



**THE COLOURS
— OF
OUR FLAG**

ALLAN KOESKI HORWITZ

THE COLOURS OF OUR FLAG

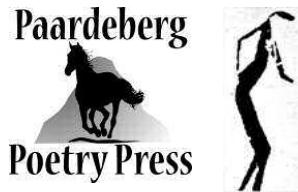
POEMS

ALLAN KOLSKI HORWITZ

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES DE VILLIERS

This book first published in 2016 by

Paardeberg Poetry Press
in association with Botsotso Publishing
Box 30952 Braamfontein 2017
botsotso@artslink.co.za
www.botsotso.org.za



© in the text - Allan Kolski Horwitz
Layout, cover and illustrations ©James de Villiers

Many of these poems were previously published in journals/anthologies such as Baobab, Botsotso, Carapace, Marikana Remembered, New Coin, Art for Humanity Bill of Rights project, Stanzas and Twelve Plus One.

ISBN 978-0-9814205-6-1

For my family
Of blood and of the spirit
The living and the dead

"The nature of a poem is analogous to that of a Fiesta, which, besides being a date in the calendar, is also a break in the sequence of time and the irruption of a present which periodically returns without yesterday or tomorrow Every poem is a Fiesta, a precipitate of pure time"
Octavio Paz

*

First of all, do it; then once you've done it (let the words spin out
a whirlpool, dart in from the fringes) let the flow
of ragged cataracts straighten into
deep channels so that a state of swirl
subsides
becomes clear as the foaming vision of prophets

truthful fantasy of voices in rhythm
machinery of the intellect
in hand with the rolling tongue telling drama
an ancient space one to honour
as you
shape and re-shape
read the neighbour's palms
then love your fresh page
all this as you make your own
script/scrawl of the living

island and mainland visited in
daylight and darkness
delivering merciful judgement recording
revelation

you do this because you need to follow and leave
traces in the sand beside the raging river

AKH

CONTENTS

How far	1
Two bushes	2
First face	3
Bo tree	4
Black consciousness	5
Voice of a homeless woman	6
Stoned over Louis Botha	8
What is this blind nuzzling	11
Cycads in Modjaji's village	12
Pin prick	15
Bella at Bela Bela	17
What is to be done?	18
Food for life	20
Cyber loyalty	21
Under an open sky	22
Cemetery of driftwood	24
Clearing the mind	25
The bread of the Dutch is death	26
White cross for the white man	28
Spit fire	33
Dignity	34
Infestation	36
On Robert Browning's obsession with dying maidens	38
The maids	40
Water colours	41
I can't phone there's no signal	42
Ghost love	43
The sacrifice	44
Morning in Gaza	49
Dance trance	50
Brown (study)	52
The back of the head of a guitar	54
Which way does the river run?	55
Ten queens of Bulawayo	56
Those and these days	59
At table: the guests are the hosts	62
For N	63
Across the bosom of the hills	64
Worm life	66
I ask u	9
Dagga smoking on Robben Island	70
Above the chains of Lions Head	73
The man in the green blanket	75
I burn/you poison	78

Aerotropolis	80
Seven minutes past three	82
Abdullah's toilet.....	88
Cat	93
Afternoon with Kay.....	94
Returning to earth	95
Mangwapani	96
On the bank of a brown river	97
The fate of revolutionary poets.....	98
Steady	100
Lining up	102
Scoring	103
Human invention/extinction	104
From the air	106
Beads of delight	107
In the meanwhile	108
E for escape	109
White hair	110
Silver	111
Reflections on suicide	112
Q & A	115
Defence and attack	116
Does nothing matter	118
Information gathering	119
"Dandelions in the desert"	120
Stratis Thalassinos	123
Migrating desire	125
Jackal hunt	126
Falling into sleep gladly	127
Jerico	128
At the round earth's imagined corners	130
Red sea coral	132
Anthony and Cleopatra	133
Sunday poetry salon	134
Superama sunset	135
A flash of green/blue/black and gold	136
Moon games	137
Ancestors and descendants	138
Homage to Vernie's Don Pedro	140
Solitary	144
Vision	146
Dead sheep	147
David Livingstone Explored	148
Primary facts	150
If.....	157



HOW FAR

How far can I go with you
How far

Tell me
Oh tell me

I will show you
Once our horizons meet



TWO BUSHES

Pink rose shower of tiny hard buds
brilliant yet pale amid the green

red rose
older trunk still curved and supple
vermilion clutter of tangled branches

pink rose fragrant adrift with
subtlety
red rose florid and lush offering gusts

i at leisure in the garden
breathing dreaming
transient delaying till dark

is it either
or

may i choose both?

FIRST FACE

Go be as the child
enter him let her live
both become adult

let him be formed out of rough and polished knowledge
the lines to be cut into his skin not artificial unearned
let her scars not be frivolous marks of trivial pursuit
let her face demons grind them down with discipline

be as the child
welcome his smooth face
her eyes wide as she skips
and give him stomach to face carrion
her a stiff lip when fire burns red

these simple things
born from the wound
of the Mother
who
died and died and died
and survived

and surviving
conceived and carried and birthed
and comforted
children to give her life

BO TREE

*(partly) found poem inspired by a plaque placed next to a bo tree
in the courtyard of the Tanzanian National Museum, Dar-es-
Salaam*

**The leaves alleviate fevers, bleeding wombs,
constipation,
boils, bruises and mumps
The fruit treat stomach upset, heart disease
The roots heal inflammations, gout and lower back pain
Its latex soothes skin disease
Bark sterilizes wounds
Seeds ease bladder infections**

there is no part of our frail festering flesh
it will not deliver from pain
and if we with diligence and good faith
entrust our spirits to its healing
there is no trauma it cannot salve
for under the shade of the bo-tree
Siddhartha became
the cycles the tides the force fields
springing and wintering

*

roots and branches break out in motion
gnarled entwining stems
unite in a dreadlocked trunk
minerals in deep earth rise slowly
leaves meet the wind
comfort stillness with music

when a patient approaches
the bo bends to offer its medicine

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

Black water signalling the measureless depth of an aquifer
black mail scar signing the cheek of a faker
black sheep succulent firm fleshed roast on the altar
black hole invisible light breathless with matter
black face brooding profile ancient in stature
black guard majestic nomad made an enforcer
black heart butterfly pulse damned up with rancour
black magic enigmatic rod tripping the power
black book obscene scrawls of the censor
black box unseen witness tells of the murder
black list shadows released under torture
black mark chance's tattoo of cautioned behaviour
black mass scripture scalding the blood of the saviour
black widow everyman's triumphant survivor

VOICE OF A HOMELESS WOMAN

Documentary of a Cape Flats eviction destruction of shacks

At the centre
of the margins
in the heart a voice of the storm
voice of a woman
and a camera frame
this voice of
a woman and the echo of hands and hammers
bringing her down
sundering her shelter
her shack cast open
cut
d
o
w
n
hammer nailing orders banning her space
bare voice of a woman
utter fucking madness
hammering down her life
this voice
wanting ears to cry
love
rage
you!
yes you!
can you help?



STONED OVER LOUIS BOTHA

1 January

i am flying over joburg

louis botha avenue ribboning
north south
past shopfronts dirty sidewalks

five million souls in this city
high veld staring down
at the oceans

i am flying wondering what
thoughts and sensations breed
and bear fruit in this city along
streets lined with trees
rain has made green

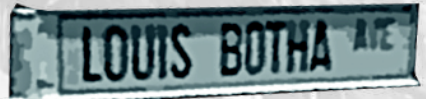
and it strikes me
first task: produce!
without a scheme for succession there is no survival –
make babies make plans!

draw the future out of the dregs of the past
you see louis botha in the spirit of these new times
must still be renamed
(for the moment the boer general's fame subsists in
designating this street)

*

i am flying over joburg

five million souls recovering from the new year
parties that shake off the shackles



the drinking and eating the laughing
all these spill forward like a drunk
on the 'stairway to heaven'

but
this is also time for reflection
time for hope
damn! we need this week away from wages
this renewal
we need to gather up strength
dream immortal. . .
we need to get motherless
before facing the grind and the guilt of another year

*

i am flying over this human settlement
named joburg
waves of hysteria and boredom greet the pilot
the task of interpreting
entrusted to tv anchors and workshop gurus
not philosophers not griots

and it strikes me
joburg you exhaust me
even as i take another hit

human paths stretch meandering at their own
pace those who wish to hurry had better show patience
those who wish for harmony had better first watch
the action of a star being sucked into a black hole
then come out the other side and make another primal explosion
to appreciate just what power and violence
can and do and o and o and o and o



and then manifest as a city: bricks and girders bitumen surfaces
rats rose gardens oil-burning plastic mobile insects
with homo-not-so-sapiens holed up in their shelters

and it strikes me
joburg you are golden tarnished groundcover spreading
over springbok stalks
foreign imposter on this highveld
burning pure air with your belches your selfbranding
banquets

what is so global about you except for your monkeychatter
your slack fat gas-guzzling traffic jams
your electric fences barbed wire grill gates
your weary taxi lines and toiletless shacktowns
your mallmania your security clusters

ag joburg stop yr blue light behavior

*

i am flying over louis botha
and i don't know where or when
i'm going to land



WHAT IS THIS BLIND NUZZLING

This digging into
This holding and smoothing
This sucking
This sniffing
This tongue touching
This gum sucking
This lapping and lowing
This grunting
This sighing
This shrieking
This mewing
This swearing
This giggling

This swooning
This mauling

*

Inside you
I disappear

And am found

CYCADS IN MODJAJI'S VILLAGE

Pre-historic trunks wind round the hill
 brown ring upon ring
rough bark like a hide
prickly serrated leaves
 pods large as a pregnant belly
neither tree nor bush edging out the swamps

dinosaurs sniffed trod them down
 ripped them chewed them
brushed past in the dark
as the millennia slid by numberless

and these doomed gatherers ate and ate
and the quick carnivores watching ashen skies
over the dying forests died out

but simple and hardy
the cycads kept growing growing
growing slowly so slowly
they grew a new slowness

 not bowing
 not wondering where time's going
 how it's being swallowed
 spat out and upon
 how it refuses to budge
 then runs away so quickly you can't blink

all over Gondwanaland the steaming moisture of jungle
cycad plantations spread dense dreamy forests
till the hunger of humans for fuel
cut them down cuts them down
 so few are left few in the earth
just a few to survive in reserves

