

FOLLOW THE ECSTASY

How these books have been interpreted or what they are in themselves is not of great importance, I took from them what I needed.
C.Milosz A Native Realm.

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FOLLOW THE ECSTASY

Roger Connah

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Follow the Ecstasy

BE-BE CAREFUL

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. But the sniper holes in the body
are recovering well. You'd never believe I'd been the object of fire
in the sights of the gunmen in the Frontier Province. It's only poetry
that will do this, 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's survival.

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We will instruct the anonymous from our outdated manual.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. 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.

PROGRAMMATIC WITHDRAWAL

The cruelty of the poetry is drizzled across this dark landscape.
To give up on everything that holds out for correction.
To take the dog-ambush near rivers still altering their course
As fast as the weak storm surprises. Not to sleep again without
Seeing her hand lifted in place of a smile, the head too weak
to signal survival. Limpid, the world holding onto what used
to be called love, an idea that can still astonish us, in stealth.
The body levitates as if now leaving all the work to this flighty soul
thrilled into new passion before passing through security and
showing the passport for one last time. This is the imperfect love
we are calling it this time. Wide awake, unable to stop this
her hand is waving not drowning. Like my mother's arm
finally so weak in farewell. Leaf-like as she lifts to drop down
from beds with mechanical functions. Wide awake, the cruelty
is deflected. No longer the victim of conflicts beyond your heart
that tears families apart. We lose ourselves to this goodnight soul.
Her voice so low is tempting to crack and let degeneration
take its own unspeakable dignity.

LINE THE BOX CAREFULLY

How wanting we have become in our secrecy
and no eternal returns will satisfy the structure
which can never be appropriate. Line the box carefully
insert the elements of the required knowledge and clasp
the lid with the gentlest passage of guided silence
Without the cynical will that vacuum presses lives,
unsealed, loathing the tightness and the wondrous
non-knowledge that only a few reprobates continue to speak about.
Oh, to demolish our form, overreach all boundaries breached
never to be taken as the authentic self that awaits
the occupation of another. You didn't even become
a love story before it obliterated the lovers we might have become.
Don't look for the inhuman shape in me, look for all those
difficult truths that make up you in me and me in you.

ARTICHOKE TIPS

It's not that it's too late
But you have loved elsewhere
in another world which gave to you
this measured life. I touch your body
scarred as it is by the cities you have become.
I pass through the arches to get to the older
quarter where doorways remain inviting
and the vines grow unrestrained. I make
stories, hardly new I know, from all those
messages your body still holds out for
Into this earth that cradles its care, so
silently prepared for us both, you ask me to
open the jar of artichokes. Your hands,
this refined weakness that has become you,
cannot shape the necessary strength
to plunder the goodness within.

Soon I will speak in the city of the Grand
Academy of the Arts, hear my own echo
still with that imposter's nerve to believe not
in the words strung together. The horses
are probably still groomed nearby
making it onto those postcards I would have sent
had we measured this life a tad earlier.
Our ages combine in an intimacy, which makes
a tree ring this impossible history between us.
As I slip the black linen away from your face
I am veiled by your hands, as they pull me down.

MORETHAN ORDINARY

How delicious as we loosen any lingering uncertainty
with the thought of neon green slushes, love hearts
and rampant dogs on a bed of white roses.

How then will we translate other words that can
'rose' your skin, moisten it until the dew of this desire
begins to sweat ecstasy. Cast unfairly into the outmoded past
there is nothing but pleasure to be searched from the window
Our flaunting bodies facing double rainbows
and fireworks of a late summer theatre, along
with the anxiety of this puzzle, seep out
into the everyday to be crushed into the glass I use
thinking what edge you will lift to your lips.

HUMAN INTEREST

The performance is all set, there's nothing we can do about it nor decide what should not be part of our own future.

The café was attacked just at the time he was deciding which books he would no longer read, at least in this life. Preparations were essential though nothing could stop the witness's horror at being caught up in a false alarm. The doctors couldn't quite say when and where this happened and how much was left for any remaining dreams, unspent parties and unprepared diners. The tables went on being laid, the performance was all set once more.

He knew at that moment she would not be there
Damning the scare, this wasn't a false alarm. It was not that he missed her one day more than another, he had been writing when the alarm went off. Now included in the manual: *Anything is possible*. Clearing the café, sifting through the debris without further remnants of the heart being concealed where small gestures could not sustain what was now impossible. She would not be there. No one has taken responsibility but they would not let her in. The area is cordoned off. Meanwhile a new manual is being prepared, a lot to do with the smoke alarm, new music, a re-mix, freedom-fighting, deferred aging and elderly yoga.

HEADFIRST

Of course I don't give you time to catch your breath
to protect yourself from the seductive vulnerability
of a child and the distraction of a stranger doing up
the buttons of the coat that you once wore. And tempting
I see my daughter, buttoned up in a new navy blue woolen
very-English overcoat, falling headlong into mud
after running over the metal bridge by the river to see the ducks
And her mother momentarily angry and yet what did it matter?
She fell headfirst into a life that she had to live
and now she meets queens and princesses and writes essays
on Basque Separatists and the Ukrainian situation
And someone is saying that the bombs don't fall
in the way they used to fall, that war is not carried out
under the rules it once had. Headfirst in the mud of childhood
you once took out the hand that scraped it all off
and found underneath the words, the beginnings of a world
that has to emerge if we are to survive.

VENICE, SHE WAITS

Nothing was meant to change, no connection really made
You knew how to recognise the cleverness, the attentive skin
and the tease of shoulder thrown aside but left open
for eternity to enter once more. Locking itself open you
looked so crisp, so taut, needing just the right amount of tattle
to support the lost memories of previous lovers. You will tease again
and probably go on teasing but it will get through

You will be brought to your knees once more, imagining a life
re-fashioned out of such fragility and loss. To live without him, you said,
was to live without anyone, but by that time it was the distance
measured between the letters not the words. Seconds remained
before she left taking the drinks to other guests.

We saw the city together, just as we'd always seen it
and the illusion was more than useful without knowing it.

Then we disappeared to each other only to return
bearing more than gifts misunderstood.

BE-BE CAREFUL

Be-be careful, my daughter would say
Be-be careful, you don't fall for these alibis
for the acceptance of any narrowness that passes for continuity.
Don't find this mendacity acceptable as it feeds the fantasies
of the unstable, those emperors, dynasties of small potatoes.
Be-be careful, ambition is not confused with the eco-cleaning material,
the mop and the bucket and the bright red steam train vacuum cleaner.
Imagination has forgotten what it started out on, what it might have done
infecting everyone with a sense of hope. The blank wall recently tagged
over Christmas has yet to be cleaned and cancelled. A new graffiti
has appeared all over town "Fuck Black Ice". Be-be careful,
my daughter used to be only a child. No longer
and we all need the repetition.

UNDER THE PARASOL

You pull me to unwanted cures, you bring me to the table
whereupon I am forced to keep reading versions of the same
theory over and over again. I can no longer keep to your
secret quest for this beauty, for the worlds built upon
the love of confused words, this feather philosophy
of your own choosing that inexorably invites its resolutions.
Have you noticed or do you ignore all this with such
entitled detachment, such inside pain? You expect me
to travel through all the vigilance and carefully selected support
until we have nowhere to reside, except in the perfectly
built up paragraphs that hang out your knowledge noose-free,
agape, rent, loved-long, waiting for the kiss that never comes.
I have lost you and what is even more alarming, I never had you
even from the first word you whispered under the parasol.

