

THE DIASPORA OF GUINNESS

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Exit to the Sea, The Second Cell originally
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URBAN SONGS

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BETRAYING GEOGRAPHY

URBAN SONG

We will rename the cities, take them away

Locate them in other places.

We will give over our city to the trusted characters

Who wish to disappear. And from there we will reach the gates

Of the city of The Emperor's daughter. This will not hold us back.

From there we will pass through the gates that hold

Back nothing metaphorical, only the deepest insertion

Into the patient's heart. The cities then will take the place

Of all cities missed or missing, and those that life plays with

Tossing back infancies until we rattle through, realizing

The immense attacks on the body may have to be supported

In ways we haven't achieved previously.

BETRAYING GEOGRAPHY

To be redundant when faced with such decency

To scuff the hand-crafted shoes in the early weather that betrays
a brutal geography about to be unleashed.

To learn brunch manners across the two solitudes

To recognize the cities that still fight each other, lifted
by the colours of down, dampened by silent tongues and
the extravagant hand gestures of the very young shop assistants
selling Canada Goose. Rehearsing their digital cash registers for the rare
but not entirely unknown sale of the Junior cash-back.

Listen, something still moves in this city though it may need
another shot at the new vocabulary to keep it alive, to capture this place.

The lady with the greying French bob constructs the picturesque
whilst the limousines are taken out for their weekend jaunt
on the Parkway.

Meanwhile, across from the construction site
Two grandes dames seduced by the hip hop
coming from the builder's boombox, shake their hips
and no one thinks of using the baseball bat anymore.
There's a calm not to be called on, not to be invited
to plant kisses or put knees under the table
Or sign on the line where it indicates: *Your Name Here*.
The golden days are back, and we have really nothing
against the past at all. The greying French bob bobbed
Triumphant on the Streets of Ottawa!

ZOMBIE, THE SUFI CONNECTION

My mouth tries to take the shapes, make the sounds it has been used to.
But I fail and the words uttered are unrecognisable, incomprehensible.
They are scuppered by unremembered rhymes of the ancients
pausing at the wrong moment in this city
where so much geography is allowed and ungraspable.
When the smoke settles, when the short lease on death has been rehearsed
There is nothing left, where there may have once been triumph.
Those with ideas have long passed their usefulness,
Others struggle to warm up a lost history, shocked when asked to
Discard the dead meat up there. And I point to the left side of the brain
when prompted. Which all but means: let it go, let it fall away, let it collapse.
But pointing to that side of the brain broke no revision. It was clear
No one would come up with a zombie scenario as the philosophical clues
were all but ignored. But someone had allotted the baseball bats
and left them inside the shop window, which vibrates from passing busses
and veils the advancing vigilante squad.

KATRINA

When the hurricane-swelled waves took out Beachtown near Galveston, that unintended future called Venom in the story didn't stand a chance. No characters invented to relieve the palette of chocolate, pistachios and cream survived this new urbanism. Wilful reading could not border the destruction itself, but you did dear reader, take off the headphones. You cancelled your trip to the International Zone, parked up outside the mega-Church whilst Beachtown was to be re-built according to the pattern book of lost limb and life. Reading works best when misreading works out.

DEAF LANDSCAPE

No longer look out, or even look up
when the helicopter drones overhead searching the valley,
passing through the low lying hills, on its way to deafening the landscape.
The borderlands near the castle re-live a delinquent morphology.
There is talk of eccentric weather, eccentric behaviour, eccentric buildings
but that wasn't the concern of the latest victim as he shelved family and friends
for one last trip to the farm.
Now overhead the helicopter drones on, holding its position.
The unemployed villagers, traumatised, battle-weary, are seen running out
as if they are still in Hanoi, Kabul or Helmand Province. The light is fierce
Then men are rounded up. For the women no escape.
Someone catches the murmur: The farm will be re-taken tonight.
By morning, the victims will be left hanging there for the photographs.

LESS THAN DUMB TREES

However barbaric some of them have become, however wayward
these attacks on each other, words were never meant quite to plumb
these depths, pretend paper was our alibi and the page could be left incomplete
With vacant lots everywhere to be filled, sand could trickle out
when the timers were smashed. In the privacy of loyalty and shock,
We expect you to conform, draw a little nearer the banality
that doesn't quite make the cut. We are not sure which weapon
was really used or whether the voice had been changed
to put the vigilantes off the scent. Yet this is still the country
that cannot be named. This land full of less than dumb trees.

THE INSEPARABLES

During the mazurka everything will be decided, even that love
which can never be spoken of. We go without sleep for days on end
in sympathy with the migrant. Flouting our hubris, we remain the same beings.
We are, it seems, knowledge mobilizers in this the unlikeliest doom
That washes over all disorder. The purveyors of new vocabularies
and solid understanding measure our lives, calculate the bonus structure
in conformity and compliance. And if it wasn't for their miscalculations
we'd be inescapably incarcerated in their gloom too.

This is the glossary of new nonsense and key principles that is apparently
in our interest to read. Meanwhile the struggle for leadership is on
The new candidate is made over in magenta and cream and caught
looking for a journalist who still matters, speaks questingly into the camera
with the eye of the urchin: is anyone out there?

In the Finnish cottage, the mist slowly lifts from the lake, swirling calmly
in love with a once so gentle disquiet. The silence is no longer deafening.
A dog comes out of the clearing and makes for the lake's edge
with a black capercaillie in its mouth, shot with drunken accuracy.
Breakfast is served; the seeds, oats and flax have swelled overnight
all it needs now, honey and banana flakes. We go back to our day job.
Dying of news before it all happens, we mobilize that knowledge
which is so gloriously unstable.

AIRBRUSHING THE FUTURE

What triumph in these words that can still hold back the nausea?

Unable to give you a city or a country, I can name some of your actors.

The borders resemble those of nastier regimes but you learn to disguise the barriers faced with levels of impunity not always recognized in those unmapped countries.

On arrival, everything appears to take on its slow motion, the trees move indiscernibly as if to correct the haste elsewhere in the world. The air is a touch clammy but this time there were no sounds of gunfire, nor explosions that lie beneath the curb.

Buildings passed from the airport to the centre of town had been miraculously repaired.

No signs of sniper bullets, attrition had moved elsewhere.

The harbour was waiting to explode but no one knew. Too long the institutes had been closed for repair, history suspended. First task according to the manual: check the apartment for devices.

Eventually you learn not to refer to it as an apartment. You come to love the cell given you for refuge. Which country was this you woke up in this morning and whose apartment were you now re-arranging in order to carry out the mission? And who put that less than dumb tree in the room?

HOBNOBBING IN THE GARRISON

Can requests prove fruitful for new ambition in this vast geography where hobnobbing days are numbered. The appetite for such events fade upon those that curate death for the needy and Bangkok they tell us was merely a convenient stopover towards Luang Prabang.

Where the small timber villa perches on the NamKhan, just where the Mekong splits. Hammocks are usually reserved for the penitents but such exile deserves to swim in the organic pool. Writing new lines that can become the film of a murder never solved. So by this you accept that the project for a hermitage is definitely on.

No I am not leaving town and do look forward to a hole in the wall moment where all surfaces are stripped of devices and conversation remains overheard to be choreographed into this new North. But just in case we miss each other When the city is locked down, you will find me in Moscow, Moscow Idaho that is Before Christmas truly exists once more. Hobnobbing days? What an idea!