*

the nursery at the foot of the forest
 issues permits for sale
you may take a sapling from this sanctuary
 take it home to a city clogged with fumes
but you are warned:
 nothing will induce your plant to speed up
 cut corners hasten its height and its girth
cycads ignore the rush they know everything
 sooner or later
 changes
they know they will one day
join the decomposing memory
of the planet and rot just like us

so now walk in the reserve marvel
 scent the ancient bog
this most enduring survivor rings
the rain queen's haunt
 Modjaji queen of the Balebedu
 who still rules

while the fern forest
 digs in
second by second aeons of
 untimed seconds



Diagram 1
Positive



Diagram 2
Negative



Diagram 3
Invalid

PIN PRICK

Thirty second HIV test: positive or negative status indicated by the number of vertical stripes formed after a drop of blood has been introduced into a special solution contained in a small receptacle

One line or *two lines*
never three lines

that's the way it works
in this truth story

one line

two
lines

blood drips onto the plastic boat
you take a voyage to far off places
dark heaving places where your heart clots
becomes swollen saggy yellowish sacs

one line

two

lines

breath blows up a high pressure zone
eyes squirm with salt
a dead lifetime floats into the future
sunrays shine bright
even as they waver

one line

two

lines

only pulse beats away
the beginning or end of hot or cold kisses
seconds in which the mind and the memory
infect soft wet mucous

one line

two

lines

the ship's doctor readies a white coat
furies leer along the coastline

you will bless or damn this voyage
but you cannot choose where to drop anchor
the choice long made long lived

or was it?

one line

two

lines

the crew's down below

all those baring your sex
can you remember his or her face in the dark?

the slide into and out of that body
the heat

do you recall any cuts any sores in the days after?
do you recall any scratches?

one line

two

lines

you crouch as waves wash the deck
seek a life boat

where's your jacket?
the escape hatch is locked

O	<i>T</i>	<i>L</i>	
N			<i>I</i>
E	<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	
L		<i>E</i>	
I	<i>O</i>		<i>S</i>
N			
E			

three's a crowd in this pathology
that's how it spreads

but
can you stop?

Bella at Bela Bela

Arms up she parts her hair
 makes two auburn tails
quickly then slowly twists them

then one hand over her plump breasts
she fusses with strands
 before sweeping them into a bun

a woman past bearing rearing
 past fighting and feeding
 past angling for eyes

but a woman still conscious
 still wanting the sun to brown her legs
 restore sagging sides

a drowsy woman lapping warm water
and me there wondering
 when to start patting her sighs

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

A Question for Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

*The beggar taps at the car window
shows his stump*

the driver looks into his blood-shot eyes
looks at his rags
tells him about boom and bust
cycles of supply and demand
the movement for deregulation of lust

the beggar says 'bread, any bread, boss'

the driver rolls down the window
tells the beggar about rampant short-changing
price-fixing and insider trading
how monopolies are gobbling
how today's rising stock is tomorrow's collapse

the beggar sniffs, scratches his matted hair

the driver tells him about pyramids and plots in the sea
over-invoicing round-tripping
tax havens tax schemes tax holidays
cartels and cabals

*the beggar thrusts his one hand forward
"anything to hold me together, chief"*

the driver tells the beggar no amount of glue
can fix the world
no amount of patching can cover the cracks



*the beggar at the window waits for the driver to
feed him more than fear more than rage
more than fantastical accounts of disaster*

the driver shakes his head turns away
 rolls up the window

the beggar spits

the driver watches the spit roll down the window
into the street

the beggar stands in his puddle of spit

the light turns green
the driver drives on his way
and day revolves and Cain kills Abel and
then Abel kills Cain in the next life

FOOD FOR LIFE

Serengeti

Herds rivening the plain dust clouds blanket their rear
thousand year trail of wildebeest zebra gazelles

and in the rivers they must cross to reach the fresh grass
and along their banks

those creatures that live off their flesh
the crocodile the lion the leopard
even hippos roused from muddy pens
by the thrashing of frenzied flanks

all these creatures shaken by the thundering hoof-beat
waves of grass-eaters crashing into the current
dust-caked herds sweat-stained
running towards jaws tickling the long grass

and so the wind blowing downstream unsheathes reddening claws
submerged snouts bubble the water serrated rows ready to rip
furious with instinct devoted celebrants
of this over-riding boisterous blind movement
push this pulse of strength speed cunning
this agony of the dying unable to staunch
the undying jubilation of survivors

for days the dust rises
herds roll stampede
blood pumps and spills and gushes

everything victorious

CYBER LOYALTY

him: This life is a hard road. I want the best 4 u. may love give us courage

her 1: I tink its better if we both move on wit our lives pls

her 2: Hie truly it is, yes definitely our love and GOD wil give us courage Thnx, sleep wel

her 3: If only love could pay the bills then ill be happy Gudnite Im out of airtime

her 4: I knw lifes tuf bts I swear nothng wil make me to fail to make u happy n be ur future wife.
I love u ne

UNDER AN OPEN SKY

The sign said *k B B*
 F A
 8 k
 an arrow pointed east

we followed the dirt road

the road curved between fields
soft sand clinging to the tires

we followed the road
almost to the horizon

three boys appeared
we called out
 they signalled west

we drove on in the heat
curved past a clump of trees
the sky dipped round the bends
another gaggle of kids clamoured by the roadside
 sent us towards a lake

but once there
no woodpeckers hammered against tree trunks
the lake was a wisp of cloud

we returned to the highway
a blind woman with milky eyes invaded a layby
we declined to stop for such an obvious ghost

we rode on reached Newcastle
headed for Black Rock Casino

R C R89 99
 R
 ^w
^{1/4} k w

 k C R
 w

 w

 k

later that day we phoned your friend
 she lived in another small coal town
 had recovered from meningitis
 was lonely
 too bad we missed her
 she's a looker
 the two of you once kissed in a taxi

then on to Jozi hoping to catch fireworks

and that night
 we made our bodies unpeel
 fuse
 like the flesh of a peach enfolds the pip
 you and i
 yr buttocks caressing my cock

all quiet adventures to write home about

CEMETERY OF DRIFTWOOD

C , R

Sucked out to sea by the rivers
then beached by the tides
these salted beams of white bone
creviced c o
n
t o r
t e
d
wracked trunks and branches
fibrous mottled arms
crusted calcified beyond rot
left sprawled in an alcove

*

as you crest the hill you will see them
jammed together pale with seagull shit
the sculpted stumps
grave with elongated agony

CLEARING THE MIND

Bare movement of branches
 cawing ibis lengthening shadows
my feet on the grass near the wild olive trees

day drawing close to
its night
 turned inside out reflecting on
 years of patterning
 muscles pushed to their limit
in the salty pool of everyday sweat

day's deliberate path-making
 tracks carving answers thru the elements
then
sleep
 churning
 deep swells in that incessant surf

deprived of air fish float to the top
 then high tides catch them
 sweep them onto the rocks

some things forgiven some forgotten

so long as the beach is clean and dry
i can sift

THE BREAD OF THE DUTCH IS DEATH

F

We will never eat the bread of the Dutch again
We will eat our bread buttered with blood
We will never eat the bread of the Dutch again

I, Tromp van Madagascar, Age 20

I, Cupido van Batavia, Age 30

I, Jeroen van de Malijste Cust, Age 24

I, Neptunis van Bima, Age 20

we, bondsmen of the former burgher councilor Nicholas Oortmans

I, Titus van de Caab, Age 22

I, Joumat van Ternaten, Age 40

I, Pasqual van Spaanse Wes Indies, Age 30

We, bondsmen of dispencier, Sieur Johannes Swellengrebel

I, Thomas van Bengalen, Age 30

I, Anthonij van Mallebaar, Age 40

we, slaves of the farmer Christoffel Esterhuijs

Have willingly, without torture or threat of bonds, of irons,

Or even the least threat of these,

Confessed and admitted

That the first prisoner, Tromp,

With Hanibal, alias knap een Deuntjie,

Who has been shot dead,

Did not scruple nor hesitate

To incite many slaves to flee

That we conferred with one another

And agreed never to return again to our masters

And to head for the land of the Portuguese

Never again will we eat the bread of the Dutch



Never again will we bow our heads
Never again will we smile for mercy

We, bondsmen, slaves held at the Cape, at the tip of Africa
We seized guns and flour and made our escape

APRIL 1799
[Handwritten signatures and notes]

goff me
Brazil a
slaf jo
mist
to jason
ind juff
to theg
lypse jo
goban

Sidd
177 juff
Cot.
Cye do
we dange
Ej Slop
in waign
ban
nove cue
Ej Slop
mwa
Pison
juff in golibo
maljo
sje tom
dat ind
Slop
ind juff
de E



WHITE CROSS FOR THE WHITE MAN

O

w P kw 2010

Hundreds of white crosses
on the hillside
hundreds of white crosses
Side by side
become

w

stark as the light of Afrikan skies
scintillating with the sun of Afrika
giant white cross on the hillside
catching the sun
vivid scorching sun of Afrika

and above the white crosses
in white letters so large even a child can read
a sign from survivors

P L A A S M O O R D E

each white cross a white farmer
his white wife his white sons and white daughters
white grandmother white grandfather
white uncle white aunt

this hillside of white farmers gunned down
stabbed strangled shot
done to death by black men
marauders
who
rape old women as well as the young

each cross mark of dry tears
bloodied ribs bitten lips
each cross a white man
struck down on the land
he ploughed and sowed then reaped
making a good life for his own
feeding on this land wrested
from the black man the black clans
this land wrested from the buck and the zebra
the lion and the leopard
there on this land he found good
this land he made good
white farmer struck down by black man with guns

no mercy from the black man
he dubbed 'boy' black man he dubbed 'kaffir'
no mercy from the black man he enslaved
then whipped for taking bread from his kitchen
black woman he enslaved then whipped for taking
washing powder from his bathroom
black man he enslaved then whipped for taking
cattle from his kraal
black woman he enslaved then whipped for taking
money from the madam's dressing table
black man he enslaved then whipped for taking
tools from his tool shed

no mercy from the ghosts of the black men
he once murdered in fits of drunken rage
 in cold fury in savage quiet
 so as to hold on
 to
 generations of servants

but now the white man gunned down
by black men he threw off his land

 (he had enough
 blacks on his land and didn't want more trouble
now they've got rights
 are the government the police
the tax collectors the jailers the permit givers)

white man shot down by the black men he threw off
the land before the law could stop him
 but now they've come back
 come back with guns

white man and his white wife white children
snuffed out by the black man whose cattle he drove
into a donga drought stricken donga land
 black man he exiled to the mines
black woman chained to the stove
 taught to thread koeksusters
 roll over for the white man after nagmaal
she black woman of the black man he paid
with tea and sugar meliemeal dop old clothes

so pray for the soul of the white farmer who gave his life
 for his land life giving life taking land
his murder seeps into the soil
blood circles the white crosses
 pray for the white farmer in his white kraal

here on this hill by the toll highway to Limpopo
see the red earth redden
with the sacred polluted blood
of the settler sacred polluted blood of Europe
sacred polluted blood of the civilizer
the developer the grower

before he presses the trigger black marauder cries:
on your knees dispossessor!
on your knees!

