

Orpheus in the Classroom

The Italian boys on a one-way exchange
disturbed our summer. We hadn't expected
blonde hair, blue eyes
blue as the jeans they wore to lessons

their white shirts dazzled
reflecting the sunlight

we sulked and sweltered in uniform

they were louche
they swaggered
they were way too happy
laughing in a corner of the grey school yard

they blatantly smoked

the teachers were speechless.

A year or so later Sir pressed play
on a hissing cassette, told us to listen:
one of those boys, compliant after all
his voice like honey falling from a spoon

he brought our Latin text to life
reciting the lines we thought we knew

the snake at her ankle, descent, pursuit
and heartless warning: don't look back

(who doesn't look back?)

he astonished us

those chiding consonants

when he spoke her name

Eurydice

Eurydice

beseeking his lover not to forsake him

as his disembodied

voice unspooled, we understood

or so we thought

how love and song bring back the dead.

We didn't learn. We were too young.

Elizabeth Porter

3rd Place in the Open Poetry Category

2020 International Competitions - Wells Festival of Literature

www.wellsfestivalofliterature.org.uk/2020-competitions#open-poetry-competition