MOSCOW

That small wonder in the special wonderful we find in cities
that pull out from beneath the sunlight, that rival the solitude of winter
within the towns that have no need to make their numbers increase
to fill the coffers of new manufacturing bases. Pussy, the riot and the Orthodox.
And in spite of all the talking, the engagement of the body is crushed
against unlikely furniture. An intimacy not always required, it was her
sitting in silhouette at the café, that picked at this wonder that followed itself.
Time catches up with the town and solitude unpicks itself. By the third morning
The smoke pits blurred by neon and advertising bring on the lazy departure.
The amnesia takes another destination, leaving will be spent, imagining a silhouette
so briefly recognizable in the passing Cherokee or Highlander in Moscow.
Moscow, Idaho that is. What an idea!

SPOKANE

There are gaps in the notebook, that have become gaps
in later life. They include the potential moments of a new life
hanging by a thread. A woman turns to the B Departure Gates
when you are taking C. Had she known, had we known
in the jolliness of the mimosa for breakfast,
we could have tempted the new life and avoided the
museum of innocence. Or at least tilted at it, left it unscripted
but unlike anything we have both experienced.
It may have been the deviation of a breakfast cocktail
or it may have been eternity. She's found the hair, she said
that special cut that so suits her, melts into everything about her.
I found one such gap in Spokane airport, the stunning hoarfrost
on the Palouse holding the landscape beautifully until departure .

PULLMAN

But if life is a notation, what then of the words that
Stubbornly avoid poetry, the love that is forced to take the other gate
at departure, to where the escape lights are carefully mapped out
in case of the emergency which we denied had already happened.

It really is a warning, not to release the prostitute story too early.
Let the audience have that last gasp. Surely he'll not go there, not today
Surely he remembered the medicine and the language correctness course.
Wait, there's usually something like a marching band, or a drum practice

Some Zen chanting, deep throated, deeply thrumming into the stomach.
The lights may also fail at that moment. If so, then accept the sign
consider it mystic if you wish, and then tell the story of the two hookers
in downtown Warsaw. Develop it each time, beyond its incorrectness.

Boarding completed. The doors of the Bombardier closed.

WHAT UNWISDOM IS THIS?

I am beginning to take on the signs. Of course there is a knack at resisting them but this unwisdom has a habit of forming a presence like that bad penny. Shaped by anxiety at what might come and a fear of what has previously happened. Recommended to breathe in more air we avoid putting any further conditions on this which might make it worse. Not – as some are hoping – better. Stepping into this, her cocked hat, pencil skirt fair weather shoes, lost pearls, a life never really succeeding to shake the tree, alienates this already delinquent body. It seems the waiter didn't put enough whisky into the toddy. The warmth didn't reach into the depth. The writing on the body faded.

UNWORTHY DYSTOPIAS

Dystopias are so unworthy these days, they cannot hold to narratives pinched for effect and abandon. The pattern recognition gently wardrobes its software and individualism; according to the libretto it must become the cities we never expected. Continuity has been reversed and ambition removed for safety. Normal conditions now operate as the new edge off which quite another world will fall. The cell negotiated for contains all the orders necessary to take the next attack for granted. Those that slip out of line, those that fake this unwisdom will be punished.

DETROIT

From behind chain link you, the voyeur with enriched dreams
And a lemon and pepper chocolate heart are the wanderer about to upset
this ruin porn. You make Lego out of indifference, and stare back into
trees hung with shoes. The shooter took the wrong city, approached
the wrong monument, used the wrong App. So had to be eliminated.
But we gave up studying delinquent language some events back
For the poetry that makes up landfill continues to make up landfill.
An easy equation: no one knows why the two cars, two kohl black,
coal black eyes and a scarf that stands in for all iconic injustice in the world
maps out the territory with a barely decipherable gesture.
Written on the inside of the linen jacket the brand that took over
the old brand: Bring on the Apocalypse!

PACKARD ACCENTS

Impatience is hot, irritation part of the lonely upbringing,
The familiar motel corridor smell, the spilled carpet dulling nightly treads.
Someone mentions the lonely crowd but no one knows why.
In the defaced motor works, collapse is measured by the strained impression
of heavier, no-future footprints. This, where the floor binds as a fold
known only to students of ruin, the policemen asked for directions
couldn't find the switch on the dashboard to roll down the window.
Better that way, the journalist says, keep walking. And the young black teenager,
Pushing a pram with a baby in her arms holds the door open
For this elderly known as Baba-ji. "I like your accent!" she says.
Winning smile, missing teeth, odd socks. Post-Humanity saved.

GHETTO ON HEIDELBERG STREET

She put her head out of the window of the halted dilapidated house
Curtained and unpainted. "This is a ghetto area," she shouted.
The mumbling was imprecise. "We're alright, thanks a lot."
Not quite understanding her words. "This is a ghetto area," she tried again
This time waving her arms about. "We're fine," I replied convinced
I had misunderstood the world for its safe neighbour
Surely with no trouble looming. "We're fine," I shouted back again,
Fearing she hadn't heard me. "You have a good day."
"But this is a ghetto" she tried for the third time. "It's better you leave."
"This is a ghetto," one of the students said, "we'd better leave"
"Alright," I said, "we'd better leave."
We waved back and passed trees with dresses nailed to their trunks.

THE DAY BEFORE

Ask for forgiveness not permission, ground the world and call it yours
set the table for the dinner party. Put the camera on time shutter release
walk elegantly behind the guests. Deliver the lecture over the shoulder
and when someone wants to jump, check for the harness and be sure
to carry out a rehearsal. By the main course, the absailers are at the window
blocking out any panorama the school offered.
The city locks down. Just in time!

THE IMPERFECT FENCE

THE IMPERFECT FENCE

I should tell you why I'll not be one of those present or even one of those most undermined voices of the century.

In fact the century offers no home for this imagination that leases its impact not to mention profundity. They say there are no poems in it for us anymore as if the river can answer this daily shore. It cannot of course. It has to be wrong sometimes. And nothing of this intimacy helps the contaminated riverbanks. The thriller is passed to all interested readers. Until it made the perfect, if somewhat dull, puzzle.

It's not possible to say language as organized as this fails itself when it straddles the imperfect fence. We stand this side or that on the anarchy, waiting for officials to apply some leniency without needing to use the registered pistol. No one picked it up nor the Swiss knife taped under the armpits. At least not without prompting. The security wand didn't pick it up either. Removal was a painful tear as if the tongue knew it could now speak again. The sweat peas planted so long ago eventually made it to the top of the wall in the Unfinished Garden. Before something unpredictable in the summer took its revenge, before someone could shake the pagoda tree, the harbour exploded. Outside now, two white doves drop messages on the two waiting chairs. That's where the new runway will be.

PAPERS PLEASE!

We have awoken, momentous events neither concern us nor engage our indifference. Turning to Tolstoy at a time when other urgencies call is about as accurate as it gets.

The other novel is lawless and predictable.

Why then have you stopped taking the road to the sea or the path along the battlements of the old castle?

The wall continues to collapse in front of our eyes.

Meanwhile migrants are offered Apps as part of the survival package for phones they have not received yet. No signal forthcoming, terribly trivial, this transition to a beautiful Nation.

A scandalous loss of identity, and a massively suffocating geography. *Papers Please!*

THE MEKONG CAN WAIT

You cannot get a poem out of this, don't even try.
Yet again as an incomplete being you were never a quitter.
You sink into the pond-life of solitude, not commonplace,
but for so long an autism without romance. You should have been
an immigration official, waving that wand, but you've lost the focus
you once had. "Papers Please!" And when passing through the barrier
as the Good Father, life copies out its own conundrum.
I suggest you forget any biography that has been passed down to you.
Fakery, please, you have been worked into this crisis,
invited into the mounting tension. Or did you know what exactly
you meant to say? The Mekong can wait. None of this is
particularly useful in the light of sweet refuge.
You have permission to reject the career move and become a caution.
You must also learn to intervene in your own life, as a chorus.
Now have we got that?