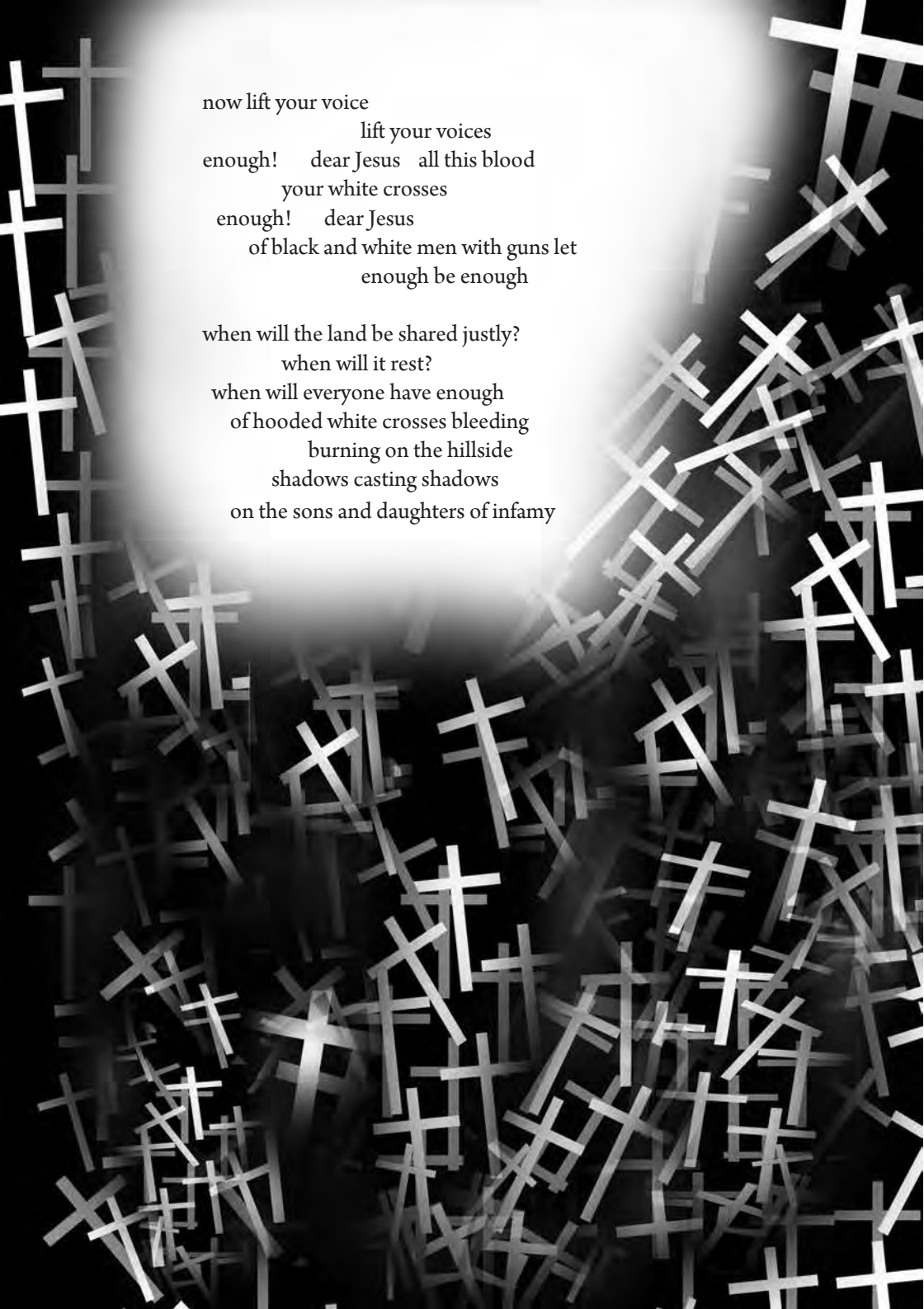
before he rips out the heart:
on your knees invader
on your knees b a a s!
before he rips madam's dress from her milky white thighs
open up white bitch!

his blood on the bullet shot in pain
shot thru with hunger shot from hunger
shot thru with revenge
shot with drunken dreams
shot up by tears

blood spattering across the white crosses on the hillside
white crosses stabbing the grass
white crosses sending white signals across the valley
down the highway striding across Afrika
generations making red earth where the blood of white crosses
mingles with boerewors fat
fat of slaughtered chickens and goats

for the reckoning has come bloody reckoning
for them who spilt blood
there on a hillside rows and rows
of white crosses and letters in black

P L A A S M O O R D E



now lift your voice
lift your voices
enough! dear Jesus all this blood
your white crosses
enough! dear Jesus
of black and white men with guns let
enough be enough

when will the land be shared justly?
when will it rest?
when will everyone have enough
of hooded white crosses bleeding
burning on the hillside
shadows casting shadows
on the sons and daughters of infamy

SPIT FIRE

Spit fire

When dew is doused with poison

When pensioned widows suckle a daughter's child

When builders abandon the open roof

Spit fire

When the blind are denied sites of learning

When rain turns to urine

When police siren out a prophet

Spit fire

When patriarchs unzip the budding virgin

When she-devils worm away the last fruits of Eden

When the frayed nerve claims to be a rope

Spit fire as you think forward

To the day

After

The revolution

DIGNITY

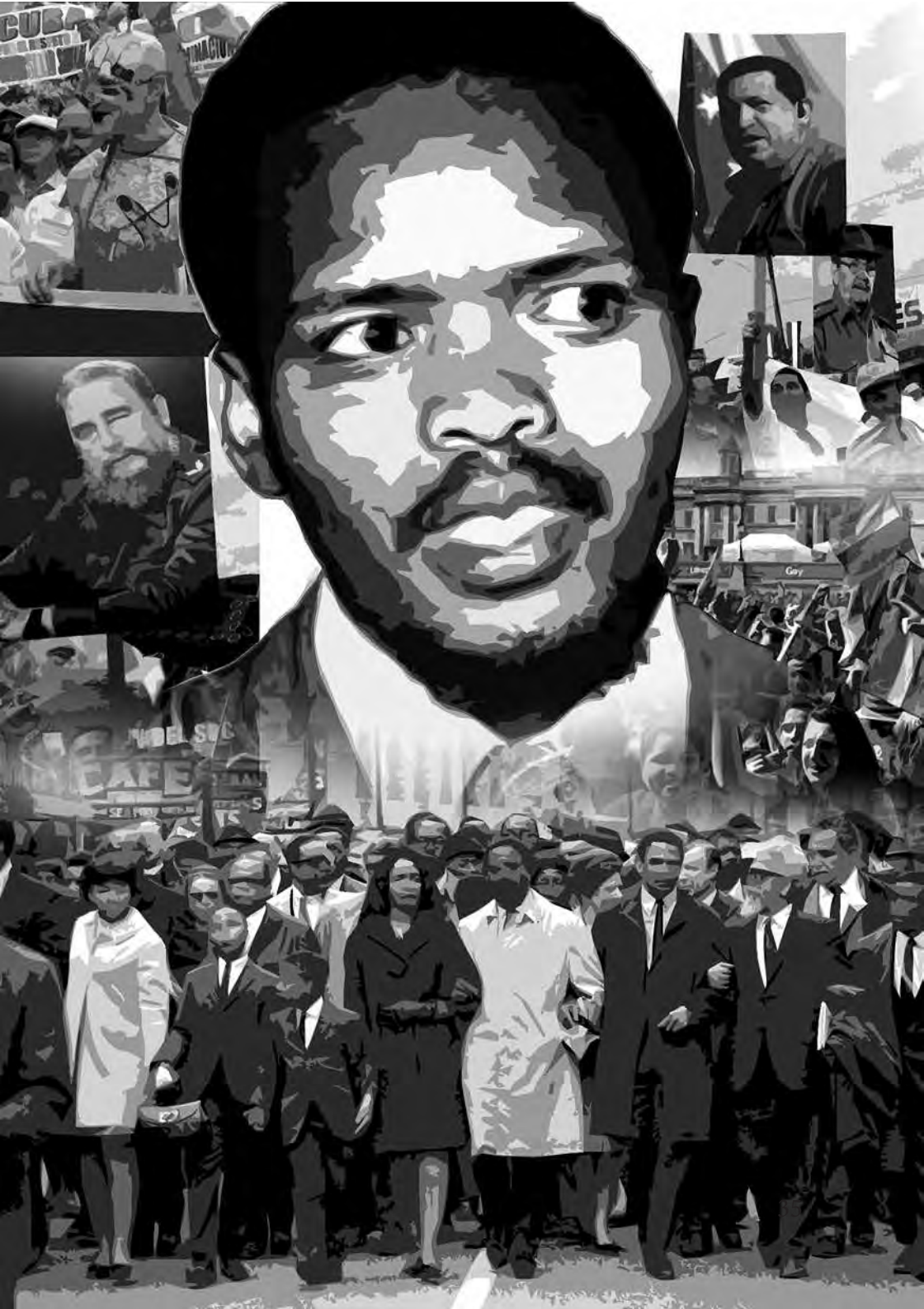
I am the junk-and-bottle gatherer, emptying bins and so be a survivor
I am the refugee in flight, petitioning the judge not to extradite
I am the dark-skinned Untouchable who refuses to remain invisible

I am the bergie, age-old San and Khoi-khoi, now dancing to the toyi-toyi
I am the remnant of genocide, the Jewish Tutsi who will not hide
I am the Cuban beard, the justice Gringo always feared

I am the legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko, the children of Soweto's hero
I am the battered wife who breaks the man-shackle on her life
I am the Living Wage rattling the boss's cage

I am the poet's conscience rhyming against the censor's silence
I am the spat-on gay, proud despite the priests who prey
I am the slum-girl without a cent who won't spread her legs to pay the rent

Dignity oh dignity
You don't need a five course meal
To eat you shouldn't have to steal
You need no velvet boot to house your feet
Sleep well enough on a ragged sheet
Dignity oh dignity