HANOI METROPOLE

The dress you will wear at the Hanoi Metropole
will fall like a wall pushed, barely toppled by
two fingers moistened from the morning's dew.
You will step out of it in plain sight of the man
you now call the stalker who touched more
than you ever knew, more than you ever felt.
You become liquid, the dress is picked up and
draped across the large bed. The weight on you
is triumphantly received, all inseparable as the two
bodies now disappear in what amounts to this elegant
sweating of moonlit bodies.

SWIMMING NEAR THE MAINLAND

You are all woman and more, it's one
Of those cancelling ideas that we can still hang onto
But it's usually not his words that make
Up the new anthologies that you can rely on.

In the collected works, you will not find the
Secret of your make-up, or the wildness of
Your State as we break through once more
On this silent Greek evening.

A stone's throw from the mainland is all
anyone needs to know of this instability,
of steep streets, narrow passages into another's body
that resuscitates the stone and timber alike.

The air alters the water your body has become.
The bomb went off just as you chose the width of
the thong, rejecting the bejeweled version
for the cleaner lines and the break

That allowed water to be cracked open
And the breast of womanhood rescued by
a very clear sky, and a moon hanging between
Castle, rampart and peacock.

The harbour laid out with spectacular delicacy
You, tree and you, decanter
The baubles of torment as the sap
Is smeared over your fingers

The mountain is climbed, the forest
must be cleared for the tabletop to appear,
and the empress enters from unknown parts,
subject to disastrous translation.

Without the fierceness of seduction
The voraciousness of tree
I cannot separate you from the crime
I cannot part branches or lips

Or torch all sides of you
and touch the bark's ashes.

FLICKERING THE SWOLLEN RIVER

Out on the terrace, late evening, warm
and not a flickering of pornography
known for its greater meaning and
bloated intimacy. Curtains drawn

Yet we are stilled to the imagination that
fights any interruption. We are still
holding each other, slowly rocking, the
dance of a favourite song put on repeat

To suck the energy out and return it to its
rightful dwelling. The entrances have
been cleaned, nightlife and movement
swept away. The fog has lifted

That swirling morning mist shared over breakfast
across the swollen river. A mahout dips
the young elephant into the river
swelled more than any flickering

Our bodies read without this language
that seems to be able to do everything
and nothing. We darkened the interior
of womb worlds with a desire

That cannot separate such artificial
constructions. And we awake to
low flying fighter planes screaming
through the valley, on training missions.

THE TREES OF YOUR HEART

The moment before, some have knitted jackets
Trussed up, the trees of your heart
Countries identified by their own index
Of unexploded ordnance.

Some wear the tightest, waist-hugging
Jackets of blossomed colour
Printed destinies devoured by
Next season's creations

A favourite of yours that will be
poured over the dessert
that spills onto fingers that have
already been seasoned by grasping

The tree that takes your embrace.
A skirt slightly flared open
As you skip to a meeting
In the trees. One of those meetings

About to overwhelm you, that still
Ravishes you and puts the Grand Persecutor
back into the dock, stainless steel,
bullet-proof. Not a smidgen of timber

Before it arrives, the moment the waters
Broke, there upon the floor of the forest
Carpeted in shells, casings, ammunition in
Plain sight to a metal-detector only.

MUCH ABOUT DEAD ART

MUCH ABOUT DEAD ART

It's got to be possible, the Judge said
To source the fraudulence of conviction
And still walk through the fire that destroys
The forest. It's got to be possible, the
Judge repeated, to smell the conviction
That fraudulently turns this into another
Truth waiting to emerge. But then
He paused, he couldn't believe his
Own words. How long will it take us
to close in on that one tree
that has been spared the chainsaw
to become a future represented only by a work of
literature? The judge didn't know

It is vague we know, but the sundials
are no longer to be trusted, programs have altered
the source data and the sun has become an App
to be downloaded by driftwood. What's that then?
the judge asked, hardly surviving. Dead art,
he was told is the wicked result of the kindergarten.
The Grand Persecutor takes different guises
Instigates projects for inhumanity
That must eke out a return to the forest.

TEA TREE

Yes, tree, yes, you

It can teach us to leave more air to unseal

The messages of mourning, the genocide of self

It can teach us once again, we know we have forgotten,

to allow the juices to flow without any hint of arrival

To stem the wound from its infinite journey.

To know what remains incomplete is a wisdom we need

It allows the body to breathe the language that has not changed

For centuries, un-neutered by the hasty words

That are supposed to be more accessible to the

Murders committed, to the human wrongs

that habitually leak out, disguised by smothered pain.

Perhaps yes, refuse to give this tree a nickname,

but by that do not impede the intimacy.

Forget for a moment more competent poets

And let me keep you mute

For longer than this desire.

GLIBNESS

She announces something more than a future friendship is in order, a method she knows well which brings her closer to yet another challenge as big as the Metropolitan world she has left behind. There are what are mistakenly called frisky encounters that leave the war and the conflict at the door of the hotel. They both celebrate a vocabulary that has gone so wrong, but one which can still crawl under the rock, under that stone. Forgetting the last one picked up and the last beach to be covered by sand blown up from the glib boundaries of wounded souls.

THE WORLD'S LARGEST DEMOCRACY

We don't read long enough for words to reach their destiny
There is no home in this language that sets out again
And no wholeness that substitutes for the crime of passing
Quickly, that attention deficit that is the world's cover
For indifference. Woken by the elected silence
That is no longer entertained, she becomes the random act
That uncovers their error. Taken out of our hands
Fate, destiny, whatever this triggered alarm feels like,
Is accessible to all. The cup moves on the table by itself
without cinema, without spectacle. Though someone still
films it before it too loses all destination.

AS THEY DO

I remember being given the task: Ward 6
and take the ice-box. It was unworldly, a castor loose
had to be steered like an errant shopping trolley.
In the lift we were on our own, two students
given the short straw. There, third on the right
curtains, we've wrapped her up. On the return
journey, in the lift, once more out on our own
Couldn't get away from the feel of
the warmth of distress. Her parents
unknown to our journey passed the other way
to Ward 6. They didn't notice how the ice-box was
easier to handle, how could they?
It was the weight you see. Her body still warm.
It's probably still not known
how the dead come back as they do.

THE DISAPPEARANCE

Of tree. Your silence comes with no surprise
without the ribbons of my last gift, without
the final words re-invented for the occasion.

It spares the gift of doing what finally must be done,
of disappearing, unaddressed and undesired,
relieving the insatiability

Only that bit short of delusion.
There is such a thing as unpausing in the day
of triumphant misunderstandings.

I no longer send out messages to know where
you have gone, or where you might have been
which city is the festival of dark optimism
when I know too much about where you have been.

As the birds circle, the ferry arrives
and the artist records another skein
of hair-lined adventures in this overworked
but undernourished sky. We have not offended

And no departure is recorded.

