**Division of the Chaff** *by Sheila Aldous*

A battle for this rim of earth: propelled

by jets of rain, this arithmetical season,

where Spring is wounded in the ground

in its fight for life –

I count buds ripening on Magnolia,

add up wallflowers after overwintering,

and think of the cold war of nature –

I wonder how some escape.

I see if I don’t prepare, wield the spade,

dig the beds in time, masked invaders

with innocent smiles and cuckoo lips

will multiply, settle in,

run amok and smother shrubs, wipe out

flags of peony, heads of antirrhinum,

choke roots of assent, stunning rose,

love-lies-bleeding, be murderers in my midst.

Spring is nature’s tooth and claw,

at risk of zealous over-gardening.

Sheds hide skulls crossed with bones,

aimed to kill those not counted out or in.

So weapons sharpened: secateurs, shears,

hedge-trimmers, long-arms, pruning hooks

and axes for slashing, cutting, chopping,

for subtracting and eliminating life.

Spring is arithmetic on a country walk.

I count the ways; the stiles, the hills I climb,

the words the river speaks as it gossips

misinformation, disinformation, illusion.

I calculate an empty field mid-trimester,

tally seedlings planted, still sleepy, in beds,

bunkers, caves, unaware of the laugh

of crows bombing from a gash of sky.

In Spring I hear the farmer load his bullets.

Coldly he enumerates how many he will need

to take the lives of hooded eyes, maggoty

skins, worm-hearted spreaders of a plague.

Vengeance is his: he adopts the phrase

to punish the plunderers from darkened skies

gathering in the service of assassins.

I see he has them by the throat – divided.

He blows away the killing smoke,

counts the corpses in the crop, buries

them in fat-earth graves as his field turns

black to red – and in their place grows wheat.

Chaff and death are just numbers not reported.