INFESTATION

Don't shriek into the bushes
 sing to the rats in the garden
 calm them make them stop prowling
 on the move nibbling
let these rats almost fearless
know the garden is not theirs to run
 make it clear
in this war of energy against energy
no mercy can be shown

ultimate almost invincible
 finessing the art of engorging
they scurry everywhere unceasing
 quick and edgy
 what is it they will not eat?

i watch them hustle as i lay out poison

 slowly i mix in grains of rice
 a little helping of gravy
 some cheese
yes i bait them with shiny granules
 bait them with what they love

Days later
when i find a dead rat near the rubbish bin
i start:
 a big furry brown and grey rat
 it must be a male

i recall this same rat
earlier near my son's window

the two of us smiling
watching him nibble the poison scattered under leaves
admiring how he stood on his hind legs
fore paws tucked up against the chest
a fellow creature with every right and need
this same rat at ease
chewing behind the glass

now
i shudder
shovel him into a plastic bag

ON ROBERT BROWNING'S OBSESSION WITH DYING MAIDENS

*"How do I love thee Let me count the ways
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace"*

Elizabeth Barret Browning

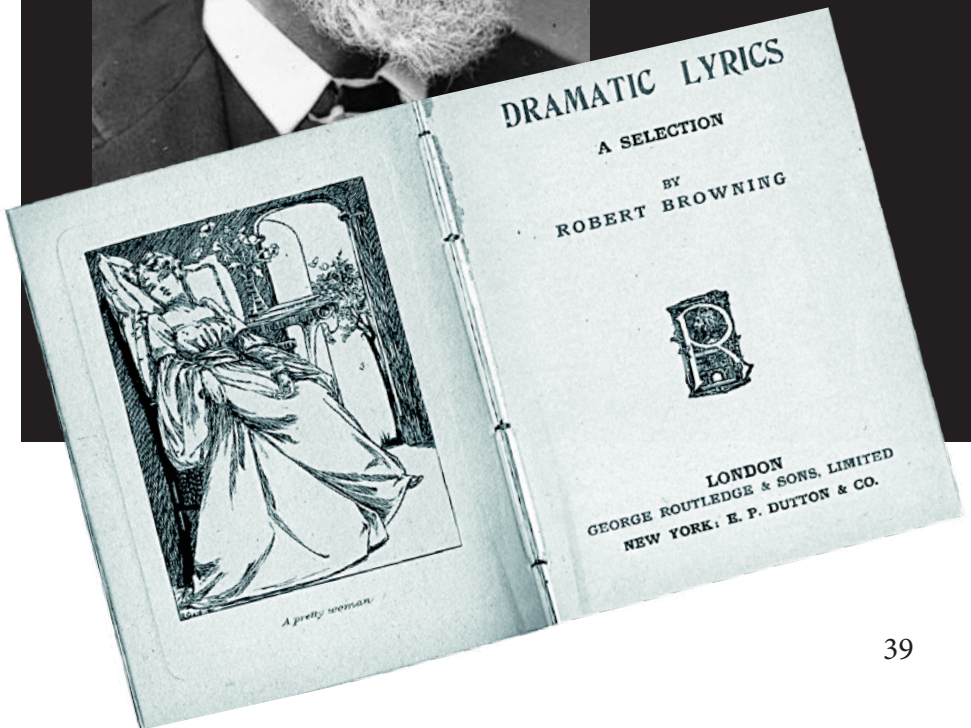
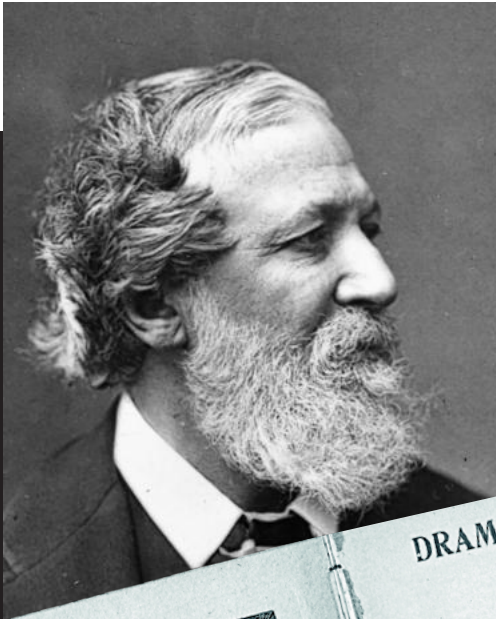
A mad actor gave me your book of lyric ballads
a time of slow words and running sentences
phrases streaming all over your English countryside
and there you coated coarse sensation
cloaked it in dulcet auburn stanzas rhymed and neatly sewn together
to cover up the naked bodies of young women on their funeral pyres

ah Robert! how you longed for these free floating maidens
followed them down alleys and meadows
gripped their deer-like ankles semi-precious stones round their wrists
girl-women with tender unscrubbed hands
your mind's eye as needy as Elizabeth she your wife poetess
begging you for air for water for tremulous love

wheezing on her crippled chest of dreams
she denounced the slave bounty her family wealth
even as she was lulled by opiates was wild as any spirit bride
living to inscribe your journal with her poems –
how her words caressed lit the borders of the shaded bed
how brilliant was her pen! and tender too

and so in loving a genius invalid you gained reward
and yet you took your leave
retired to a private place and gloried in the sashaying virgins
seen daily in salons and in the streets
pure white bodices inflaming but staying outside your grasp
they stayed at the edges became a book

indeed no whoring for you Robert
charming poet of the ever wistful
celebrant of those beauties sad beneath their innocence
for your longing breathless verse
must keep them pure and dead
and you and Elizabeth immortal



THE MAIDS

The maids next door on Sundays
sing separately
but in unison

through the window
I hear their radio
and the tattoo of their boy-friend's boots

he shares them with a fat blade
and other gifts wrapped
in brown paper

and they hum when he lays back
and strokes their thighs
up and down

like a trawler rounding the headland
with full holds
ignoring the gale warning

WATER COLOURS

Light rain after the maddened beat
the storm
clear light
soft and fresh with dawn

little brown and yellow bird
still
sheltering beneath
the green canopy of tangled bush

white petals
sprinkled
across the darkened brown earth
the reddish wings

every stroke every shade

 alert

 composed

I can't phone there's no signal

All i can do is whisper
yr name to this cup of coffee
 and swear it's rim is
carrying the sweet of yr lip gloss

against all odds even uncalled thoughts
my body is calling yr body's dipping slopes
 yr thighs and hips and
 breasts conical and smooth
nipples pointing like compass needles

this full cup u make for me
 the handle held carefully
 fingers caress
 creamy froth

yes the world is too much lately
 my head bows
there may be no signal out there
to spark conversation
 but my need
goes out to u from deep in this cup
 as
 i sip

GHOST LOVE

A ghost should pass
to the next world
not linger

in

the

present

a ghost should respect death
be content with hazy shades
tolerate being a hole in history
even as joyous moments slowly wrung over are anguished
 all sweetness sucked soured
 finally
 drained

yet for now there
is no point

your becoming a ghost is just not in my interest

THE SACRIFICE

Icarus rises in the air
It is a clear earth day
Behind him lies Minos's island
The ocean ripples beneath
His wings and his feet
He is high
There is no turning back
No coming down
Until he has reached the far shore
Where sweet tastes bake waiting

And he praises his father
Great Daedalus
Architect of the Labyrinth
Where the bull power of flesh was contained
Thanks him for working so hard
To make his wings
Strong and beautiful
So light

Icarus salutes his father
Coded deep in our beings
Ancestral
This longing to fly
To live forever in thermals
To live beyond struggle and death
Whatever turbulence ahead
Beating his feathers drawn
From all the birds of the air
Icarus sings a hymn to his father

But as he glides
Joyful above the deep water
Flexing his young muscles
Even as the sun shines eternal
He knows all depends on how
He will manage the descent
He knows how everything depends
On how we handle the descent
He knows this but cannot stop climbing
Until the ocean is a wrinkle
A vast blue wavy jelly fish

And then he shivers

Is this hot wax dripping from his fingers?

*

Daedalus watches Icarus
Smooth-cheeked boy
Tracking the sun
With each wave of his wings
His beard thickens
Eyes deepen with shadow
How endless the heavens!
He watches Icarus rise
Rapture redden his face

I gave him wings to follow me
Why remain slaves to a tyrant?
But in my heart I feared
He would drink too deeply
Glory in flight
Forget the dread danger

Round and round in a spiral
Feathers floating free
Daedalus watches the boy plummet
Watches Icarus plummet

Watches his son trampled under the foam of white horses

*

Now Daedalus was a strong resourceful man
A master at living
He had done the honourable thing
Trip-wired his instinct

The water closed over his son's body
The ocean began to soften the boy's skin

Daedalus kept on flying

*

And so every time
An Icarus wants to break free
A Daedalus fears
But cannot deny him

Just one look
At the prison
And he starts
To build his son new wings





MORNING IN GAZA

August 2014

A man is sitting on the earth in the sun
in front of his house

birds with small beaks hop about

he throws the birds crumbs

the sun warms him
it will be another hot day

there are white trails in the sky
silver wings glide overhead
thunder cracks his ears

the man sits in the sun throwing crumbs

what else can he do
while birds with small beaks hop about

in the ruins

DANCE TRANCE

Maluti San paintings

Forepaws cross forward
-crossed broken bones-
the man catches the eland's tail

and clapping women drum him deeper
cramps catch his stomach clamp his head
red blood bursts from his nostrils
flows down the white markers of his spine
into the godly beast
till he is almost on fire
that fire cold like the moon
hot as coals before they become ashes
so each becomes the other
with all the birth pangs given to females

then we make stories
fill the sky
there is always a reason
there is always a coloured grasshopper on the path





BROWN (STUDY)

Brown house: bell broom bed

blind teacher at the door
reaches out to the new pupil
touches her cheeks her brow her skull
moulds them into herself
then traces the inlets
 takes the tips of the fingers
 leads them to the piano

first lesson:

feel the keys feel their smooth glacial scope
face the sightless eyes and wonder
at the view within

the teacher has no need to ask
 answers suggest questions
and the teacher is patient
she guides the new pupil to each key:
 let the note be noted
 let the ringing tone echo

then the blind teacher hands the new pupil
a violin

 lets her fingers trace the length of string
sense vibration absorb the tension
that necessary stretching
so pitch can rise
 and rise
 then stabilise

*

brown house: home for thoughtful exercise

blind bells chime sweep the floor
the walls are uneven as they follow the curve
of the retina

the new pupil takes the blind woman's face in her hands

she has wasted many years out
of this darkness
an unheard sound will find her ear

why dwell on the past discord
can become wavy
harmonious

so the new pupil becomes ready
she will leave the brown house
more than ready
more than ready
to learn

