David Campbell Prize:
Commended: Dr Paul Magee - ‘Like words laid down in sleep’

‘Like words laid down in sleep’

Like words laid down in sleep,
the rubbings of a statue’s lips:
nothing we write can really stare.

And still,
a face looks through you
whenever you open your mind, i.e.

all speech is rumour.
The chains of words leave behind
their prisons. They’re inside.

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No ghosts but come to life when they talk.
What we really want from friends, cameras, cities.

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Guilty at not returning those CDs, which I listened to strangely,
in the life that followed, one year on, I decided to return them
to the public library - the closest I could find to after-life is a shelf
of souls in circulation, dead books and arias of divas unrevived
until we play. I don’t know why I felt guilty at loaning them
from an owner who was dead anyway. But I placed them in the
chute. I’d borrowed them from him a week before he – not died
but suicided. The two things just don’t seem the same.
Till this morning a voice regained my ears and loaned me its death
to steal away (Monserat Caballé, highlighted
from Handel through Puccini; singing high-note.
It never occurred to me that they were his gift.