

MICHAEL FARRELL

Telephone || | *O* | *x* √ / |

The metaphors are coming ... no – they're ringing. I built you a bridge to bring you this message, but it took years and you were already dead. Suppose the telephone is out ... Or suppose I've been putting my thoughts between covers all these years; yet you never noticed, or at least not what I thought you would. You didn't recognise my voice; you'd been reading some other, perhaps of my generation, my flatmate even. I encrypted your name, perhaps, into everything. Your name means encryption anyway, so you can hardly object. Yet you distance yourself: when someone calls and asks for you, you just say "Who?" I'm sitting here, writing to you, or thinking of calling you, in my underwear, my cigarette, my Coke can hair ... The possibility of death in the room, or the telephone. Eventually, that's how you (might) know. Suppose I want to just see where you live or used to, but the bridge is out, or you or I have no webcam. Or it's just too late, because of flooding. Did I tell you about the last time I went out, in 1987 I think it was, I drank myself out the window / under someone's feet / got run over on the beach ... You didn't recognise my face; you'd been learning another's from the lips up or down doesn't make much difference. I hope at least that you noticed that the possibility of this being a sonnet passed some time ago. I'm typing into the telephone. I'm with one of my peers at the café. Yeah, we're probably sexually involved, but you didn't hear it from me, I only tell that stuff to – well I don't even tell it, it tells itself. I haven't been sexually involved since 1985. I put it all in a poem: I didn't even have your number then. What is it 9653 something?

It spells “Wolfmoth”, I know that. It’s hard to get that ambience in when you’re writing. Kids fighting, television, sirens ... The urban domestic. I’m quiet. You can see why I needed a bridge. I should’ve got one of my artist friends to help; or my father, he can build a house. I was playing a game of patience, calling from one suit to another. I could hear howling from down by the water. Are you a man? Your voice is deep enough. It’s as simple as saying, “Hello, this is the Sun. Can I speak to the flower of the house?” And you’d say, (or I’d say) “Who?” And I wouldn’t (you wouldn’t) know if you meant (I meant) Who is calling, or Who do you want to speak to. Whether it was contempt or pollen in your (my) throat. There aren’t the keys to say what I want to say. I don’t know what it was like before, when everything personal was written. Everything not delivered directly. What do you hear? The sentiment, the gentleness left out, held back? We talk on the telephone like there’s no history of voices / like we’re Tony Soprano trying to get some sympathy. I could’ve called you, or someone: I was writing this. I didn’t take the phone off the hook, they don’t have hooks any more. That figure has moved to a new context ... The party is a metaphor, was it in the 80s? When you or someone walked me up and down the carpark, like a message that couldn’t get through. Like an outdated technology or feeling. It was Richard, I was being deliberately vague, but I don’t know where he is now, I couldn’t find him on Facebook. You don’t have to be a poet to talk to the Sun. Or that story-image is an allegory of our talking to anything – we don’t know what, despite the familiarity of the voice on the other end. It’s not the sound of our voices we love, we don’t hear them very well, except maybe when reading poetry aloud, but the vibration, the phoneme-formation, as we try to talk Hebrew for the first time. We are already writing poetry in Hebrew, though ignorant of that tradition. Yet we can probably assume there are Hebrew poets who don’t give a shit about their tradition also – at least partly – not giving

a shit being essential to caring deeply. The tradition is not actually anything in itself, it's just a shelf to put it all on. It's the very emblem of a thing that's taken for granted. But you go somewhere where the shelves and even the bridges are made of shoeboxes and fishheads, and you wonder if you'd take that call. You stare into the river, like there's a clue, but the clue is in the voices, you don't know whose, perhaps the Sun's in all its plurality, history and inflection. The telephone is the Mother / the ocean bed / the Middle Ages. It works underwater. It's silent, not really there. It's like a pronoun standing in for someone not, as it's said, of this world. You're actually a metaphor, a still-workable technology; in waiting for euthanasia. A shearer by day, glam rocker by night: a telephone talking to itself, and eating a jar of jam in the process. Everyone notices the call. They themselves call more often. Shearer by dayyyy ... glam rocker by niiiight. No one suspected anything dodgy at the shearer end. You use your one telephone call on your stylist. We go driving, Larry, Stella, Catweazle. We see a blade of grass and think of a movie, like *Dial M for Murder*. I am Jessica Lange circa 1987, Stella is Hope Lange, Larry is Fritz Lang, Catweazle is Oscar the Grouch. Grover has been wrongly accused of murder – Oscar is unsecretly pleased, yet can't resist the temptation of catching the real villain. "It was the way you took the call", he says to Fritz. Grover has lost all his fur due to the anxiety of having to play himself. The glue calls but has nothing to affix itself to: its voice floats off into the smog of blue hair and glue factory fumes. I built a greenhide bridge to get this message to you, but your sister's boyfriend said you weren't there, but with a poet or poet's nephew. Ignominy has a new definition. I could build another bridge, but it does actually seem like a waste of time. As I retrace my footsteps I hear the voices of trolls beneath my feet. I'd be scared but I recognise the voices and the words: it's the Goodies mumbling – in harmony – the obscure Bee Gees ballad "This Side of Ridiculous".

I only know it because of a film I saw at a festival about a Bee Gees impersonator; he sang that song over and over. Zero by dayyyy, grave robber by niiiight. The walking back is slow, but not as slow as if I dismantled it ... The *Collected Poems* of David Campbell is calling the *Collected Poems* of Robert Gray. I still have a vague hope that you'll follow, saying Jesus Christ, why do you have to make things so difficult? And I'll answer, as if on the telephone, "Who?" You'll put the *Bible* on, and I'll recognise the words. I guess I'd really rather talk to *Concerning The Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*, or an Ivy Compton-Burnett in the voice of John Peel. Halfway back is a *Beyonce's Fried Chicken* that wasn't there before. It employs beautiful women that you tip to spit into your food. I climb the four flights to my flat, like a human, my feelings all calling me at once, my bladder of course directing a call from some high pressure zone. I'm wondering what's in the fridge that I can wear ... ? There's a gazpacho red ("Hello? Will you accept this adjective?" "I was hoping for protein ..." "We have an old heart here no-one wants." "A heart that's an adjective?" "It might be a hearty that lost its tail.") telephone at the top of a shelf, I take it down and listen. My ear hairs vibrate.