THE BACK OF THE HEAD OF A GUITAR

thighs modest but firm
hips round but not swollen
neck headless yet complete
the scrapes the scratches the whirls
the screws the rolls the stars
the tangles the twists the ruts
the chips the stains the ratchets
the strings bending and giving way
the steel solid encrusted
nipples twirling about
fingers slide down the neck
to vibrate and praise heaven
thighs modest but firm
round but not swollen
neck headless yet complete
the scrapes the scratches the whirls
the screws the rolls the stars
the tangles the twists the ruts
the chips the stains the ratchets
the strings bending and giving way
the steel solid encrusted
nipples twirling about
fingers slide down the neck
to vibrate and praise heaven
thighs modest but firm
hips round but not swollen
headless yet complete
the scrapes the scratches the whirls
the screws the rolls the stars
the tangles the twists the ruts
the chips the stains the ratchets
the strings bending and giving way
the steel solid encrusted
nipples twirling about
fingers slide down the neck
to vibrate and praise heaven

thighs modest but firm
hips round but not swollen
the neck headless yet complete
the scrapes the scratches the whirls
the screws the rolls the stars
the tangles the twists the ruts
the chips the stains the ratchets
the strings bending and giving way
the steel solid encrusted
nipples twirling about
fingers slide down the neck
to vibrate and praise heaven
thighs modest but firm hips
hips round but not swollen
the neck headless yet complete
the scrapes the scratches the whirls
the screws the rolls the stars
the tangles the twists the ruts
the chips the stains the ratchets
the strings bending and giving way
the steel solid encrusted
nipples twirling about
fingers slide down the neck
to vibrate and praise heaven
thighs modest but firm
hips round but not swollen neck
the neck headless yet complete
the scrapes the scratches the whirls
the screws the rolls the stars
the tangles the twists the ruts
the chips the stains the ratchets
the strings bending and giving way
the steel solid encrusted
nipples twirling about
fingers slide down the neck
to vibrate and praise heaven

WHICH WAY DOES THE RIVER RUN

You know i never noticed
which way your smile slants
how fast the apple falls
dawn birds whistle away the threats
on my mind

-the worry running a daily marathon
tainting the hours trepanning my skull-

how many times have i started

kicked into gear been ready to ride

but the vision of goodness

-let us make right and keep making the world-

became the curl on the lips of those who deal dirt

swell with false fantasies

brazen lick of their tongues

baring pinky red speckled flesh

i want everyone not just my blood

to be brother and sister

not lie lead me on

because the sun doesn't blink at the blood

we spill to blot out its light

and so before the evasive dream dies

i want to again step into a river and feel

the cold tingling current

i want hope the love in your body and in your eyes

you who is so in need

of love and i moulding yr hand and kissing

you all over yr face

murmuring it is time

let these waters run all the way to the sea

TEN QUEENS OF BULAWAYO

Photograph of Lobengula's wives Bulawayo Museum

Bulawayo seat of the royal kraal
Lobengula's kraal
he who bested his brother and snatched the crown
warriors hoisted him up in the heat of rebellion

and there
seated and standing ten women scented and soiled
no virgins all veterans
of the Big Man's whims
his habits his needs
two rows for the camera grainy black and white shadow breasts
hanging like gourds shoulders swathed with torn cloth
the old and the young assembled by the murungu for history

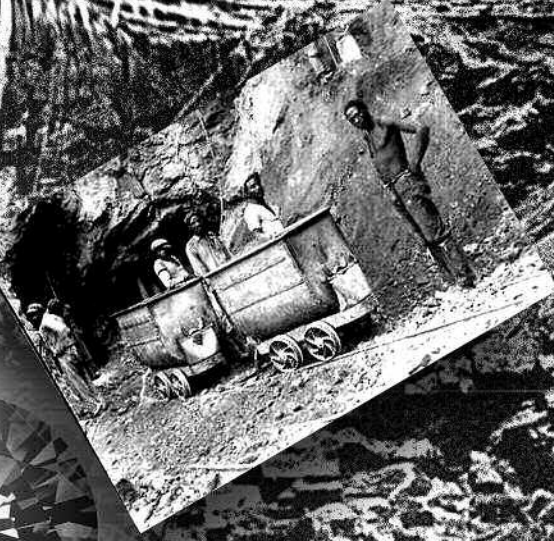
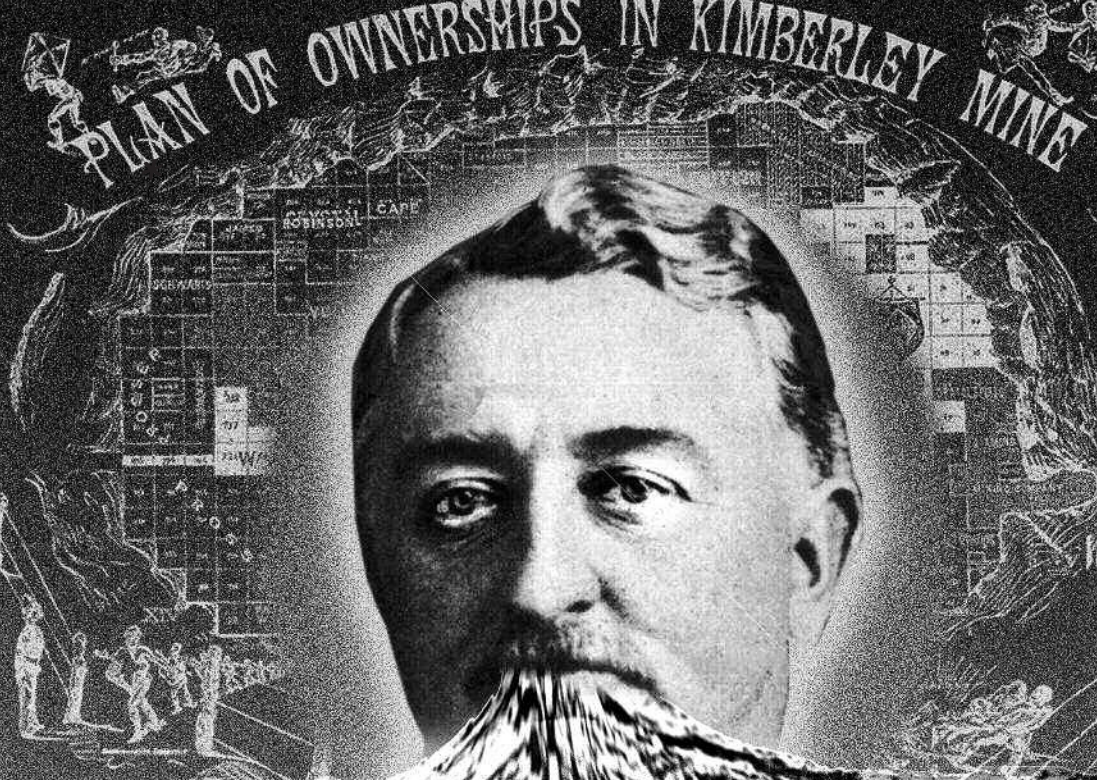
one squints slit-eyed at a thorn bush
one glazes over yr shoulder with soft docile lashes
one folds thick arms across her grapefruit chest
one stares down at her criss-crossed belly
one is about to fall asleep as you call her
one sighs seeing the end is near
one clenches her fists
one looks askance at all questions
one invites you to like her because she means well
one radiates calm suffering and silence

ten women from the king's household
drawers of wood and carriers of water
bearers of children planters of seed
harvesters and potters bead and basket makers
comforters when warrior sons die

two rows in grainy black smudged white
over a century gone and still the question:
when last was one of these barefoot queens joyous?



PLAN OF OWNERSHIPS IN KIMBERLEY MINE



THOSE AND THESE DAYS

The Big Hole Museum, Kimberley August, 2013

In a cavern on the lip of the great hole dug in the kimberlite
a museum strong-room locks tiny gems
they scintillate still stuck in remnants of grey mass
the holding rock blown from bowels of earth
then brought to the surface

as men chiseled out the organs
of extinct volcanoes

-now we are down another hole
hole of consumption of software of softsell
the multi-coloured sticky hole of the
virtual-

and u pass by the trays
stop to focus
on a stone sparkling with Promise

these diamonds forever
in the dust where they lie
just figments
these diamonds that will outlive their fingers

*

The emerald green water filling the crater
fills me

looking down from the lookout
i want to cup my hand

but this man-made hole in the veld
yields only brak

these days far from Kimberley
the 'smart' money paves paper trails
for boom and bust

these days the struggle for air
-we live on fetid headlines
feed on fresh
infraction-

is so intense
to shine is a rare virtue
for even the very brave
the most patient

*

Here by the grey river
black men from the villages came to sift mud and water
white men from smoky sewerless cities
laid their heads on bare earth shot game to survive
breathed dust as they picked at the seams

and markets in New York and London compressed their claims
gobbled solid pockets of gemface
till the white men wound whips round their trigger fingers
drove the black panners and diggers deeper
to crack and ferry the ore
then raided their arses to stop them from smuggling

so the fields and the pastures were left to the women
children knew not their fathers
the old ways tarnished by a hidden sun
became bitter became weak

*

The emerald green water is a shining surface
a mirror that does not show a true face ghost
diggers churn in the depths

clawed on their grimy
foreheads a
glittering lie

i see them thirsting
shovelling
filling the hole with their sweat
the air fills with their heaving

behind me in the tourist village
iron facades of imperial houses
rust nostalgia

i want to drink only what is pure

from the lookout i let my bucket dangle
still hope to be slaked
the veld in front marked by scrub and aloes
the air still drying
fortunes snicker
while the town spread flat from the cliff

At Table: the Guests are the Hosts

The menu examined for roadside bombs
 chairs stripped of their bugs
the party commences with small eats at hand

i look round the table
some were my brothers some never more than connections
 intersections of tangles network relations

some shared much some hardly a thing
 a heavy hand a harsh word
 should not cause ill feeling

for the record: no knot was split no blood was spilt
 talk mattered more than the unsaid
 all masks applauded

so we agree: past affections should survive
 present needs determine the future
let us not judge the obvious temptations

as alcohol flares loneliness eases
 the zigzags of each life ask:
 what is failure?

FORN.