LIQUORICE KISS

Underneath all, blush
The undertones of spent shadow
Close to your skin, lifting
Your body ready for the encounter
The love of deep liquorice kisses.
And if black is sometimes
too harsh in the late morning light
It can never be too harsh to be
Undressed, as the tongue sucks
Childhood liquorice and the black poems
Emerge somewhere out of the shadows
next to your skin, which I will finish for you.

A PROMISE

Asking you to eat the peach
I disguise desire in these words
Which you have already taken
And scratched into bark
On which your body has scored and
Moved. This is a promise that
Your body learns to leave back
on the island. Full spectrum, bright rainbow of
A contrarian past, emptied out
Into the line of two fingers drawn out
Opening lips unsealed with anticipation.
A cryptic way to welcome you home
Where words engorged, block any entry
Allowing only stillness
Until you shake free and
Camisole-ready, that flash of peach.
Your promise is recalled, using
A succulent word like 'ineluctable'.

A USEFUL GAMBIT

It wasn't difficult to prepare the contents
To balance the lost world between plenitude
And nothingness. We knew the critical self
Had to leave behind any excess. We knew too
That contemporary contemplation wasn't
What it used to be. How could anything so
contemporary be that relevant?

There was though a desire to undermine dissonance
A useful gambit that would be draped over the malignance.
Some deride this as solitude in action but the surveillance
was as invasive as it would ever be. The decision
Was relatively easy. No *self* left untouched,
No *self* left unturned as it embraced this triumph
of going in and out of meaning, each day.

UNVEILED

You will return the big scarf
But jettison the bag You will know the
World's image is not one you recognize.
You will climb the hills and disrobe
To the slippery rhythm. You will love
in a house that is both old and not old. And
Your nakedness will meet trees never
Imagined, never captured. And in that
fashioned bag that you jettison
I will put these words no longer necessary
Along with this stripped bark. As you climb into
yourself for the first time, no one
no men, no sons, no fathers, no saplings
will turn the veil back to hide your beauty.

SHARED CONCERNS

THE FELLED RECORDS

The tree shares your concern
And are the next in line to embrace
A girth wider than the world
As we know it. No one speaks of the
Organizing committee, the felled records
The machine shards, or the limits of control.
This alleviates the official review board
caught somewhere between
the swamp and the forest
Where they are allowed to do their job
without interference,
of dismantling the crash site.
As space is disturbed and evidence altered
The travesty perpetuates
and offends the only survivors.
Those select trees who witness to the tragedy,
become victims of this seamless evil
which cannot return to banality.

GENOCIDE

It's like trees, simple enough to understand
But it has to be, to keep the word wrapped up
To keep the books unopened by the nighttime table
Illuminated in silhouettes only for those
Night-readers, exiled in the bark of darkness,
Scored by an unrecognized death. In this way
We serve a useful purpose, we keep meaning
Away from having any further effect, from
Celebrating in those untimely disasters and fashions
That we can no longer do anything about.
But we share this with the most handsome tree
safe in the knowledge that no lightness will ever
Resolve the new country back in favour of the old.

And no lightness in the abandoned forest all around
reminds us that we still don't know where we are.
But we can, at least those perched on the roof tiles,
be excused. The huge cruise-ships dwarf the shorelines,
ruins accelerated by proxy. If we knew where to take
the exit, and to which side of the tree we should lie,
we would. But the maps required
Are all wrapped up in what looks like a bark scroll
Protecting us from the words we no longer unwrap
The trees we no longer respect.

INNER TENNIS

She's playing tennis, he's holding off on ecstasy
and the revolution once more.

It cannot even be said to be simmering,
it's off the back burner.

And how long will it take before they realize
they must continue this struggle
to shape their own urban life, that intimacy
that lies outside the attic of their minds.

He imagines her movements into which
he can still insert this unruly desire, this unbounded
swerve of a belated sort, this intimacy of late reading,
of immeasurable glances belonging to the still-modern
tennis playing mother of three, imagined in white shorts
rescued out of novels from a French library in Rockville,
emerging from children's stories protectively wrapped
in towels with pages like sand.

Whereas he, foreshortened and ruptured
in the movement of eye to ball, from hand to mouth,
stops her speaking more. The explosive laughter
of racket to arousal, the squeeze of the gentlest pressure,
the sort that in other times, in less-calendered
and bottle-marked days, cigarette in left hand,
moves from the wrist to the crown.

Yes it might caress the forehead, move her hair away
to reveal that glistening nape, and linger
for that eternal moment, an embrace
before the ball is returned, and the game continues.
Inner tennis! Now what is that?

JUST THE OTHER SIDE OF PAPER

Draw me a map of love
I will write the names, directives and tears
with your name in my city.

Draw over me, and craft the words to
dislodge other words
not just words, or actions, letters or stops

And re-enter the body's space
no sunglasses on, no bottom up
Simple, we must be led to inhabit

No secret looking back, nor fields undone
This is the uninhabitable map
The City must know

This time she is not waiting for you.

THE FERRY

I imagine the woman in a bright electric blue dress
To be waiting for someone. She has to be.
She has passed this point
at the entrance of the ferry many times in the last
twenty minutes. Her shoes are tight, mignon
Her shoulder-bag gay, in the lost sense of the word
I consider being her rendezvous by chance, to help
remove the anxiety of walking back and forth,
talking into a cell phone, accepting
this random embrace that I have been giving her
for the last twenty minutes.

POCKET SHAPED

Responsibility has to return stealthily
Begging us to think more clearly
Before the mouth opens and messages once more
take too little shape. Whilst the history of our
Conversations has offered us too many expectations,
The golden road, the brocade of a watered heaven
I knew you wouldn't, not this time
Throw me down like a stone.
Instead I would become that slight, smooth
Strongly blue stone that you gave me to
Lodge deep in my pocket. Still with me
Like a wild strawberry, pricked for blooded
Bliss.

OLIVE AND LIME GREEN

Somewhere, it's hard to call it the exact spot, or the
Precise moment, but there is a gentle warning.
You will not open the books in the same way,
you will not pause with the words and make more
from them than they require. You will not undress
in the same way, and you certainly will not undress
Her in the same way. Instead, and this is the darkly
optimistic part of your museum of redundancy, you will
Avoid the mirror for some time until the shock subsides,
and the agony invented no longer unbearable. Then, if the troops
Keep advancing, you will hold firm, the blood will not trickle
From where it should, you will not believe the rumours,
And instead of touching her and shredding the olive skin of a
Lost afternoon, the lime green ballet shoes kicked off
For that long awaited dance, you will open the book
in quite another way. Hanging desires from her ears,
those rings of a new life embraced in the invisible journals
of sorcery and seduction.

STOPPED IN YOUR TRACKS

So much of you is deep within the black water
that the rivulets have reached, crevices where you do
not belong. If I was the maker I'd unmake,
if I was the creator, I'd uncreate.
But you have no such privilege.
You cannot conceive the world to occupy it
You must travel using occasional giraffe steps
to name what cannot be named.
You must engorge that fragile nature of entitlement,
The city some say is only in its water and fathers
had their wars to blind the current wars.
Tragedy and hardship is now inapplicable.
Tobacco did not poison their hope, it enlightened
a production of the world taken from then
onwards. Now in the water, felt so clearly
the steelyards have been abandoned for so long
that no seeds are necessary.
In the siding where relentless production
and men gathered, there are now no buffers
to stop the ghost train in their tracks.