REHEARSALS IN HINTERLAND

Laser Combat three quarters of a mile from the turn-off.
These were the country days without you, without Sundays
where you had swam through water to reach me. Passed the café
and the sheep-sodden field, into the protection of deep conifers.
They sign up for the Game to End all Games, Special Summer offer
Virus present, sharpened pursuit. Dressed, goggles on,
they look the part for life in cities only ever seen in news clips
Refugees scrumming together to avoid the kill, the running naked.
He shoots her to revenge the games they have played on each other.
She feigns the beautiful death of soft forests, early morning mist
and swirls of desire. I leave them to it, steered by satellite guidance
to one of those migrant centres with the unmistakable metaphor of the jungle,
ripped out of hearts washed up on shores no longer safe for surfing.
Beneath angry choppers arriving with doctors without any frontiers
all medicine crushed to the finest powder. The thing is, yes,
the conifers were warm. Yes, the bed of fern gentle. Yes,
this game of summer pastime was a rehearsal
But it won't be laser next time.

A SMIDGEN OF ZEN

The second cell you gave me was not much better. It did have light. And that light, of course, if you only imagine its history, was spectacular and treacherous. You would never imagine it enlarged from such torn contacts and subdued contracts. But the new lights fluorescent, pendent, all ached with pardonable cleverness, that smidgen of Zen between life and death. Be careful, she said
Be ready to move when the rains come.

The more fragile belongings will not survive the drenching, the roof unable to pretend any longer to offer refuge. This was the cell that introduced you to the Heritage Guard. Plans would be drawn up for managing the ruin, a little more technical skill would always be required. Grants would be applied for, funds given, even a re-accreditation laboratory would be set up to measure the waywardness of expectations. The exact time of collapse would then be determined in order to evacuate the building.

SENSE AND INSENSIBILITY IN THE HABANA LIBRE

No one had heard about civic engagement or then
it was part of the daily amnesia. And as big as the theatre parking lot was
we heard about the rumours of throwing up a skyscraper
to break open the acne of the sky. You pull up to La Rampa
to consider how much asphalt should come unstuck.
You measure investment when it has everywhere to go.
You can create your own shit, the joy-boy interjected,
and even if you still suck at baseball, then you don't need to sit
at the roulette table and feel so uncomfortable if it lands on your number.
You make the Rumba and the Salsa come home and choose
The peppercorn crust, goat-cheese burger when next on the menu.
Disinterest may have fallen foul of opportunities offered,
the bamboo wall replaced with etched glass. But with the hot
and spicy women hanging out under the concrete on La Rampa
that's no reason to capitulate or want the King of Cuba dead.
So the joy-boy said.

FIELD NOTE: THE REUBEN SANDWICH

Eight lanes of traffic, but no one trusts to walk with you
to the middle of the road and let the cars grease your thighs.
Somewhere, it might have been in one of the Mexican self-help books
this is known as being close to the trickle of eternity.
I didn't buy those screaming badland boulevards with gentle
but voided violence of the cinematic sort. We were sidelined
in the city and it felt outrageously good to have arrived
after the catastrophe. No kiss could find its destination.

The homeless shelter rested back on its Saturday nothing and sea wind.
Reaching too far into the city's skin, hair all Byzantine and unruly
caught the dude out: "You're a photographer man, you're an artist, I can tell
I know about those things." Moorish ruins, he put the gun away and posed
for the photograph that could no longer be taken. You are cursed
they whispered, by your own sensitivity.

We pushed onto the new housing project,
the result we are told of critical recklessness
a burnt out two-storey Kowloon. Roof in, timber fallen, Lycra patterned
stretched and stacked like a smoked meat sandwich: The Reuben.
The sort of sandwich that competes with the ribwich
and the pulled pork of Old Havana. Now there's a turn of language
that you cannot compete with. "It's not the lingo that hurts," she said,
"it's the rice that bleeds".

JINATERA

There's so little awe left on the body. Silting, now that's the wrong word
has deflated what was known as residue. There's no sell-by date on cities
never has been, but they struggle like the rest of us to salvage
those parts ravished by embargo and envy. The pony rides are over
but the Lincolns and Cadillacs cruise as the sea crashes into the pitted edge.
The carousel is still turning but the violins have gone. The narrator tells the story
with head rocking to and fro. The breakwater has moved in,
the orgy happened without those who might have saved the city.
The T-shirts brand more than they can. Holding back icons of insurgent laughter
and struggle, the game we now play is mini-golf and the trousers still look
awkwardly pinched into those Tango boots. A young girl
With a flower behind her ear and a cell phone wedged into her breast
wrenches the cigar out of my mouth and kisses me passionately.
She is, she says, looking for Frida Kahlo.

SOCIAL EQUILIBRIUM

You were there when the bridge collapsed, but had no inkling
what the future would bring. In fact, we never used such phrases
or thought our preoccupation could be debated and ultimately gamed
in something that some still called Art. That was then, of course.
Now the world's shadow has moved on, but still there in your eyes
your stories from the past, rock and archipelago, sails and mink
have stripped away any lipped intimacy. Outside these Duchampian
games that have made a re-appearance, we were generous to ourselves,
We'd look over the tortoise-shell spectacles of choice And return
to that time the bridge collapsed. If we are really only the ones
to have stumbled across this dark optimism, we are still not entirely
sure about the weapons of choice that have crept into our cities.

HE TAKES A PAUSE

But it's not enough for any serious respite, before two or three others walk up the street passed the restaurant. City life, whoever calls it this?

He is up again, thrusting his hand out to shake or be shaken.

With no consideration of rejection, mockery or rudeness the hand is left in hers until he says: "Lady, may I shake your hand for tomorrow?" An interesting concept! But she walks on as uninterested as this city. The next one walks in and the one after that.

He continues unsure whether this is rejection or whether perseverance is the new venture. And he shouts again:

"Lady, let me shake your hand". But she's already out of reach.

For some reason, as if he must still register this loss he keeps shouting:

"Lady, lady". The lady by now has gone and he is suddenly walking towards someone else in another city. He's exhorting them to take the diwan sofas laid out with the hookahs.

Is this not a city that will lie down with us?

Is this not an imperfection we might consider infinite?

I will wait for you there.

GEOGRAPHY'S RUIN

No apocalypse today, thank you and no thanks for rescuing this song
this almighty mismanagement offering insight where blindness still destroys.
Now haircuts, jewellery and smart watches are where our brain is going.
The tequila is cooled, the ice undeservedly crushed, the salt ready
but the glasses are cracked. The stems are lost in the swim of all feasts,
the invitation to Jubilee Street, and the cities re-named after deserted
queens. Cities now obliterated by the ruin of geography are confused by
the twisted synonyms that confuse the Indians from the Indians.
One hundred year commemorations don't do much for the market
though injustice can exchange place momentarily as if the victims
now have a license to drive this strange hybrid we call the 'urban'.

CITIES, TOO GOOD FOR YOU

CITIES, TOO GOOD FOR YOU

The books will fall through the door, there will be an urbanist at your table instead of a terrorist, but it wasn't so long ago when we were all freedom fighters, members of the long ontological haul that begged authenticity from the merest hunch. Across the Moscow kitchens to the plaza, from the bedroom to the basilica, when cities thrust their weapons in our faces and begged us to freeze whilst the para-military checked out all exits. The city was never in history but became history itself. Scan the surfaces you need, preserve what you think will serve this image of heroism. The cities of future histories arrived long before we had time to adjust. When they tell us cities are good for us, believe them oh yes, believe them. Then, before you leave, with all the wrapping intact on the package, take out the pink flamingo and register your new premises on The Bliss Studio. There, where the attacks can be mapped outside that other restaurant at the end of this universe see the new diners emerge. There was no end of misdemeanours, that we agree, but these cities are impaled by the outrageous celebrations, the new city lights: this dance of a lifetime in those cities too good for you.