Falling
the sweetness of holding u
becomes my balance

yr embrace
keeps me standing unto death

what i mean
is u make me breathe
deep enough to live
well

ACROSS THE BOSOM OF THE HILLS

Darkening view of burning mountains from Worcester

Flame laps mountainous haunches
kloofs blush with liquid lava streams
ruby cones ringed and wristed by dusk
ruddy fissures

bulk rock solid grit and slate
bush burns and blackens
the valley looks up

sighs

no night should be without
this necklace

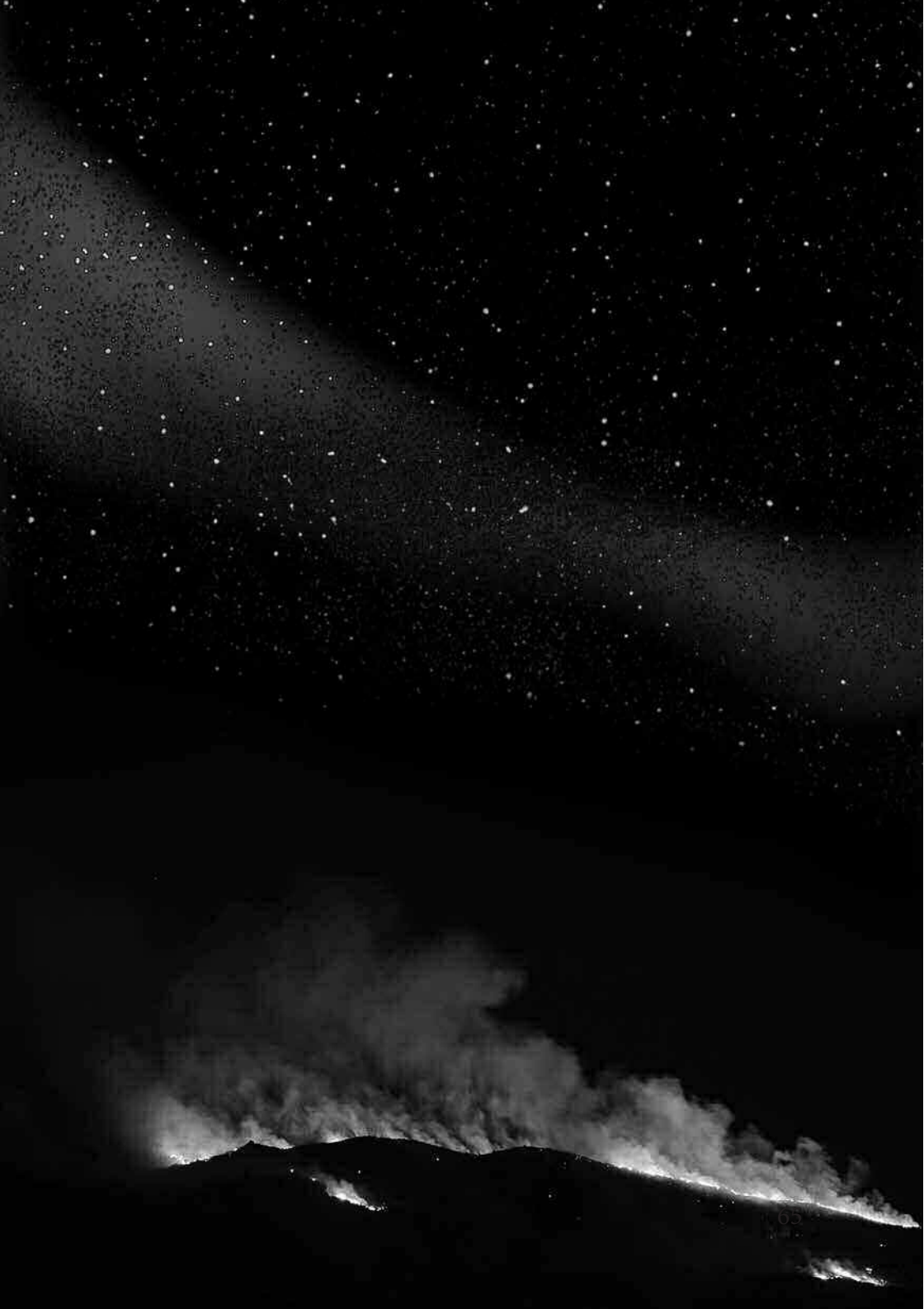
*

Ash strewn below

russet leaves
 silver boughs
 charcoal trunks

sodden ashiness

winter tidies autumn
snuffs out the last fire of summer's fire
gladdens the heart with red circles
of bubbling resin



WORM LIFE



*Too much thinking
thinking*

*Thinking
can be nerve
wracking*

The worm crawls along paths made
by it
and the paths made by others;
some to force you along some to open your heart and lead
you to a better place

The worm crawls head-on into a mass of earth

it wishes to create its own path
why follow others?
why use the trails they have already so industriously

t un
nel
e d
?

no worm with balls
should hold back from creating a tunnel to celebrate
its own image

male/female

worms roll themselves into being one and the same
of course paths do cross and s o m e t i m e s
coincide

even as these very paths take them away far way
from each other

worm = tunnel that's a fact
 now
 how to organize them better
 that's the question

worms tend to live solitary lives
 they make too many individual channels that preclude
socializing
 and due to this nature
they seldom encounter other worms underground
 any meetings are largely held top soil

 then again to be truthful
even topsoil meetings are pleasant enough only on the surface
if you've ever sat thru one
you will know how tense and back-biting
they can be
 how the factions and cliques start to get at each others'
 bristles

worm life = factionalizing but don't be cynical

when you're up above warm rays steaming your coils
you feel very languorous
and there's a tendency to deny the value of digging

to say:
no worm should have to tunnel for sustenance
it's demeaning!
blind tunneling in the damp?
 why can't life just be sun-lit manure?

of course those in the know know
 you have to get dirty
 the rarest minerals the choicest chemicals
 all there down there at the roots



just look down

get ahead! show discipline and grind away
 besides
 burrowing in the dark
 has many other attractions (ho ho)

cool and moist and peaceful
there's just the scraping of your very own head
against the soil up in front of you

you can switch off and think freely

 true some youngsters get a headache
 all that swivelling and jerking and grinding
 slugging it out with those damn granules
but there's no choice really it's the way we're created
 and if it's a rough deal

well . . . ?

Worm life = constant self-analysis



i ask u

Would you like some chocolate

day overcast
snow from the berg
heaters stir brittle fingers and toes

or a glass of sherry

on the table a bottle the sweet
but not cloying traditional brand
old brown in colour but not musty
a fine drink at any time

u haven't responded

on the shelf
a slab of cadbury's nut and milk
and toblerone refined and exciting
of course we can combine the two
make a feast!

*hey what's it to be
you're being obstreperous with your silence*

outside huddled figures cloak faces
but i don't give a damn about tomorrow's forecast
it can stay freezing
all that matters right now
is to have you
sip the dark gold from my lips
lick the rich sweet from my fingers
and grunt that it's time to go riding



DAGGA SMOKING ON ROBBEN ISLAND

After crushing rocks
The mulling of weed
Calloused hands sniffing
The heady scent
Lingering in the life lines
The prisoners soar into nomansland
Cut the waves
Open their arms to the life
In themselves that will not
Be coshed

The one warder
The one with tattoos
Winks
One week on
One week off
Is lonely
Without his best friend
When he rooks he also wants to fly
Into talkie-talkie land

In the cells
Each prisoner
Guards his stash
The crushing tedium
Bested by debate
They gather with the one they call Madiba
He leads them as the joint
Travels from hand to hand
Each draws and closes half an eye
The shit is cool

Madiba
He's a veteran
The man to close the circle
To weather storms
The buffeting winds of empire
Driving the clans from their hunting grounds
Their pastures
This Madiba is a prince
A master of the conqueror's law
An outlaw who raised rebellion

Now he takes the last hit
It is good to have this medicine
The soul needs to fly with the ancestors
A man must be prepared
To die so as to live
The prisoners nod
The young warden thumbs up
The sun stops exploding
The earth stops turning

Sacred is the smoke
The spirit of no surrender rises
Floats out past the breakers
The soil has yielded its prize
Food for the wide-open sky
Human power taps into timeless hours
Captives unite
Life seeking its sweetness

Amandla!
The prisoners watch day slide into night
The bars of their cells lengthen
Seagulls shriek as fish fight the current



Robben Island
Another night of ghosts and trials
Madiba calls out a song
The men chorus
The herb has brought its blessing
They are filled with resolve
No matter the noose
Throttling the windpipe
These songs will be heard
As smoke lifts from the townships
From their lungs
Into the air
Of the new/old South Africa



ABOVE THE CHAINS OF LION'S HEAD

Above the chains of Lion's Head
we lie in the death-blue of evening

little stirs below
no wind disturbs the green and brown of this peninsula
just waves crinkling
 far as the eye can reach
 waves and waves
of an ocean stretching we are told
to Brazil

and i lay your hand on my lips
and leave words
for u to break open
and eat

and while we look down
light shimmers along the wrinkles of the Nek
cascades from the silver trees
and the tail of a private security car disappears
behind seagulls

we can go no higher

all is still



THE MAN IN THE GREEN BLANKET

*Found poem extracted from an article by Poloko Tau
The Star, 10 September 2012*

Atop rolling mountains
green shrubbery covering Mqanduli
the low tempo of grieving souls

a coffin
 a bullet-riddled body

ingwenyama isekhaya

ingwenyama isekhaya

softly clapping hands
 strikers come to bid farewell
to their hero
 their lion come home
he who deserves gunshots in the air
Mgcineni Noki
Mambush
 he of fleet soccer foot

*remained in the same position
for at least two hours
 blood trickling from his head*

his body one of a group
found in Nkaneng
 there by Wonderkop

that hill of wonders

that hill of rising up to stake a claim

“we are armed but not fighting
for anything but our rights
as the tool bearers the toilers
the ones in the bowels of earth from
where the ore must be raised”

he held firm
young by age
but immovable
so the men defied orders to give up their weapons

“let the company come and talk to us
we want R12,500
we want what is due”

he lay face down and motionless after the shooting

“now how do we find peace
when the police have killed *Mambush*?”