THE AIRBRUSH TECHNIQUE

The transcribers still take to their notebooks
when there's something worth nothing.
New tablets emerge in a daily attempt
to nurse the world, and tempt the excitement
that tickles the new narcissists.
Rumours are however circulating
about who can be released, who
is no longer of value to this nursed world.
Someone, maybe more than a few,
can be airbrushed out. Comfortable
in the Post Urban Gallery, a few new faces
look taut and anguished. Nothing in the celebrations
has been de-mystified as the drawings
don't quite hold the mystery of any departure.
The book of withdrawal, that's one title
must finally be taken on.
But then again...

TOSSED FLOWERS

Those that you offer
will slowly replace the library
They may make the invisible visible,
Fleetingly invite the rainbow
to emerge again without prompting.

How is it possible to announce
a renewable silence with the idea
that there is now a void to enter? We
Shall not talk of moving
from the end of one period in life
and merging into another.

We are thrilled that to die within
life before death, is as emancipatory
as expected, whatever those self-help books say,
Whatever astrology,
or should that be pathology
predicts our futures?

There was no accelerating love
to this stage, nor does this imply
a return to that faith without God,
the unity that has invited new vocabularies,
New ontologies.

If we were really coerced into this thesis,
a random enthusiasm for the accident
still remains to be called
the Greater Unity, there is no reason
to falter at this seductive,

Faltering narrative.
But our vanity is not wisdom,
our imagination is not dreamed,
caution is a winged descent, the temple still
Sacred as sacred can be

When the tossed flowers are thrown
into writing where language cannot go
we need not the nuance of ambiguity,
nor the promiscuous petal fallen from

Spent flowers on the window ledge.
This soft dismemberment,
a seduction out on its own,
often abandoned, allows us

to read the world and savour its complexity.
The waves crest, water is seen and unseen,
dries the body kissed to quite another infinity.
Some will interpret this as gaming

Others will see the divine plan taken from
The guidebook with a stray photograph
Of a Middle-Eastern city
bookmarking the section for fresh relevance.

But nothing in this restrains us anymore.
These are not works
celebrating the written but
Tossed flowers of a new language to follow.

CRIBBAGE

She could be the one,
this woman playing Cribbage
With her daughter. My gaze
Is unstoppable, enters where
It shouldn't without invitation.
She leans back
Pulls through her hair, fingers coiled
momentarily making the pony tail
Then let's go, it springs back
Right leg over left, swinging
In game frenzy and beauty,
a profile defined by the brilliance
of the cold morning air beyond the glass.
Occasionally glancing across the café
at the sound of breaking glass,
her silhouette breaks into fullness.

I am lost, enchained as
she cuts the cards with studied elegance
and destiny. Deals silently
a future outside the table
Contemplates lovingly, side glancingly
Seeing in the cards the next move
the next life which once might have been
to dissolve into the stranger's life and hair.
In the unexpected moment
Uncontrolled, eyes look up to the doors
Laid out across the ceiling
Thresholds that defy everything
left in the life of two strangers.

FRESHTOUCH

What else but such ecstasy
in this exile and snowstorm
the beginning of a poem texted
to be continued from the random

Whilst the storm blows
even harder into the skull
departure looms,
and moments are relinquished

Taut with dashed longing
Forever lost
Yet lingering not quite extinguished
Waiting to be lived again.

Just that, awake to the latest unknown
Entering within,
Jouissance deferred
Into the still-stormed night

And exile persists,
still providing cover
Such fragile protection
Twinned

Too much shared, undisclosed
the storm will dispense wisdom
bring love, night and silence
until dawn is contemplated

The body renewed
The bottle unemptied
Awaits
Fresh touch.

A WOMAN CALLED HOPE

On King's Parade, twilight, the cell phone needing the App
To make out of this darkness the moment before the fanfare
To sit back, wind causing the morning chaos
Tidal surges in place of collapsed markets
New tears of eros opening indifference to renewed narrative
The music constantly interrupted in the chapel by
Requests for personal significance. Those close refuse to
Communicate knowing any sentence will condemn them to
Ridicule, will expose their previous lives and fail
To live up to the alert mind they professed.
Embarrassment is so common it passes by
Titles of the new theses are suddenly available
And noted for what might have been missed.
New ways are being written for which writing
Has no answer and is thus dismantled, cheated by
The ungrateful soul of abandonment.

More enthusiasm must be found, new devices
To insult the veil of the East, the irreligious will mass
The believer's blood on their hands used like face paint
We do not know who is no longer insane. There's no voice,
not theirs, but one's own. The knack has always been
to listen to the unlistenable, to work with misunderstanding.
Infectious, this is the outburst that included reconciliation
and the jester can never be far away
This was the moment he was on his own,
She was on her own. The tears had changed, she was now
This woman called Hope.

THE SCRIPTOMANIAC

WRITING MATTERS

Writing matters most when it matters least
It betrays the soul on edge, the unsteady nerve
It throws out the unfortunates with the angry tongue
And resorts to untidy brevity when everything intelligent
Lies in between the lines.

It may be the time to return to poetry just
At the moment your words slip
And nothing registers in the ache of time
In your loneliness of not knowing what emphasis
Even to put on the simplest words.

No one will read this. It will not reach its destination
It has no reader who will even identify its departure
For it has already been rudely dismissed
As being beyond words in the utter sadness
Of a willed but constant unhappiness

Yes, it may be time to return to poetry
But not for the reasons you think
And not for the answers you will never read
Nor the solutions that find their own
little deaths staring them in the face.

It will be time to say farewell soon
But I suspect you will not see it coming
And you will find the reasons
To damn the smiles and gifts of days
Unlike your own, of lives unlike yours.

But that day will come
The honeysuckle will emerge
And all evil suffered forgotten or then re-written.
For it is only when re-writing the lives of others
That language becomes useful again

Yes, the poet asks of all of us the same:

Is there now nothing on earth we need to possess?

At least I know no one worth envying any more

Whatever loneliness suffered, it will survive

And nothing can embarrass the body with new pain

Only then is it left for those seeing the sun

To straighten up, to meet the agonized face

And touch the skin like tissue with renewed love.

If not, you will not see the sea or the blue sails,

Despite them being there in front of you.

PARENTHESIS

In the morning, stilled, balanced briefly, spilling over
With unknown intimacy, I'm thinking of you.
In the day, unstilled, searching, futureless
I have already crept into your shadow.
You cannot be written down for fear the tide returns
And washes away barely discernible footprints
left in the sand. You cannot be written down
for fear the uninvited visitors cloud the opening sky
and drench the taut air. You cannot be stilled
in summer dresses that colour the beaches of
forgotten holidays, dresses that cling to the deftest touch
tracing the contour of the bay down your back.
You will become the music that breezed
Cuban rhythms across the city of this creeping
Seduction. Your hair pushed back will obliterate
all audience and any other interferences.