DISTRACTED

To love without wanting further meaning to exist.
To live without echo bruising this distraction.
You admitted to that when approaching the double nave church.
In this dissent of decency, you crawled out of the crypts
of old meaning into the serpent's path.
Then of course laughingly unworried, like the warriors
you let restlessness settle, taut into itself
until the massacres are forgotten.

You had no part to play in the program
to let the buildings decline whilst more cities go unnamed.
You will see us seated at the table,
lost as the water invades until degradation is assured
and acceleration celebrated. Then, with no defence offered,
with surgeons up to their ankles in water and with no one to question
the arsonist, we are all thwarted by the disquiet exposed.
It's not sure whether you still need to be a soldier
and do all this for real.

POETRY AS LANDFILL

It was simple. To put off everything, every invitation, to stay within the spent soul. To avoid entering the centres of detention, to avoid the debates that refreshed this spent condition and opened more fissures. The rest of the time can be spent mourning the new phrases that cities demand to be re-worded. But we are not historians; we are critical but we are not thinking. We gave that up a time ago, and a time before that. Endorsements are collected to support the unreadable. More and more reports are written up with the aim of augmenting the new urban landfill. At the edge, texts are trundled into the desert of waste as the writing and reading still progresses (though one is not sure exactly why). There is a welcome delinquency of un wisdom and un-imagination. You're grounded now, you keep repeating, but tell us exactly why that is a good thing. Perplexity comes easily, but show proof of residency. Move the queue along and let migrancy write out its journey.

EXIT TO THE SEA

With exodus in short supply, imagine literature still holding its place.
Books, rare and remaindered, can be obtained by the kilo
whilst a quiche or croissant is served in the old church
with its angled Saxon misery. The next exodus, the ice cream
honeycombed, is suddenly off the menu. A line is struck through
the large poster in the windshield of the local bus stop.
King's Road is not so far away but we are still unsure
if this is the same area on the map where the Empire,
on postage stamps and newsreels, ran riot in the provinces.
But we come even closer, bring the magnifying glass in and throw out
the swagger stick. The mimic men are on the march, the city is chilled
using language that is marooned and the Sunday exodus
is so local as to be invisible. The country's rivers
are imagining those logs back where they belonged,
rampaging through country and capital, removing anything in their way.
Exit to the Sea has been suggested for the parts on the map
still marked 'unknown'. No sponsors have been found yet.

HOTELS WITHIN DISTANCE

Room 2329, twenty third floor of the Habana Libre hotel where Fidel's revolutionaries stayed for the three months of the revolutionary council. Room 2224 Fidel's Castellana suite one floor below. Somehow, this close to history and the revolution doesn't give the breath necessary to return to living in the way we are used to. Feeling the weight of a Kalashnikov in Landi Kotal on the Afghan border would haunt the wrecked luxury of a steak tartare in the Hotel Nacional.

EARLY MORNING MADRIGALS

The music traipses in from a far-off land,
nothing in this house belongs to that country.

The victims turn on their heels,
the infidel is both you and me.

The pen is the thinnest possible
to write without pain on this paper
that tissues the wound.

So much of what is produced in the
name of a lost discipline attempts to organize life
without our presence. Without alacrity
dull sonority and impulse carried us on this time.

We have relied on it before
where intuition is loaned from versions
of a free imagination. Idiosyncrasy
has become the hottest theatre to go cold on itself.

Our learning will of course struggle.

Meaning: we will have to rely on all this again.

THROBBING

Our worlds have become so refined but their own city hardly ever throbbed
and careful is the rudeness that can pass for encouragement.

They don't call it the suicide tower for nothing but no one has actually
ever taken their life there. I write a poem a day but it still doesn't bring us closer
to one of those cities nearer the realities of the age. That was a myth
perpetuated by the tin drum and all those dog years, the local anaesthetic
of a crabwalk. In Detroit the frustrations of the city vanished,
reality chalked up with fresh graffiti. We heard the word 'authentic'
make a comeback. It bounced over the rail lines and converted market place.

It's so popping, the young transgender said, everywhere you look.

The poor looked poorer. The drummer kept on drumming.

The toothless took the homeless to task, the security guard embraced the barista.

Those throbbing concepts about to make ourselves cleaner.

Admittedly it wasn't a word we would usually use.

ICE HOCKEY

All so totally friendly and we sensed a theory emerging
open and alive. That was when you noticed almost all of them
spoke of life only as what had been left out of life.

Some cities cut you off, the young ice hockey player said.

They arrange their own expectations not yours.

We were impressed. He usually butchered opponents
with shoulder grease and strangely appealing, grunting moves.

All this iced up, behind the chain link fence
that now make up the new migrant camp.

HUSH, PUPPY!

Apparently we've got it all wrong. This won't be the first time that the Princeling points this out. The border guard enjoyed his moment of fear and intimidation. "I'm going to put you right. You're wrong you see. This city did not die because of the car industry, the Yuma and abandoned tobacco leaves. It died because of a corrupt mayor. Get it right. Ok! You get that?" Everyone in the car froze, the gun lay idle. A young world was relieved that the light above the car channel would stay green and some of them would enter The United States of Delusion. "And one more thing," the guard shouted and they all dropped a heartbeat as he looked at the form: "I don't get what is written here for purpose of travel: Urban Renewal. What is that? Sounds so, so... what word am I searching for?"

RENEGADES

Searching for words was not our usual problem
in the babble that made up lives so far
caught in the traffic lights of border stations. Between
the princelings and the paupers, no one could better this delusion.
A journalist, somewhere, is it any longer necessary
to know where, announced the toxic moment
was one made up of renegade landscapes.
Now who really was responsible for defining the era
before we could actually get there? “Claro” she said,
“that’s not the enigma of arrival we are used to.”
Of all the argyle patterned socks, the princeling chooses these.
Ok. We get that! The guerrilla moving crews
carried all the pianos out of the hotel.

MUSEUM OF THE OPPRESSORS

Laughter cannot be stopped nor need it.

The ruins can only become the fund of decay,

the re-wilding of ourselves as reckless beings.

Scratching the birch, seeking the golf ball in the rough

and the glass strawberry in the museum.

What critique of innocence can we accept of the destruction

when we have developed to die in order to be re-born?

We paint the neon shoes, whilst others

throw them upwards to hang from abandoned lines.

A single wall hangs vertically polite but crumbling in the sun.

Un-buttressed, this is the museum of likely oppressors that no one wants.

A woman waits whilst her husband scavenges for wire on the scaffold.

A genocide carved out by forces beyond their control.

He ran passed someone with a rifle. I cannot feel fear, he said.

I'm not even sure there is any surprise left.

In fact, am I still breathing? The last words had to be

guessed; the microphone wasn't close enough.

WHERE AND WHEN, AND ARE WE SAFE?