's s s s

“if you (government) is really sorry
for what you did
because it is clear government wanted people to die
then say after this day
Noki's village will get electricity
and we won't fetch water from the river anymore”

g g w L
g s

and so the coffin was lowered
and Noluvuyo his widow
and their five children
must continue

without their breadwinner
their man
in the green blanket
their leader
immovable beneath the earth of
Thwalikhulu

so it was Mgcineni Noki
a leader of the miners there by Marikana
laid to rest atop rolling hills covered
by a curtain of shrubs

g w s
g w s

“his blood must bring change in his village and mines
around the country”

his blood must bring change

I BURN/YOU POISON

I burn you poison we build over i graze you slash we dump
On the mountains the sea the plains the forests the rivers the deserts
I slash you dump we poison i graze you burn we build over
The sea the forests the swamps the plains the rivers the mountains
I dump you build over we slash i burn you graze we poison
The plains the forests the seas the mountains the deserts the rivers

Cities swollen with junk
Cars are massing
Fumes are rising

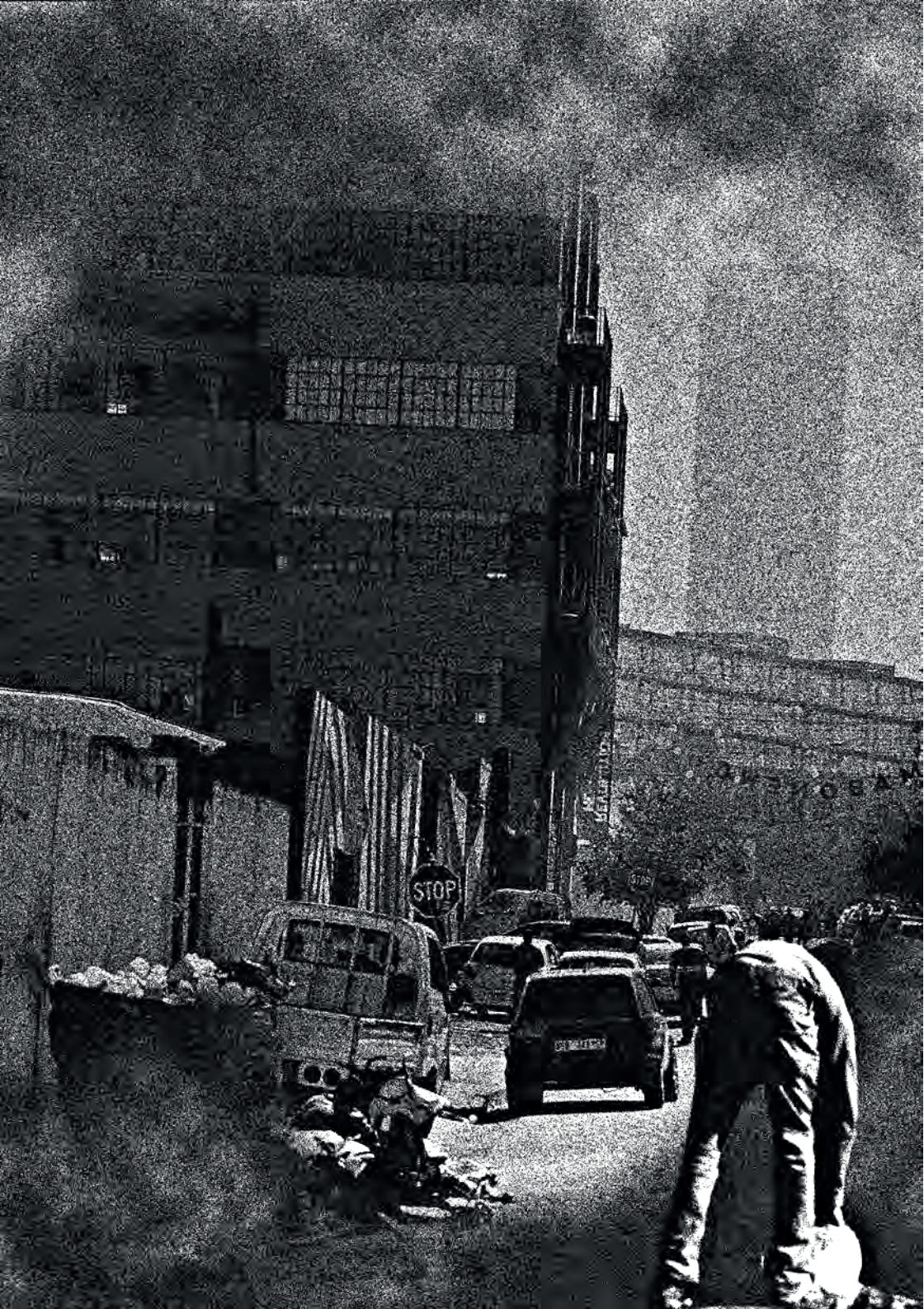
Water is running brown
Plants are gasping
Children are hungry for milk

Jungles turning to ash
Radiation burns cells
Mines dumping waste

Atomic power stations smoulder
Floods soak wretched earth
Bombs blast terrorized fanatics

Coal clouds block rising dirt
Rodent killers catch hawks
Human shit stinks out the spheres

Green/yellow
Make them the colours for our flag
Green/yellow
The colours of our flag



AEROTROPOLIS

B s S O'T M G , J 2 0 1 2

On the outskirts of the aerotropolis Isando train station
near a footbridge blackened by winter fires
Thomas Mambolo sits with his tray

*W s s 50 s s R2
s g s R1*

on sale to the fastfood grillers waitrons baggage collectors
porters security guards cleaners parking attendants and cashiers



who arrive and depart every day of the year
to prepare passengers for take off
make the cathedral halls of the airport sing with foreign exchange

once casualty of a violent strike
Thomas offers no credit to these commuters

“I trust no one”

he rises at 3 is ready to trade by 4
peak hour is 6 when the early shift starts
8.30 he heads to Germiston to stock up
returns to Isando sits waits sells sits
sells sits waits
come evening he's home in Tembisa by 6

Ekurhuleni has a 27% unemployment rate
job creation is one of the Metro's seven pillars for development
an American expert adviser to four presidents
has been flown in the aerotropolis his pet concept:
the aerial hub becomes its own service provider
generates demand factories and jobs

but till then Thomas will keep selling at the foot of the footbridge

it's a cash business

under his breath I heard his dry cough

'hey Mister Aerotropolis
don't let us say it was all pie in the sky'

SEVEN MINUTES PAST THREE

The Liberation of Bergen Belsen: the testimonies of Josef Rosensaft (camp survivor), *WRF C s B s* and Brigadier Glyn Hughes
Ch i e f M e d i c a l o f f i c e r t i j o h A r m y

At seven minutes past three o'clock
in the afternoon
on 15 April 1945

British tanks
drove into the camp

N w s s s
O g s g s g g s
W g s s w

T v s s
T s s w s w s s

A x 11,000 s s
I v s s g s s
W g w s

we
the cowed emaciated inmates
did not believe we were free

**It was a wonderful sight to see the joy
Of all those people
Although one felt that they were almost mystified
At their good fortune
The troops themselves were incredulous,
Almost more so than horrified,
That such things could be**

it seemed to us a dream
which would soon turn cruel:
we had been driven crazy by hunger

A s ss s w s
H g w s w s s,
I s s, w g w s v
T s w s ,
T g , v , g s

Hungarian SS remained in charge
after the tanks rolled on
in pursuit of the German army

the Hungarians
shot 72 Jews and 11 non-Jews
for offences like taking potato peels from the kitchen

this tragedy was for us the signal to organize
on April 18 the first temporary representative committee
was formed in Block 88

*

At seven minutes past three o'clock
in the afternoon
on 15 April 1945

British tanks
drove into the camp

and it so happened there were three Jewish soldiers
they looked upon us as objects of pity
they had forgotten that once
we had a home and a background
motherly love and kindness

T j s
 F s v w ss
 D w s
 Ev s v g s

 T s g w
 S s x s

how could we jubilate
 the invaluable gift of the new freedom
 could not entirely make up for the sense of isolation of
 infinite loneliness

In the huts the living shared their bunks with the dead
The skeletons we saw could not have made any struggle
To get their share of food even
When it had been provided in meagre quantities

thousands of inmates died
 free
 but beyond hope

about 58,000 men and women were liberated
 about 28,000 died afterwards
 mainly from typhus and tuberculosis

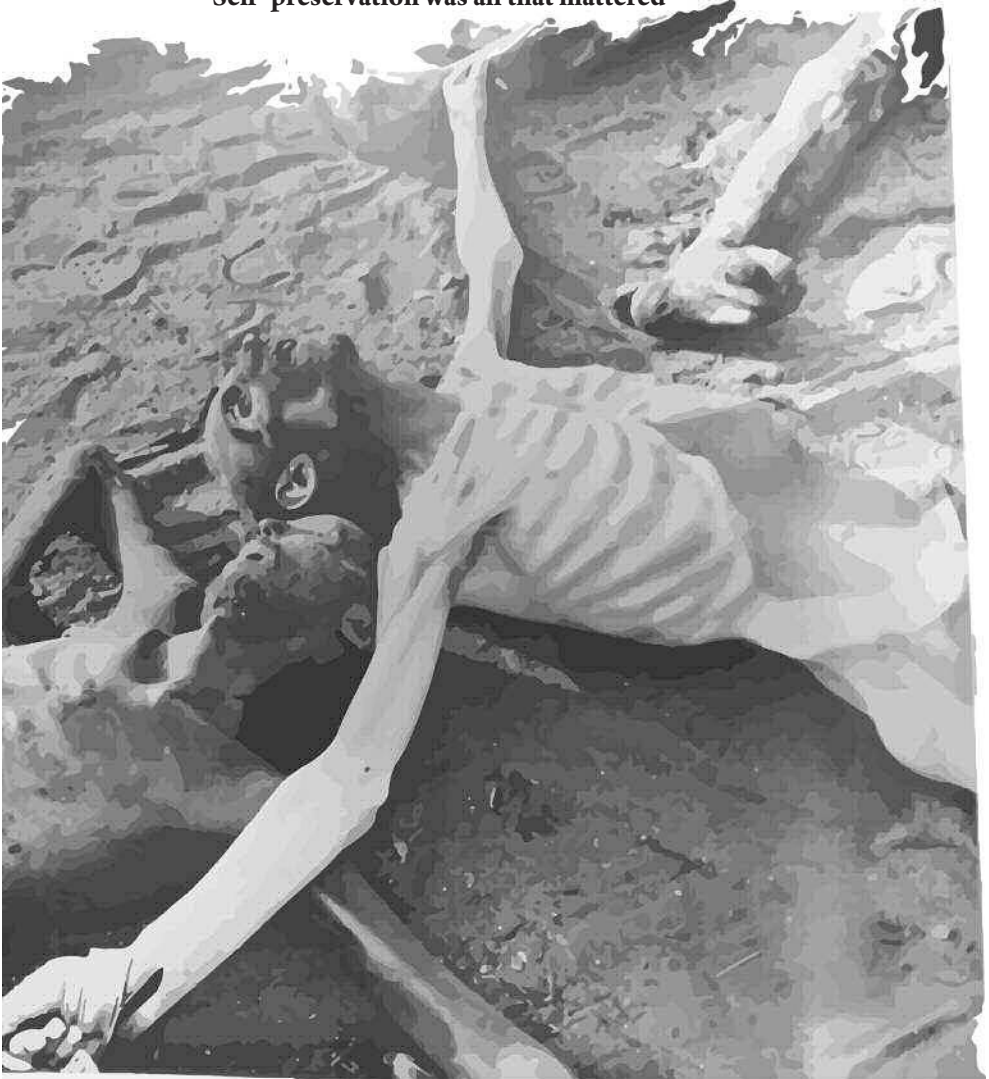
*

Not one of us who was not a prisoner there
Can ever realize what those brave people
Went through and endured

