

Orkney Ruins

—Nicholas Jones

Ancient volcanic swells of land
push up against the thin encasing wrap
of turf and grass. Hard-won barley
struggles in the ever-present western wind.

These ruined houses, half-walls, cling to earth,
grasping their tiny arcs of protected spacey, kkikiki,
circles that these long-dead folk called home.

The wind rips at them,
the sea beats at their edges.
They endure, but only at unimaginable cost,
ruined, roofless, silent.

They tell us almost nothing.

How did these people live?
What stories did they tell?
What songs helped pass
the long dark nights?

I ask, and no one knows.
But then, that other, nearer perplexity,
my own wind-battered imagination,
leaps up and stares me in the face,
knocking me aslant,
demanding *me* those same demands:

How do *you* live?
What are *your* stories?
What songs do *you* bring against the encroaching dark?

14 June 2016
M.S. *Le Boréal*, at sea off Norway
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