sensing a world of minerals, mistakes, the molecules of air,

water, the width and breadth of love, a vacancy—  
this singular moment in its spectrum of sadness,

where are we in this immeasurable opening?  
voices back tracking, backbones against backbones,

skin becoming rivulets of sand pulling us in and away,  
spume of flesh as it fractures—

the nakedness of being clothed and listening  
to the raking of leaves, their shelled rasping

as our breathing pushes them apart,  
our remembering closes them in.

## Snow Calling

I heard it—a faint quail of something unborn  
                   clouds growing in ache  
 the callous of air at midnight   warming  
 as the bonfire in its gallantry gets taller and rounder,  
 swells like a yell—the seconds stock-still,

we stood there cowed—divided  
                                   snow calling   spring  
 the wind bit harder, swept chairs in its gash  
 uncoupled each root from its body  
 unearthed memories of being little,  
 the walnut tree wide-eyed   self willed,  
 I am gripping tighter—  
                                   snow calling

a garden spins in its own generative grammar,  
 we are all waiting—wet with wind  
                                                           wishing  
 for the wind to blow another hundred wishes—  
 unbury the almost buried,  
 branches   bone-black  
 smouldering as the wind hushes a struggle,  
                                   wishing  
 for it to stop.

                  And both of you  
 in deep sleep elsewhere in your skins           out of reach  
 my very own two wishes—  
*you have given me something to live for*, she says as if prolonging the end.

*Notes on Haunting*

*Je suis l'espace ou je suis*

I am the space that I am — Noel Arnaud

*Car nous sommes o nous somme pas*

We are where we are not — Pierre-Jean Jove

I am my own hiding place — Joe Bousquet