The story goes that the dogs are given shots by the security guards. This means that the dogs sleep all day and most of the night. But when they awake, the dogs are fearfully alert to strangers as they roam the campus. In this way the security of the inner city is achieved whilst the guards then sleep at night. At other times the guards, not in their Portacabins play backgammon and drink Chai. As students, lovers and night prowlers emerge from the prison houses of the imagination, they are encouraged also to feed the dogs. This once again saves the guards buying the food necessary or scavenging for scraps in the garbage dumps on the edge of the campus. On one of the Seven Hills as it is called, up from the Ministry of Information, the image of a man can be seen from both sides. Light passes through the founder of Modern Turkey. The dogs sleep and students learn to tread carefully as they pass into the night.

AN ATLAS OF CITIES

AN ATLAS OF CITIES

It was part of the invisible curriculum.

How much had we read and never understood?

It's too late to begin now, and anyway the middle

that has become our refuge still embraces us.

Some use belts for their support,

others have another structure. But let's be clear:

we still fancy beginning in the middle of everything.

Whichever film came on in the aeroplane,

we read now only by what we saw and cannot remember.

It's not the cigar that used to salt this ignorance

but if still being alive proves challenging,

who will send out the call?

We confess, in front of the new priests, a confessional loaned from a vintage telephone box. We do not know who is speaking anymore and whether this city truly deserved the comeback.

We are aghast.

Why a city would do that when the blindfolds take the captive mind to the edge of the suburbs. We had to believe there was some coming back but we know how to fool the migrants.

No friends, she says, in this city of jesters.

You become the jungle that has taken this illegibility a touch too far.

Can that even be voiced and remain meaningful?

In this city I doubt, she concluded.

GUTLESS WONDER

You took the walk down, you removed the unnecessary ceiling in between the administrators and the grey haven. You pulled back the curtains that would be drawn over fetishized minds and graded souls. There is still a long way to go and this is nothing like a marathon. We blame the maiden who wrote out our lives. She had nothing to bathe you in though. We personally survived the loyalty of the grey haven. Yes, we know, there is difficulty in our private worlds but that is no reason to accept this painless coma.

We bought into this strategy of de-risk, we thought our money could do more. We are brainless like that. The tolerance factor lowered a little more. No one thought of putting back windows where they once were removed. Your hair and this anger of spoken silence, we like that contradiction in you but I wonder are the slippers waiting for your arrival home? And what of that bio-dome that rolls out from a distance, this outer space of despair. The pioneer churches in your city are in flames, they are irretrievable Just as I know now, in your eyes, I have become.

AN ACCEPTABLE WORLD

It's only by poetry that I will come back to you.

There will of course be less of me, a little of the bowel gone

Intestines scraped, polyps removed and the sniper holes in the body now recovering well. You'd never believe I had been the object of fire in the sights of the gunman in the Frontier Province. It's only poetry that will do this, and thrust the Kalashnikov into your side, held firmly to dance out the small grief between us that closes gently over time.

This suture of language is a survival, don't let the talk go against this even though we have come to accept there will not be a future generation to speak for us. Nor will there be a generation to speak to.

We will instruct the anonymous from our outdated manual but we do have cause to rejoice. It will become easier to invent new events that consummate our failures. There are some things we should not, however, come across too easily. For example: why should we fall again for that uneasy narrative that repeats our life as someone else? We know what this means without asking. We have always known this and come in somewhere less optimistic than our acceptable world has promised us.

SILENT EMBRACE

This is the nothingness without the grave. It could not have been better signalled. The past suffers an irremediable reverse. We now swim in this ecstasy without further communication. We have no choice.

A halt in proceedings, and as long as no one talks to each other in this interval, this small intimacy of nothingness becomes law. Caught in an eye looking across yet nothing forbidden, in shoes scuffed for use in battles marked for the next celebration. To take place without you. We arrive triumphantly.

This is the contract that has been signed in our absence. When the Government was recalled from its summer recess to authorize bombing raids, the sniper attacks and other assaults resumed immediately. No, it doesn't resemble a video game the pilot says, pausing for a bathroom break. In fact I'm useless on the X-Box, he continues. There can be pauses in meetings too. Just to determine the figure moving on the screen before he fires. A secret intimacy postponed.

FIRES IN THE MIND

I can't possibly tell anyone that I've pulled out, thrown in the towel
that it's not the body that is closing so much as the city.
Strategies are thinned out, pruned to meet the drab denial
that passes for the poetics of the everyday. Clipped sentences like grunts
pass for communication. Sparks fly from the closed curtains, the seeping walls.
The crushed, uncoloured key-curling corridors are swept for footprints.
Fires in the mind are sent ahead of the Emergency Services,
enabling you to get there before the looters arrive.

A part of the bowel might be removed, thyroid activity re-monitored
but no one battles with the surgeon anymore. It's the grand secret,
the only one worth keeping. Who cares who burgled the premises
if the mind closes before the ailing building Is demolished?
Who cares which city will not excite this poem? And who will scan
the macular degeneration as the cloud bursts from the left eye to the right?

THE ZOMBIE ACADEMY

Each morning – how long can things go on in this country of lost geography
– is greeted with creative disinterest, amicable indifference, joyful distraction.

Then the shooter ran through the seminar, hot knife through butter,
that sort of thing. Locked down, the indolence of a city remotely mimicking
other parts of the world. If this city had eyes, you'd look right through them
seated at passionless feasts for the uncurious, startled by rumour to master
the art of self-censorship. The grey days of correctness have been re-stitched
Her dress tells a story that only the victim started to unravel.

I wouldn't wear a scarf like that, the officer advised, taking the thread and
continually pulling at it until she was naked. Masking the docile, kindness is inept
when it takes the roller coaster. Experts have been renamed,
until they stare out from across the bleak high rise of planned demolition.
Catching the late afternoon sun, there's a choreography planned in it all
Coming nearer home, forget the global, this is critical, this is regional
this is the gentle dementia of tidying up after the rioters left.

Into the eyes of the sweet youth runs the city and you'd be forgiven for thinking
they too had no time to smudge this world with their zombie academy.

No trust, there is only one philosophy left us, the living dead.

But no one's coming up with the first letter, or even giving us a clue.

MANSPLAINING

We will not go into the words that have already been laid out before us. In fact, we will not contemplate using them anymore exposed as we are, and forced to alert our world to this ever-changing vocabulary. Also we must not accept the open invitations to share the truth and cancel our trust. Instead we will do what has become part of our new urban dictionary. We will learn to linger in words unformed, a world existing outside living as we know it, in the amnesia of the unsightly. And those douche-bags that pass for comfort sponges and seductive derision what of them? Then there's also everything that we might pick up in our random reading of what we call here - without taking full responsibility – this democratic intolerance.

DANCING THE CITY

Caution must invite them onto the dance floor
before the energy shifts the hubris from one mountain to another.
And the Empress down below, looks up to choose which young mind
will marry her son. As narrow as the pass is, as narrow as those we disagree with
she decided not to dance that day.

She said she never dances. This young Yorick who was splitting the heart
of men who happened to catch any glimpse of her. Her own melancholy
carved into the mountain and the museum. What interests her is what skills
we are prepared to misread. She now dances to her own version of life
Reading what she does not see in those other versions of survival.

SHARPTURNS IN THE BRAIN

Why imagine the playing field has been widened, when the abuse colours instruction, when pride gets the names in the wrong order and the narrator stumbles for the goodnight phrase. Distilled is not the word we would use, but in such dissonance and decency the tongue is forced to sit well back. Right back, you mean Yes, in the back of the backwards throat where confidentiality is the new weapon of choice. It now takes the place of the old weapons given away, secretly. The small tattoo on the Armenian barista holds the secret to delicious but unrevealed intimacy. The arms of those dishing out pamphlets rough in comparison, their tattoos brash, pictorial, vinyl-era. The sense of the past, the migrant from over the border said, is the way we can enjoy the automobile once again. Even risk the donuts at the roundabout. There was total silence. We don't do history anymore. We've told you more than once. No essence. Nor the past, just sharp turns in the brain.