The rock may slide from avalanches unpredicted
though the church will survive for more
curious interiors of the poet of the furies.
A dinghy will arrive, empty of the living,
guided by the exhausted swimmer.
Bodies will be found after days of searching
in the shoreline of your day.
I dare not open another's page to see you
within those lines. Silence will help for a while.
Boredom will play its part. In the evening
emptied of this ecstasy only for the time it takes
for the sun to recede and the two white doves
to return to their perch, I'm thinking of you.
In the night, waking, alarmed by breathing
irregularities, I write you down between the early
morning sheets.

YOUR SHORELINE

Colour has arrived in the instant garden
Music can be heard from the galleries
The sun is coming around
It catches the magenta rabbit that is
Your responsibility. Far off on your
Shoreline, wind surfs the coastline, grains
follow the shape left by your body in the sand

Time again to believe in the wiser poets
That bring such loveliness, that apportion
This intimacy to the briefest touch.
If I read in you the shoreline's lightness
I see the edge of a mystery still to
Discover, a life catching up with
Forecasts from the winter island, the
Dark forest and the Spring to come.

Dark writing has never been light
Never stood a chance to displace
The ravishment of this sun-drunk sea,
As our responsibility seeks the shade of
The unfinished garden.

EXCITING IS THE PAUSE

Like a book I cannot put down
You are paused for no other reason
that I can continue reading you tonight.
To think you can hold back the sun
and that you'll return
when the book is opened again.

Ecstasy has always been overrated
But not here, not now. The Mekong
was cancelled this summer and now
I know why. It lasts for some minutes, much
Less than expected as the book is
marked for the next invitation.

I enter much earlier than is possible
And I put you down on the table
in front of me for as long as it takes
For these words to reach your shoreline
for the artist to paint the colours
of your shoreline dress.

Press 'Pause' for the poet to withdraw
once more, to the desert of secrecy and loss.

SEE I HAVE NO LIFE

How many times
How much longer
Will clarity be that myth
That strips our tongues
Of piercings and hidden needles?
But what do you really
Want to be when you grow up?
And don't give me that
Forever look
Velocity, is that your name?
Aurora, is that the character?
Idoru, is this the idol?
And is that the title
we can live with?

LANGUAGE TAKES ANOTHER HOLIDAY

Certainly silly, now don't overreact
in such a cryptic, petulant way...
Of course I appreciate your words and concern
Can you not allow time and tranquillity...
Language took a holiday from those anecdotes
It left your body, lost its touch
Left the story that you once held onto
Telling yourself with no real persuasion
That you'd like to see more of me...
Of course this has decidedly turned away
From those tidbits of information as you call them
That you said would be slipped
into poems of the type required.
No, your language was insanely busy - that's all!
Take the week easy and don't kick against
things all the time. Pick between the spaces
of the wrong words. Language takes another holiday:
on a budget airline.

LA DOLCE VITA

You should have got out more, she says,
You should not have confused the writing
that never reached the body, he says.
Attitude not style, sky drama
No longer the landscape with meaning
That wrote out the rest for the wicked.
Foreplay not the formulaic, mistakes were made,
but in the event, pressed and insistent, no one
Would take responsibility. The surgeon
carried out the alterations, the rotunda
was re-structured for the good life. Something,
a lot like a coffin, was constructed without drawings.
Intuitively, it only took one sitting to test the satin lining.

You preferred what I knew
and what was predicted. The scholarships
were given out on a first come, first served basis.
Generous to a fault. The board of governors
took the boat out for the Beaux-Arts Ball.
Errors of the past made place
for the errors of the present. The Police
still occasionally called but relatively untrusted.
The riot shields didn't help
against the new drone explosives. The French market
gathered all together. Volunteers,
entrusted to design candle lights not ashtrays,
were invited to take the blame for the mistakes
to be made in the future.

THE INTERREGNUM

The interregnum was the name given this uncomfortable time. It's not clear as the galleries become lounges when the anti-body process becomes cataclysmic. We question its worth even question using that word anymore. Embraces when risked were so highly charged. Some returned to pick up their voice, some lost it forever.

The music deflected culpability and no statement was given for at least 40 hours on the collapse of the building. Mistakes went on being made. You didn't accessorize enough, she said. Held her fingers under her chin as if acting out a wisely bearded man

Thought for the day: identities are divisive, religion will not help us offer any identify. And unfinished and non-idolatrous, made in a divine image, we return to be partially considered in this, the earliest ebb of life we ever imagined.

PAINTING THE TOWN

Squeezing the bodies between the security bars
dropping fuses onto yelping dogs
this is not only the sport of the homeless.
St. Francis sails down the boulevards
La Reina dressed up as the African Queen.
Paint – it comes and goes – doesn't know
which way to turn. Galleons off the harbor
Strike a pose where all hope appears
to drain the struggle when it needs it most.
That's surely not the right way to phrase it.
The Prado tempts the body smooth as
marble, bound feet and such a pinched
touch. Nobody writes cheques
Nobody signals a left-turn. We keep on
Taking this struggle home
And hope the fuse hasn't blown.

COMMANDANT, PLEASE DISTURB

You can address me as *duke*, *il duce*,
As *jeffe* or *dude*, if it's the genuine
Pink shirt you have in mind,
And not the argyle socks used
Instead of bicycle clips.

You can greet me with *moi*, *tere*, *ciao*
or *hi*, if inside that cavalier act
is an intimacy that hints at those
Drugs-for-All that caffeinate
our fatigue.

You can even use *people*,
or *folks*, or *guys* if you feel comfortable
with a phrase I would never use.
You can swing that hammer and sickle
in that snappy mood which allows you

Commandant, to come down hard on me
For forgetting my name, for losing my step
and scalding the child too close
to the counter.

But above, all, remember it as a disgrace
You can disturb me anywhere
and anytime. But don't call me
Professor or enter without knocking
Now that, *folks*,
Would be far too insincere.

A STUDY OF WEEPING

The hermitage is filled with ash and books, exile listens
to data and mappings. The virus even enters
when your back is turned as more space is made each day
yet today there is not one single sentence left in you.

The books persist in arriving after announcing their presence
elsewhere and without as much as a greeting, take their place
on the un-dusted ashen shelves. It was there in the hospital ward
that planning and writing virtually ceased.

The world abandoned yet one more scheme to map the first
exhaustive global study of weeping. It is true, of course,
words do still trickle out but not like before, when they were mined
for a success they could never achieve.

Instead they mime an anxiety you can no longer feel,
they numb the parts of the body now inaccessible.
Now muted and alone in the ward, they lie
in awe of the terror that must not arrive .

THE HOUSE OF PARADOX

After years of thinking you could write
you have forgotten how to
and yet you dream of making good
the unwritten.

As the alarms and sirens go continuously
nothing in the contract to bring an end
to such disturbances makes it out,
The House of Paradox sees to that.

Bending backwards the dreams of known words,
the slips of illusion so lightly oiled now
inside the skull crawl back to the desk
lightly topped with its leather inset.

You assemble as many extra thin black pens
in the hope, like before, when war
and melancholia had its day
they could just take up this spidery project

Make the words work without you
and leave you out of all this muddle
that language makes of us all.