TENURE

What game for the hoops laid out, or the way the rules are interpreted
for this new entrepreneurship. We're all in this together whoever was respon-
sible for the first bankruptcy. We've never been impressed by this argument.
The cry Is emblazoned across the walls of the city's institute.
but resilience is implanted and shelter from the winter over-rated
We implore you to venture out, stand in joyous defiance,
await the forces that will thrash across the city. Watch out for the
low flying fighters above. Only then will you be qualified to continue.
If you master the video games, if you thumb-torture your hands
only then, are you safe enough for us not to monitor your every move.
Just know who is the enemy, avoid the collateral. In this war of difference
we know we should accept what makes us anxious yet still thrills.
The indiscretions they tell us are now emancipating if they are confessed to.
There's a very small part of us that will not let go. In a container in the English
countryside, free of the jungle, you have eyes waged on the world.

COUNTRY FUDGE

Pealed thunder, apocalypse answered
The flowers pile up in front of the monument
My language is not coming back, its promise to itself
has been kept. The city, dubious, majestic.
The playing field is not undecided
The pictures of the world, she still draws
have little function in the new century
Language still takes place but to go by this anguish
You would not think so. If this overlaid world
is on its way to become something else, I
know you will ask, how you can make fudge
whilst still trying to get your nails done

KENOSIS

“By the time you read this, at this stage of life,
what is that noose or string, hammock or blanket
doing next to your body?” Can you choose to right everything
you are requested to do, and live on, dodging this ecstasy.
And what about these notes you have made for yourself?
It’s an autism, somewhere on the spectrum so lightly feathered
but don’t tell anyone. I know I am a disappointingly human being,
she said, the problem is I’ve only just begun recognising these
disappointments. But I do often get a migraine. And every day
Something else dies that we could not recognise. Like a city.

VOLITION

If I had to invent someone to step into the role it wouldn't be you,
but it would have been mighty close. It's the deafening sound of pulling teeth
That we know manipulates democracy and shapes a new consent.
We watch the lizards on the walls and believe they take pre-established
positions. Of course they don't, but it's only when the blood trickles
and the hands covering the face are tinted at fingers' ends.
Then we see the race for the last transport across the channel.
It might serve as a cinema poster if it weren't for the reality closed up
in the luminous docility that passes for reverence.
I don't know how a city gains from this energy, I only know sometimes
the PA system is overbearing and the favourite songs
from those red-tongued Capitalist rockers overwhelm the moment
that was waiting to turn up. It might be that we pay so little attention
to this strange weather. Thinking it's a change
that has come without our permission.

No, we are not in the business of inventing another nonbinding character to fulfil the role. The city's barriers will be permanently designed, if there is a consensus on how our delusions dress for the occasion. This is the moment when the drinks are poured, the atrocity acted out all over again. The bodies are counted. I've left books no longer opened on the table in preparation for your visit. It's a pretty hopeless gesture but I enjoy redundancy, always have done. Soon, they will spring back on their own accord. Or is it volition?

THE CITY REQUESTS YOUR PRESENCE

I know you wish me to turn up, to pass the security guards
and offer the subtle gesture that signifies another future of obedience.
But let's talk of compliance, such an attractive democracy
in the rush to the bandstand where the ceremony will take place.
It was never clear who you were and the security guards knew that too,
that face of terror as if the world could not contain this city one more time.
But of course it can, of course you can, knowing you will be here
long after those city princesses have found a new life.
And in amongst the feral dogs, the canine journals that belong once more
to the gallery of refusal, I'll be tempted in this confusion
to suggest a makeover of city and conflict. But the language is all wrong
the familiar too familiar, the diaspora too diasporic
and the throat down which you are prepared to jump becomes
the aching metropolitan charm of migrants in cities
that do not recognise you. And a Paris that has no name.

THE MUSEUM OF REDUNDANCY

It appears to have taken time, all the time in the world
which we have no longer got but the museum of redundancy
has returned to open its doors once more. That's not quite accurate.
Return was never an option. The sea never went away, the oceans dropped
but a fraction and the forests still held refuge where no city was safe.
But then we lose accuracy, too many have now deferred the emptying slash
and dash as it is depicted on the gravestone. From this year, that year, the rest?
No! Let's not give them the satisfaction to make celebrity meat out of this dish.
On the beach, emptied of souls, the periphery of another city just around the bay.
Stunning as she was in the recently-receded damp sand, she wore shoes
that could have only been called a contraption. He slipped out of his Italian loafers
And felt the sand in the slower-moving estuary. Here, she said, stop.
Now that's a funeral picture. They laughed. The museum of redundancy
second time around. The city would survive. The Museum declared open.

REDUNDANT CITIES IN CREEPLAND

They spoke about Creepland and resistance with enthusiasm.
There was some agreement and something in the vocabulary
brought hilarity into the frail academy. Everything written
now goes further away from any writing agreed upon. Everything read
takes us even further into worlds narrated without us.
The redundant cities really benefit those without a voice,
the slummed world lost to decency. "I've taken the thriller," he said,
"and seen you in it." Any thriller! He's even arranged
for the hair to be styled differently, before that swell hat
you are encouraged to wear is taken out. There's talk
you should not have come here, the visa was withdrawn
and the pledge reversed. If only you'd heeded the warnings of cities
no longer mature or keeping up with the unrealities of this age.

There's less talk of resistance now, and to be fair,
there's an invitation on its way to allow you into
the less-guarded part on the country's border.
But were you to be refused, apparently you do know what to do.
You know what is asked of you. You may well be exceptional.
But after carrying out the task you are unlikely to survive.

THE VULGARIAN AND THE OUTLIER

The interrogator insisted on asking why the city had been strengthened in such a way. Why to hell and back in a handcart? Why would they insist on using such terms? The poor novice might be to blame but the outlier was adamant: it was all better than being dropped off in the coloured housecoat and those torn brogues.

Other snipers are gradually learning how to intimidate themselves. There's disbelief in the future of zero tolerance and eating disorders. They take aim, covered as the world is, in bubble wrap. They guide the robot to poke inside the suspicious bundle. When it's deemed safe there is laughter, the sort that will dress the robot in a pressed shirt and creased trousers. The belt Used to torture the last victim, can now be loosened. This allows that excess, a mixture of chocolate chip and gin. Gravity must take its control, grace has to find a way back, otherwise you too will be condemned in this impossible city.

WOULD WE GO TO THE PARKS, EVEN IF INVITED

Shop fronts are a hot topic, and the gossip is how to get the purifier in and the compost out. Meanwhile the country about to disappear from the map is due to go to the polls. Slow reversals are now the trend, saturated minds thrilled by brevity. And no one writes letters for fun anymore from the desert. Re-set buttons are being designed for maximum effect, maximum obscurity; menace lies behind the masks of our making. Graffiti replaces other graffiti without taking any responsibility. "Do you have the coordinates where it's about to kick off?" is a useful question to have ready. Noted down, we have entered the de-regulator's dream, we are in Crocodile Alley. Ontological anarchy is the current name given this practice. I fancy it's something we know and do, Without knowing and doing.

THOSE NICE GIRLS IN RED DOC MARTINS

I knew at the duck stage, layered, tasted up with pouted lips touching the brim and wine, that the poem would no longer reach that your fear was ill-spent. Nothing, not even the squeals could damage the emergence of laughter, the side-splitting encounter skirting the migrant crisis with no further indifference shown towards each other. You are right, dating electronically is the scene to come, whereby hair straightened, nails freshly painted and the bicycle oiled for the last month before the day of the dead. Get out there, play backgammon, laser tag, do something, anything, paint your nails to remind us that we have no right anymore to bring any of this under control. The toothpick and the darker heavier soul and the drifter, none can tell which country will act with the most tenderness. “It’s us, nice girls in red Doc Martens searching for the next Burrito restaurant,” she said. “And there are even more, chill won’t you, We don’t even need to run for the bus!”

THE RETRIEVAL

We can find ourselves writing to retrieve the ideas we settled on, long ago in some cases. We can travel, waiting to retrieve the experiences we encountered in cities, long ago in some cases. We can set these ideas on shelves, in books yet to be written. We can make a special corner in what might be called the new waiting room or in more extreme northern climes, an ice house. Laid out on fish boxes or available smooth planking might be a corpse of quite another kind. But one that still goes on dying, one that might still hold onto its name for a little longer. The geography disappears, the imagination is swallowed, and the speculation is that of death by drowning. It's not the city we are used to, Nor is our thinking sharpened this way, but those now out there are stranded in their place. Daily, catastrophe by catastrophe, migrant by migrant, refugee by refugee.

CITIES, TOO GOOD FOR YOU

THE FUTURE IS NO GUIDE

But the shelf is. It will organise your life, though it will not stop the cancer spreading or the brain degenerating. You caught yourself overstepping your brief. You are not a surgeon or a NATO commander, a CEO or an Empress. Nor is yours necessarily a wasted life with some belated order. Instead your guile tempts to bring down the house, destroy the shelf. Let all those models go tumbling. It is said a new coiffeur can also change positions and minds, especially in the comfort of a city with such low stakes. Cities can be rudely spoken of but I too still have time to look up the word *ricanement*. I was not there, not in that city when it happened. And I will no longer be there. But no one will ever quite realise the future is no longer the guide it was.

SHATILA

You opened for a moment like your city. There was still a trace of sniper fire but embedded elsewhere were other tears of masonry shattered by no longer surprise attacks. The scholars have already been, taken the photographs, drawn the maps and are now capturing militarised cities. As you opened, you turned the city into the closed world, not of your doing of course but the entry, that cul-de-sac of debris and fractured concrete had all but been fortuitous. It was even tantalisingly strong with promises on the shelves of the corner store olive oil and biscotti, recently arrived by boat, for the day of the dead festival. It was only a moment, fleeting, loaded and terrifying. They gave themselves a new name, the Alienated. Who was kidding who? you said. Past histories have no privilege as something foreign plunged into your body. You opened, body and city and I was only lost under you for the briefest of moments. But what wonder.

OSCAR NIEMEYER IN TRIPOLI

I didn't take the book of poems along any longer. I have written you out
and the pain you might have caused. Instead I fling loose words
into these brave ruins, ready I imagine for the new labyrinth
about to be sprung on us once more. It's delusional, I am the first to admit it
but the carousel that we once found ourselves on has been targeted.
The entry was easy, through the wire on a fence that knows not which side
it was protecting. You, somewhere behind, were stretching with that
mechanical tension they now call a hobby. This horse you are on,
once containing all the dreams of Modernity was calibrated to go higher
and lower than ever before. There is a chance we are all thrown off
before we get a real opportunity to be there. Now do we really understand what
the world builds a wall, a fence from nowhere to nowhere?
Lady of the cypress grove, with the camera in your brain, don't stray too near
that border. The chances are your hobby will fade.

THE KNOTTED MIGRANT

Of course, it's the stuff of lateness that makes the new thesis that of dredged meaning called a Mexican stand-off. We come into life when all life has been decided. No surprise there then.

It was then I noticed her skin leather-tight, strengthened like the city's control over all its victims. Waiting to cross the border into another border. It was the stitching on the jeans, the back pocket, and the calculated heaving of her breasts when all drama re-appeared. She remembered the attack.

She took her hair in her hands and knotted it behind. She said: I could never spring back into life anymore after that moment. She let her hair fall back. It had ringlets where there had been bullets, anxiety where there had been a family. It sprung back.

THE FEDORA IS A CITY

The room on the edge of the camp resists less the promise of lighting and the seduction that hides all misery. With the camp obliterated over tea and malt whisky, served from a stainless steel flask the commanders decide their next move. Rubber boots, sensible or not, will take her far from this city. As another winter dies she takes comfort in the cross-hatched world that made up her uniform. The edge is no territory that this Fedora can match. A Biltmore, from the North American attic not Havana. Duende, a word just about stray enough to enter our lives about now. But we are less sure about 'jouissance'.

THE MOMENT HE WAS SHOT

He sits more often than not now, stiller than ever.

How long has it taken to perfect this rehearsal?

With so little movement, everything else moves, even the jazz
in the café moves, even the trickle of water on the leaves changes temperature.

To move in another dimension, the one he was trained as a revolutionary
to fall back on. It is the city that has moved but he missed it
as the riot squad blocked off all exits. It is the notebook that someone wedged
beyond literacy, the one that saved him. But missed the open page.

In all this stillness that is yet to arrive, he sits there rehearsing the end of time,
the end of these unwritten lives. The moment he was shot, he knew he was
writing lines which might be his last with words which could never be locked.

WRIST SLASHING, A CRITICAL PRACTICE

And how with the title you wish for, does this really become the poem?
I look up, lose concentration. It might have been on the highway
a truck at 75 ploughing through the snow into the Camry.
Or whatever other vehicle was imagined for this catastrophe.
It was only an escape from the city that must answer its own silence
in order to produce more formless futures. The windowless rooms in
the asylum have seen so much distress. De-risk, the latest strategy
induced coma for the revellers. But it's only a Stanley knife that slices the finger.
It doesn't take long to staunch the flow, soaked bandages and the rest.
I have to ask you this, the Doctor says, did you mean to kill yourself?
Not that I mean to imply a professor is a wrist-slasher! But I have to ask
you see it's here on the forms. She persisted, she wouldn't let it go.
I mean, did you have a grand scheme for what was a slip of the hand?
Is this a spatial or critical practice I don't fully recognise?
At what stage does this become a lost chapter in your next collection?

STRAWBERRY FIELDS IN HAVANA

I like it, he said, that's good nostalgia. To me
it wasn't good nostalgia, it was present, it was the
asylum behind the big gates, the place to get hung about.
It was all this living with eyes closed that the city invites.
It was the soggy flowers left at the foot of the oversized likeness
in the Havana park. In the other memorial gardens
trespass is wiped clean in order to remember the rogue in us all.
As history collides with nostalgia, the narrator has gone missing.
But the round national health glasses are just about right.

RUIN PORN

The young girl works her cell phone with the Florida Straits on one side and the decayed surroundings on the other. Which part of the world is responsible for re-modelling. The paint barely trickles out in this city and when it does, the child bearing streets, over lean, are flattened by visitors who provide their own spectacle amidst the pimped parade.

There's a serious freeze in Bermuda shorts, sandals, and a T Shirt outside Hotel Deauville. All floppy disk time has been erased, pensioning the aged swingers in the abandoned factory. Cigars, ubiquitous in their absence, never far away as the low sun washes the morning walls. But the word out in the city is clear.

Young officer students make their way impeccably and stiffly dressed to study at the Sea and War Academy.

TO FLOUNDER WITH DEATH IN BUENOS AIRES

I've tried to bring you to the table but your concerns have lodged themselves somewhere in a world of hunting guns, quality lawn equipment and the outrageous cleaning bills for extensive power wardrobes.

The weed is not so much threadbare today as questionable.