EAGLE WAITING TO STOOP

The emotive tears they say, the irritant ones
have long been researched and found performable
They flow, they keep on flowing
but few get near as those cried out
those sobbed out, drenching the rest of mankind.
These, the tears we need more than ever

The trips out of the hermitage have got shorter,
distances travelled not so far now. Nothing invites
awakened dreams of distance as everything encourages us
to draw the curtains, turn the lock, put the chain across the door.

Yet when we do venture out, we breathe deep in the estuary
where the boats lean against the morning tide and the gulls sweep
for discarded bits of the foetus jettisoned in haste.
Should we be at a loss how to go on?

Should we learn again how to put one foot in front
of the other without tripping up those behind,
those we push out of the way when the alarm goes?

Then the sirens sound again, and the small package
on the seat nearby or the person running to mount the bus
proves to be one you missed out of the corner of the eye.

The blind spot so neatly placed by the one seeking heaven,
the one inviting us to think of the desert, the mountain
and the high flying eagle waiting to swoop.

WHAT ABOUT NEXT YEAR?

Outside the pop-up hospital, the city still weeps
People take boats out. There are shouts across the lake.
Dogs barking. Serious hooliganism is once again in the air.

The mist is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. A bird or two
should etch its way across the mirrored surface nearer
to this lost reality. Emptiness cannot conclude with respectability

Nor can we be precise enough. Let us not wish for the prettiness
of language or for more serious hooligans who better this emptiness,
by coughing like a broken bottle.

Two cranes stand in the field up to their necks in dignity.
How to get the message through to them?
Next year, what about next year?

FRIENDLY FIRE

The shudder in the room amongst all those cameras
is precise. The siege is on, the emergency over-runs.

Lest you mistake this unreason for anger, beware
I have heard talk of mouth-worn thoughts

The aged skin that hints at the lizard above the eyes
Takes in more injustice each day

I lie awake at night once again.
You find me in the bed in the guest room

I'm sick, you say, this or that virus
so I search the skull for the pain.

I find the flooded rivers of Italy and France
and the collapsed frontiers of Kashmir

Buried under mountains we will never climb.
What did we do to deserve these sudden deaths

So inexplicable for this time of year, for any time of year?
We discover skulls that aren't always our own, in the towns and
villages

Of Afghanistan released from further pain. If only briefly
we can cover from accidental death from friendly fire!

THE DOOR TO THE FOREST

He never meant to write in riddles, though he knew the talent
of ambiguity could not be practised so easily.

It was never the lyrical deceit in the present that allowed him
to lose the chance of shaping the future, before others would do it for him.

Only she knows the connections he had and how those turned
into the inaccurate future. He now lives the powerless so quietly

Seeks the dance floor somewhere behind the mists, and the burnt jungle.
He doesn't wear the white skull cap but has come to confirm

The inklings others may already have of him. Never tell another to shut it.
Unless it's the door to the forest.

THE SCRIPTOMANIAC

Death and probably the maiden.

Come on, we are all misfits, some of us more

Perfectly wedged in than others. It's a simple story:

You were always pretty wayward, structured frivolity

Never achieving any new validation and the new poems

know well enough how to defer this lockdown,

beyond the expendables

without second-hand pride getting in the way.

The church, the hospital and the monastery offered

painful new ways to think out the world, to anticipate

action in a situation where that action

wasn't quite what we had in mind. Contradiction

What contemplation could we still take on,

thinking through this world that has to continue

to leave God out of it; such malign cleverness

that we wish would go away.

Who are you? You were the jester, critical recklessness
was a life lured by solitude and scheduled obedience.
Who amongst you took every opportunity to speak
in this project for extinction?

We have marked out the alienation, it's a play
we are forced to digest without an aquavit
and salted herring on toast. Now this is not a poem
Nor is it worth noting down.

Evidently not all of us have something to say.

UNDESERVING BLOOD

Even the nihilist will be tempted
To go to the words of others
To direct the thinking that marginalizes life
On a journey that pains the lyrical thought
Until it scars those unworthy
And undeserving of scars.

And the nihilist may have that extra help
In the form of a small book
Inside the coat, in an inside pocket,
Or somewhere concealed about the person.
But none of that will provide
The destination for the thinking,
If all but a touch brings blood to the fingers.

UNBLEMISHED BY JUDGEMENT

It is worth forgetting sometimes
to make notes on how unjust the world is.
It is worth forgetting to note the agendas
that re-write the injustice before it
is even completed and the bodies buried.
It is worth forgetting sometimes
to register the nonsense that can hit
others in such ferocious ways
It is worth forgetting in different cities,
in different countries, the world
can and will destroy itself again and again
as if nothing is learnt from the past,
and nothing can remain stable.
It is not worth forgetting to emphasise
what is not written, the controversies
we cannot have, and the fragments
and transgressions of our life,
love unblemished by judgement.

FRAGMENTS TO THE VIRUS

NIGHTFALL

Are *you* only pretence, a rhetorical device in this, the emergency love that arrives too late, and too early at the same time? The irony, as you said it so gently last night that *you* are afraid of missing a world. Yet the moment you leave, another world of tenderness has to be imagined. Another small movement of such tenderness re-ignites our ancient youthfulness, thinking of being re-awakened to goodness, love and generosity. They talk of no immunity. As we become invalid for life, we must still follow the ecstasy. As my words return, the tongue rights itself, there is less fall on my face. Night has fallen in the way only night knows.

THE FRAGMENT THAT IS ME IN YOU

It's quite possible, no it's even likely. You use only a fragment of me in whichever way you wish to measure this life. It might be the raconteur in distressing attire, or the Mediaevalist returning with bottle-lensed glasses to put wrong those things put right so many centuries ago. It may be the voice and the softer volume, aging slowly with some acceptable dignity, not to be confused with the sound of the trucks nearby. It may be the travel writing that will never take you to the countries you have managed to avoid so far. It may be something else, but no matter, it will continue to make up only the fragment that has become me in you. And there's no denying it, as the crisis unfolds before the next one arrives in our blindness, you'll miss the parts left in another body, in some spectacularly dull moves in countries still suffering from uneven development. Unrealized but not abused, I edge away from you as each day invites slow poetry, the sort that is no longer read. Even by the fragment of you

ANOTHER KILLING GAME

She no longer calls, perhaps mourning the intimacy that served her so; a young Iranian student from Teheran, looks up, barely a movement in this recognition. Neat, small and living everything possible except those piercing dark eyes, the chat is delicate with nothing of real interest or passion about it. Exchange is limited. The professor asks her if she has possibly read 'Reading Lolita in Teheran'. She doesn't recognise the book, or even the words he speaks. In the glaze that passes between them, there is an eternity of the professor and student on a yellow North-American school bus. Iran in the bus, but nothing like his errant imagination of it, nothing like the invented world where they touch not each other, where they entertain each other with distance, introducing more alarm in the world at precisely the moment we need less. It's the suspension that kills!

THE BOOKS LEFT IN THE GARDEN

Life has been hidden within the slow writing, the slow poetry that has grasped love elsewhere. We have long and short conversations. We have poured the whisky and likewise you have returned the act. You have looked through books left in the Garden, books inviting your eyes to do more than search, books to invite your hands to do more than gather the papers together that are your life. You have left signs, small provocations to tell us that surprisingly you are still alive. We now know you feel your hand and it moves as you witness this attempt to write out everyone else's life but your own. You have left papers to be changed, burnt, shredded, inscribed, subscribed, scrawled and defaced. Up to this moment, the papers are still lying there; the machines idle for years. Up to this moment I have seen no indication that you will write, even if this will be your own testament. You will have the words ready: *it takes one to know one*. And you will continue writing words and flinging them into the void, but not on paper. You know who you are. You dress each morning and look into the mirror. You may learn to drive sustainable cars with unsustainable lives. You have seen how misdemeanours continue in savage untruth and indifference. Styled emotions until the world has nowhere to go. You keep the funds within this funded world. You might be the one disappointed with me most. You escaped. And who am I anyway? Do I know and will I be the other one who got away? Such gentle strokes. Even your speech has returned.

WHO IS THE PERSON DOING THIS?

What is this legacy they wish to leave? And why would this legacy need to be framed through this dogma, this personal utopia of memory, theology and history? What is this desire to be noticed, remembered and honoured in the dishonourable roll call? What is this architecture of your own opinion and anecdote? Is there a man or a woman who knows where the world should be, should go, not what it is? Is there someone who thinks they can guide others into their worlds of history, of travel, anatomy, tristesse, God and happiness? Is there a person so sure that their behaviour becomes reprehensible, rudely dismissing those that do not fit into the precious scheme of this worthy life? What of this world made out as repertoire? Will memos, notes, poems and directives from the world beyond continue being produced? Will they be dropped into the void and wait for the ripples of thought? When the ripples come back with insufficient and improper echo, the emotional negligence will be clear. But they will be launched again as if unacceptable first time round. Historians and theologians too will then get in on the act once more. Each time, as if there is no past in past, and no history in history. Who is this person? Someone who has gone beyond the beyond, someone who keeps on dying! Someone like you, someone like me?

RAISED VOICES

What are you afraid of? There is no wrong connection, there is no wrong love or the failed fury of intimacies from a connection that has already gone nowhere. The voices raised can be heard all across the valley. That is enough of a paradox to keep this brief interlude going, to fill a suitcase with the scribbling of the man wandering, greeting the mahout, joining those river walkers. Actually, so far away, so close, there is a weeping to the exchange creeping in. The tears though are only a sign to further invention. Meanwhile back where you once came from, they are facing changes, the lovers are taking a single file trek through the forest. Some even have an umbrella. For some reason they think it helps when the jungle burns. When he talks about love, when he sees the word written down, he can hardly recognise the boundaries. The binoculars are no help. She has a young son who is about to visit the cities of his mother's life. Venice being one of them. He will no longer find the bar and the umbrella. The alertness to impossibility has though been passed on to him. Her son will fly. And he will also know, the binoculars will not help.

PERSONA LUCIDA

There is more to it than we thought. If thinking fails, momentarily, or less so, if we are warned that we can lose this ability, does this cause us to panic in order to think more, and work more in the time left available to us? What if we were able to reach a condition whereby we needed less and less of the interpretations that make up our world and had less reason to record anything? If the Abbess was right about smoking, was she faithful to the pleasure that would have killed her? Can we say the same about this mania? There is a stage nevertheless that needs not the hurry to write out everything that is left us. To remain unwritten is a pleasure we may no longer experience. As others chase us, wish us, will us, to write out the clarity that is unreachable, what lines will they take from you, from us? What will be left in the unspoken corridors of a shadow or become that feather on the breath of God? Death brings us this gift of clarity, the remembrance of a line taken from us just at that moment? *Persona lucida!* It takes less tears to remain alert, and more tears to remain contemplative. That stage is then reached. We learn how to put this thought away even if it can never be erased. But then it is never uttered.

ACTUALLY IT IS LIKELY TO RISE

It arrives at moments in our lives, not always recognised. We become contemplative, even solipsistic; the edge arrives where we walk through the books that still guard us against icon and image, against the fraudulence of the latest untruth. The imposter holds onto words in this private democracy. Wisdom abdicates responsibility when the authority to speak is questioned. We are triumphant only when we identify that moment. That moment which we recognise we are unlikely to gain more in this abyss, and no longer need the upper hand in the years left us. Most of us walk around with a secret. Told that the world has become deleterious, we do not return to a state when we take words seriously. We will not only eventually die, for we stopped breathing comfortably years ago, but we will not recognise an existence lived through. Life will remain unexamined. The scare however has lost its presence, and many secretly know they will now no longer read one single book throughout their life. Contrary to predictions however, the intelligence necessary to make constant error will remain the same. Actually it is likely to rise.

BOOKENDS

It has not become hopeless so much as reading yourself to death. Information theologians - planners of the sustainable creed - navigate diagrams and list out the manipulations of chaos. These are the artificial interventions necessary to make this dream come alive once more. It is not that we can stop the information that makes up this hermitage - the metaphor is real and with us to stay - it is that these instrumentalists and mappers will not survive your affinity to them. If there is a world outside your own bookends, then it has to be taken in deeply, slowly, held there until breathing gets easier. Then there will be nothing to write home about anymore. Home will be unrecognisable, and writing will become something else entirely. But do not say, heaven forbid, you were not warned.

EXIT THROUGH THE SOLARIUM

The two words - 'superficial' and 'inauthentic' - marry a little too readily. Can these contracts with our selves really be taken on? Or have we deluded the index that tries to order our relevance? It is no longer possible to hold a conversation, for inside the formal address, the place names, the appalling tactics with diplomatic dullness, lies the future of the offspring. Who they belong to is not quite clear. But worrying about it is as far as we can go until the insomnia returns and, as we pass those exiting the solarium, we anticipate the early summers of sunbathing in drizzle and light rain. But there's nothing left of us in this, as we preserve our speech for other visitors we deem more impatient than those we once loved.

DIAGNOSTICS

One would wish for more essays in life if this were a sentence. The recluse was treated to more naivety and immaturity but few would accept this, preferring to ignore this reality in favour of a mysticism of rare friendship. The improving mind still struggles of course and there are many sentences we still copy out. He moved between Whitehead and Foucault, Niebuhr and Tillich, thinkers about to disappear - like cities - from the map. But it could not explain this anxiety that turns life, ever so elegantly, into a safe ruin of your own making. Admittedly then, we could construct this ruin with consummate skill but all that would never be enough. You have now become a diagnostician, whilst the recluse rips up the words from the mask that has been worn more recently. Research now is for that 'reclusive gene'.

THE SEMINARY OF THE UNCAUTIONED WORLD

Of course it's a breeding ground, why did you think we wouldn't recognise it? Though the tendency is evident, where the novice is put through exercises that resemble that of a seminary, you must have noticed how sincerely we have provided the pillows for cracked skulls, whilst the orphans animate their pets into birthday card greetings, and the talented are stripped, shipped off into the exercise ground. We still call it a blank canvas; you know those that invite infinite contemplation. Enhanced, this reductivism is cozy, and sleeveless sweaters are brought into the garment program. There is a Shakespearian echo of course, but the Monsignor still has his hunting boots on and Quebec is such a long way off. We have to accept that this used to work conventionally, with those alert minds of the decent pioneering types we expected to meet at least once again in our lives. It's not about re-negotiating learning and no one can deny it, whistleblowing has proved redundant. Insight loses out to the competition to bake bread and then make something else out of it. The Seminary sweats.