I've seen you called on by the Security System that you have invented to protect the death of our city from the suburbia of your mind.

This is the mistake, the error of stapled language that picks out the ivy fenced around this interior that gets so little out of the sun.

Whether in Florida, Havana or Buenos Aires, these are deflections that death has taught you to practice. These little deaths now stand in for what is left of the life you must lead. Your responses are slow and each time the mouth opens to formulate a response, we have come to identify all there is back in the cavernous throat. Yet it is neither deep nor respondent. We swim in the wrong nothingness. The one used in all the textbooks. And now the security system holds all those same but faded marvels. The sprinkler system is set to go when you light your next cigarette. And explode.

MANX

I save your book for better cities than this, for cities receptive
to your adventures. If you sail into this inlet be warned, there is nothing
to rearrange, no flow to hold to, no door through which to enter
that is not an exit in this city.

You wish to know where I am, in order to know where you are.
It would be a pity once again to be so explicit without learning from this.
It would be shameful to write here what should remain unwritten
in this soullessly beautiful boulevard of the low shadow,
amongst the rooftop canyons of brittle stares and unspeakable tolerance.

The smart piles are there by the door, the books for other lives, for more fortunate
or then fantastic times, lest the selfish mind that closes only on the prairie wind
refrains from those urban songs so helplessly repeated, chimed out
from the local bell-tower whilst the magnificence is locked off to future voyages
believing the headphones measure the distance between the here and now and
nowhere

You see, I'm gently going now too. I've signed the forms that allow your orphans to enter the camp of no return. I've followed the exercises until the concrete weeps and the juice runs through the crevices of the infallible self. I've returned the triplicate forms

to others who talk back to a world too narrow for safety, for a world open only to known forces and passwords. In so doing, I have developed the signature over years of practice until it can no longer resemble the original script nor hold the same authority. It was then that I stunted the growth of this pen and burnished and fractured the tip on the concrete wall.

And only then was the directive read, only then did the bulldozers enter via the two windows left intact. Marked on the open frames: one, agitation, the other, propaganda. No one passes any more nor pays the slightest attention to the shattered windows. The last signature used closed the school. The remains of the concrete wall were taken to Europe and sold to an unusually bewildered art collector, in a city that used to be known as Berlin.

THE BUICK AND THE CITY

He sees a gap up ahead. It's years since the seminary asked him to wear the hat that came with the job. The gap between the Buick and the city is a nuisance that has no right to independent life. Beyond the family the land fades, loses its meaning and sinks into oblivion as into a soft welcoming sofa. The city no longer winces, the school has closed its doors. Miraculously no one armed themselves for the betrayal. We, the travellers of the last century arriving nowhere lost out to the world divided up in front of our eyes. No echoing the Fall of Constantine which will go on redrawing the boundary maps of the cities. And when the gap comes up ahead of the mind that can get us through, regardless of the tragedy that will befall this intimacy, simply the Buick takes the skin off the parked car. Then, when the storm arrives, we are caught unable to let ourselves out. And when the Buick plunged into the soundless sea there was recompense of sorts. The notes made were indecipherable it was said, and we had no right to ask for the contrary.

IN THE OTHER CITY

You have taught me to resent your city, you have closed the paths
blocked the exits before we have considered re-entering. You have crafted this city
with other cities that cannot hold to resentment so cleverly cultivated here.
And when the tulips retrace their history, the daffodils realise they were
not really welcome. Gossip destroys the gentlest trace of the lilies along the shores.

The sickness in your eyes, from another century stares back at me
like those vacant lots that pass for parking zones amidst the small shacks
that contour this strange and frivolously slow city. And though it might be
no fault of your own, you are the neutered city that abandons me whilst
my mother vomits blood on the other side of the world.
It's not hard to work out which came first.

THE SEA

It was accepted you would not be there, but still that silent impact will all but saturate the lower chamber. Was this why the large blue curtain known affectionately as The Sea was pulled around, echoing the shores of this poem that would have to make itself heard. It has been said that it is still possible to entertain the next step and the step before, but that's asking a lot. Yes, I was the guardian of your books, the hundreds of volumes in your library and took it to heart when the fire raged through. It should have been possible to remain 'against method' for as long as we wanted, if you had all but concentrated instead of wandering off. But other worlds, the ones sketched and animated so quickly, the almighty one, the recent one will make sure of that. You had to accept. I would not be there. For only in that moment would we ever know what you have written. Don't ever lose the emotion, don't ever stop being overwhelmed, don't stop being speechless. Instead take all the words delivered, bundle them up Scatter them in all the cities that will survive. Throw them up in the air Tie them up inside your hair. Turn to the side and notice, in the merest glimpse in the mirror, the pause that can become another life, one of lived wisdom. Your beauty speaks to the speechless. loves the loveless in your city that must never remain contained.

SUFFICIENTLY OBSCURE

I return to the almonds as fast as I can
What is this and how can it speak to the migrant
inhabiting another jungle? It cannot be solitude,
infancy or the richness of experience when imagination
is bankrupt and disquietly uncivil.

As I watched the automatic machine gun slide across
the marbled floor, this new curling event re-awoke airports to the
necessity to keep the vocabulary trimmed, albeit controlled
from one border to another. But the collapse is evident elsewhere
All polished data-driven maps of migration don't fool us at all
nor do they tell us how we have begun to interfere
with the shooting. We, the sufficiently obscure
must also take the blame.

THE LAST MORNING

There is a story by Frisch, Pamuk and Atta. All these stories by these architects invite us to assess how our personal and critical histories have been buffeted and attacked, but have withstood the charge that today this condition is nothing like what it was. The past is of course inaccurate, however else can we know if we do not live long enough to find out? From scholarship to journalism, we have squeezed the words in, many where they do not belong. Not that this has ever put any of us off. What little encouragements we now make towards the collapse of legend and rumour seem to make no headway against the accepted assumption that our lips are moving, our tongues can still speak out, though in less than useful ways. We have begun to find more modest ways to shake the tree. We can still be considered unconditional and generous to the point of exile. We never did hear those moving lips, and we never did move that hearing. It is the last morning out on the hotel terrace. The Bosphorus below, Galata Tower, Beziktas, the Ritz and Istanbul's Manhattan in the far distance, far too detailed, far too clear to offer a landscape for one of Pamuk's paintings. To the right, Topkapi Palace. On Ataturk's Day, the canyons down below are dark, less crowded, though the usual visitors from the hotel district have begun their movements of the day.

What is it about this city that asks us to write more, to add more to that which has already been amassed? Pamuk's 'huizin' resonates into the melancholy air that hangs, as the clouds momentarily darken the sky. The wind gets up, and the cloths on all the breakfast tables begin to flap. In a sudden flock, black shrouds encircle the city, darkness looks for its own break in the clouds, flying the pocket. This is not a children's story, a fable of wizardry. This is a weapon of stealth arriving when unasked for, trying to avoid the anti-aircraft fire, banking to avoid a minaret. Is this also a city about to disappear from the latest maps, re-drawn for international approval? A man in a light suit keeps returning to the table to pick up a couple of cashews, pops them in his mouth and walks around the bar. He goes back and forth, from the bar to the street, seemingly greeting all, a cigar's length from the passing tram. Occasionally he takes a sip of his short drink and pushes the nuts towards me. "Here scriptomaniac, take break," he says. I pause the pen and cigar and accept his gift. On the street, his colleague, a young waiter in black bow tie, Galatasary T shirt, swivels a menu with his fingers held as if a basketball. "Nice, food, nice place, nice life, nice game," he says, pointing to the upper floor where windows all open to the street, and football supporters are leaning out, not yet in full song.



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