WE DESIGN MOUNTAINS NOW

Trouble is: nothing sticks, nothing much besides low wisdom and poetry goes backwards. Nothing is going away as we wish it. The exercises are crumbled into grades, out with the 'holy' and in with the profane. Take and crush the first 10 pills with a pestle and mortar, drink with as much water as possible. Stay near the room with the appropriate 'toxic' symbol on its door. Note here the self-emptying, and try and face the un-cautioned world with as much irreverence as you can. Remember when lobotomies were suddenly used what they could do? Will someone say "no, not this way, not this route? No. No. No." Take the next sachet and wait for the colonoscopy. Self-emptying never used to be this easy. Test yes, track yes, trace yes! The nurse arrives ready for the sponge-bath. Kenosis, yes please.

TEASING THE ROOM

They opened their mouths as if all went to plan, but nothing really came out. Accepting the dementia that hits the surface of the skull, occasionally beyond control, perhaps it did emerge to find in its sibilant hissing a reluctance to go on. Only then to back off, turn inside, search the faces of those gathered around the bed for a sign of admission. Having failed to pick up on the confession they went out and broke the record for how long the sentence could go on without ever having to pause, or even, and this has since disappeared, without ever having to be teased about meaning. She teased the room with her presence and the snagged memory of lovers too distant for even the staged journey to send them back to re-live those years. This became the Royal City.

HYNOTIC INDIFFERENCE

What a line for the poet to use and then put the tongue away! We used to enjoy the random and the unthinking until it could do nothing but turn back and scorch the tongue. But back then when books were not scanned we had so little to back it up, which made it triumphant. The priests, doctors, epidemiologists and witchdoctors re-grouped and spoke of a general restructuring. The lightning was not only electrical it was substantial; sorcery of the flat horizon. Attracted to this double bind, we rolled over with our legs in the air, danced and forgot to close the door after us, when everyone left. The following morning it was announced that the end of thinking is – miraculously enough – more thinking. A cynical act, it was said, nothing much beyond the prairie or grassy knolls except another Father or Madonna on a bicycle.

SILENCE IS SPOKEN HERE

And it's supposedly in Kentucky where the greyhounds do not spring from the trap set for them. And with so little achieved as they come out of the crime set before them, there is however one misdemeanour which continues to go unpunished. From the race riots in Louisville onwards, children are prevented imagining the contemporary future they deserve; they are not given the chance to scorch their own tongues. From afar no one could quite see the bicycle had been snowed in for over four months, the monastery blanket tight, the machinery useless. It was, the witchdoctor said, because they were too close to it and anyway, it is their life no one else's to decide whether the lightning strike is electrical or sorcery. You are inclined to agree with those chieftains who have invested so much limited thinking into it, so they cannot step back. It will go on like this because there is no force from outside and change is not imaginary enough. If you were an institute and not a bicycle, you'd have been closed down when the first strike was recorded over a decade ago. One wag has changed the graffiti phrase: *it's a kill-de-sac in God's fiefdom*. It was not an original phrase but comic nevertheless. The key is to put things in place to pass over those other things that you have already put in place. In this way, the witchdoctor is a transit maker. The measure of who you are is visible and palpable. It can be read the next time the lightning strikes. There is a town in central Kentucky called Speechless.

PLEASE MR FRISCH

Enough about the Virus and the Emperors, more from the sketchbook of Mr Frisch. Reaching the Esso garage and the shelter, the recluse joins the novices to wait for the yellow school bus. Huddled inside, for that bit of warmth, yet no bus arrives. A man in a 4x4 buggy, those used in the Southern Lowlands to herd sheep, is ploughing snow in the gas station. First he chips the ice with a long hoe, probably similar to the weapon of choice of the Khmer Rouge. Weak sun means the ice sticks to the Italian boots. More novices huddle in the impossible space, work is on strike in the impossible temperature, the latest virus (the one before the one to come) is spreading. For some impossible reason – it's all impossible - Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus* can be overhead from someone's headphones. Two novices giggled and somebody else whispered: "I'd rather have Puccini this morning." The bus ticket is used as a bookmark to increase serendipity, deferring any reading, any arrival for as long as possible. The known remains with the known, the outside remains outside. What else could it be now in this impossible country? The new dynasty, the grand administrators have already arrived, ahead of their meeting with the Emperors. They too seem unable to shift the ice. It is now being acknowledged that meetings can now be called to announce the failure of programs asked of them. The virus knows this.

INDO-CHINE

She is from Indo-chine. Her glasses thrust back over her head frame the delicacy, the beauty of her neck arched in gold. She writes a list, a prescription, an exam, anything that might suggest the scholar. Her fingers are delicately poised to attend to your later life, her eyes reaching for one moment across the café. The paper cup she uses cannot be her, is surely not her. She must drink from another cup, have another destiny than this. She leans forwards and writes a little more. He imagines it written to him. Her hand is arched to the paper as if protecting the words from prying eyes, or the unsuspecting kiss on her neck, unforgettably tender. She is actually pretending to work. Head so deliciously poised to suggest a future with no one you know. He closes the notebook, and opens the new book on *Death and the Virus* that had caught his eye. Gratitude. The book written to set twilight on its new course. She closed the bag. Her head was down again. He left, certain the woman from Indo-Chine had looked backwards towards infinity. Not at him, the recluse, or the doctor in young cotton, outrageously overworked, saving unsaved lives, out of God's time and poetry.

THE RECLUSIVE GENE

Apparently “discoveries in epigenetics suggest that the environment is a biochemically active inducer of phenotypical development.” The image here is of young Buddhist monks in Luang Prabang, the Royal City, once a favoured environment of the French, north of the capital Vientiane, and west of the Plain of Jars, which was the ‘Other Theatre’ for the Vietnam War; an area of land which saw some of the worst battles and bombing throughout the US battle in Southeast Asia. “In addition,” we are told by Guthman and Mansfield in *The Implications of Environmental Epigenetics*, “understandings of the delayed temporality and intergenerational effects of epigenetic mechanisms challenge methodologies that privilege space.” The new research if we ever get out of today will be to explore such mechanisms to see how it is possible to set up such a challenge, and determine just what it might mean – the narrative - to privilege space. In this case the ‘reclusive gene’, inner ecstasy and the space of the body.

FOLLOW THE ECSTASY

If genes have a ‘memory,’ then the life of my grandmother Sarah Challinor (a Methodist who played the harmonium in church every week), and my father, William Connah (a sometime Methodist lay Preacher) has left me with that reclusive gene. It is a simple desire from early age to detach, dissolve (whether in a system of thinking like Methodism or Buddhism) and eventually ‘disappear’. If the air our ancestors breathed can directly affect us, if we can trace the future they gave us, then what of my own ancestors from Portugal arriving in North Wales around 1790, under the ‘pirate’ name of Eduardo Cuna de Pentrobin and Willem Cuna de Pentrobin. Solitude is one ‘truth’ generally accepted in the human condition; where is such a notion heading in the future: machine learning, artificially manipulated or privilege the awakening body by following the ecstasy?