we formed a temporary committee
 for the rehabilitation – physical and spiritual –
 of the survivors

and to assist in the search for relatives
the struggle for political rights

**It was indeed understandable that normal standards
and moral values had disappeared
Self preservation was all that mattered**



one of our key principles
was that Germans must not enter the camp
Germans must not enter!
but we had to accept the help of German
doctors and nurses
whom the British sent into the camp

despite many such fights with the British
and though the chiefs of the British zone
never came to see the mass graves
they did show much good will
and deep human sympathy
they did everything in their power
to ease the physical suffering and mental anguish
and here we wish to thank
Brigadier Glyn Hughes and the Red Cross

but we had a struggle to be recognized as
Jews

late as September of 1945
still fifteen thousand Jews in Belsen
suffering from the curse of national anonymity
we could not avoid this struggle for recognition
though it had never occurred
to fight our liberators

and let us mention the Jewish police
unfailing tact and discipline
contributed much towards peace and good order

soon those remaining in the camp
established a school and a newspaper
celebrated chanukah and tu'bishvat

**I would like to pay a special tribute to those
Who had survived and retained their moral standards
And sense of responsibility
After the liberation they continued
Their excellent work and were invaluable
To the helpers who came in**

Now we are often told on all sides it
is time to forget
Belsen

true
we cannot remember
every hour of the day

we are only human and tend to forget
yet it is the duty of an eye witness
to recount the facts

and so
every 15th of April
at seven minutes past three o'clock
in the afternoon
for at least a few seconds
let us try
to be more
than human

ABDULLAH'S TOILET

O F s, s , s g s s
H R g s s s v g B ' s g
s Is g v w x J w s w ,
M ' I

On the bus to Modi'in

I sit next to a young woman with a pinched face
she wears a long skirt, suffers long sleeves
she may not sit next to a strange man
she leaves her seat, steadies her wig
stands all the way to honour the settlers of God
stands all the way to please the priests of her tribe

*

Why do the Israeli soldiers immediately teargas us when we approach?

the prophets of old are in hearing distance
are all seeing

they run side by side with the children throwing stones
they dodge the rubber bullets
they jump over the walls of the terraces

they repeat all the warnings they themselves once chanted
"those who live by the sword will surely drown
in the blood they have spilt"

*

On the toilet wall of the house where we sleep:

's w, w
's w , s w

Bil'in has piped water once a week

*

Tv crew
pan to the new Modi'in the Jewish heights
from the house tops
a view across uprooted
confiscated olive orchards

across the wadis
black coats of the shetl
sweat in Samaria
remnants of ghettos
proclaiming divine reclamation
living on government grants
and pious indifference to collateral damage . . .

*

A Dutch man arrives to play Chopin for the villagers
activists surround him
his nicotined fingers flit about the keys

the piano brought from Tel-Aviv
to soothe wild Arabian spirits

*

An envoy from the Jimmy Carter Foundation
inscribes on the trunk of a fig tree:

between the roadblocks and the thoughtblocks
between the minefields and the blindmindfields
between the electric fence and the mentallydense
there must be space

we must make place for space





*

Abdullah brings: pita and zaater
sweet tea to wash down the bread
these sharp and pungent
 worth the night on the floor

the Occupation patrols bring: the threat and the stench of brutality

the European solidarity volunteers with their braids
bring: perfumes of youthful righteousness
 and love-making

*

Blocking our march to the Separation Fence
Amnon the Israeli captain
talks across the barbed wire

Abdullah knows him
they speak in Hebrew then Arabic
Amnon asks for a permit

Abdullah shouts back:
 must one be permitted
to protest the taking away of one's land?

*

The new border is down in the wadi

the chanting begins
the jostling begins
the running begins

teargas streams down our eyes
we cry for this stupidity to end

*

On the way back from Bil'in
I sit next to a young woman with graceful arms, shapely legs
she lives in a slum, studies fashion design
she wants to leave the Zionist homeland
I offer her a ticket to exile but she shakes her head
as the bus turns into the Vale of Sorrows
she waves to the bearded man on guard at the gate

*

Next morning the Roman ruins of Caesaria
ignore the bronzed life guards patrolling the water
the surface is flat
the lull makes another beer foam

not far down the coast
neat planks criss-cross the Herzliya marina
yachts glide with hi-tech dollars
cafes sprout military-industrial umbrellas

I am a tourist in this parallel universe
even as the blue sky above whitens
then reddens
into a billowing forlorn kaffiyeh

CAT

Brandy and coke
white beard/yellow eyes
talks thru the sunset
ah! cat fur warmer than any woman
purr sweeter than any sigh
 curled in his arms loyal like a child

all those years alone in the house
 cat kept him sweet
and when cat breathed his last
neighbours put him to bed for three days

old man splays out his legs
dying day smeared over his eyes
he slips off his stool
 cries into his cup
cat's claws rising
from the melodious memory of yawling night

soon another solitary dawn
he will spit at the calendar
whisper:
 cat buried in the garden
 hands my own hands
 who would be ashamed of that?
 with a star
 an epitaph
 loyal like an orphan

cat decomposes while old man
sucks another pickled finger

AFTERNOON WITH KAY

On yr patio
wine and green and black olives
a bowl full of nuts

we survey the bay from this height

kite-surfers skim the foam
seagulls seize mussels
drop them on rocks
to unveil the strings of fleshy fibre

from far out the swells gather
and we tell stories
light and laden far past the clear headland
salty with dead plankton
misted with tears

and we eat one green olive
then a black olive then a walnut
olive after olive
the pips harder than nuts
one blue one black
each story a story with roots

the whole afternoon
chatting
while the ocean fills us with more
water than we can drink

RETURNING TO EARTH

How smooth is smooth
your skin

we lock each other
the sense of freedom is immense

a burrowing into oblivion
a dive from very high
into the depths of a crystal pool of warm tingling

returning to earth
we kiss
gently

MANGWAPANI

Coral slave cell, Zanzibar

In the coral cell
They threw the men
Deep cell cut out of island rock
A cell to hold the captured men

In the trees the sultan's children hang a rope
A swinging rope
A yellow bird calls from a thicket
The sea drowns all other calls on that bushy slope

But still you'll hear beside the waves
Voices a few steps away
As dhows would come at night
Make little noise and leave before first light

This island a trading post
Cargoes scooped from a mahogany dish
The sun spills over the warm water
Runs down the spines of swordfish

Now a plaque covers a plinth
Near the gaunt hole
It records the shame to be scraped out of the coral
By those who commune with the long suffering slave soul

ON THE BANK OF A BROWN RIVER

Free floating flecks of foam
stirred by the river tide
each fleck collides
is consumed or sweeps along to
the sea

and a little bird big as a thumb
flits
beating an airy drum
boomeranging
to its perch on a branch

happy to attack the sunset
its winged frenzy
streamed like an arrow head
this puff of blood and bone
makes light of the law

as foam flecks
crash away from the rocks
circle the pools
my eyes in the bush
dart with the dance

of the little bird big as a thumb
painting its airy arcs
that independent
perfectly strung nerve
pulsing in the cosmic mind

THE FATE OF REVOLUTIONARY POETS

Ode to Vladimir Mayakovsky

If you lived today
you would still be drinking vodka
smoking heavily
sighing when a new version of Lily
sheds her white petals and stands before you
aglow in your adoration
evading your desperate hands

you would still be working
designing posters for marches and strikes
because those who have taken the helm in their hands
still don't know how to steer between reefs
the daily grinding of oars mashes their galley slaves

you would still be walking past midnight
in the snow or the rain
asking why walls are being built
not for houses of knowledge and feeling
but for shacks and prisons and sweatshops

you would still be trying to create and refine
despite the clamour of brands and tweets
serial celebrities exposing silicone boasts
bank bail outs nuclear blow outs
the chatter of those with too much
drowning others in tides of debt

you would still be clapping your hands
when words stick together
you would still be a celebrant bearing the seal of conviction
you would still have some flame flare
when beauty reveals

and so if you were living today
comrade poet you would not be alone
lamenting the failed revolution

love



STEADY

"A steady income was the one necessity of life that always eluded Karl Marx "

Francis Wheen

Arrogant son of a petit-bourgeois lawyer
proletarian prophet wedded to a noblewoman
devoted papa seeking good marriages for his daughters
penniless agitator dependent on a textile tycoon for the family victuals

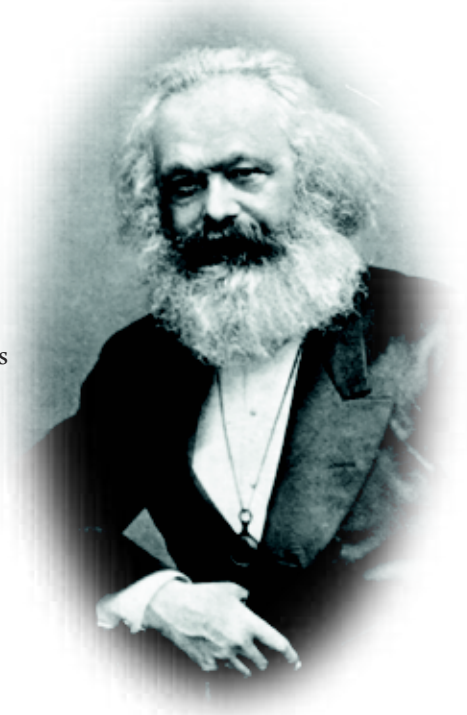
indeed, how does a man stay steady
when turning the world on its head?

- passionate philosophy
- vendettas with kings
- midnight beer and cigars
- systems bared in musty libraries
- sweat-stained gatherings
- market crises dissected
- writings and meetings
- congresses for the launch of parties

all agreed: rampant black mane
then rampant grey
fiery arguer of iron necessity
progenitor of revolutionary journals
Moses delineating the mountain
picker of quarrels
tendentious splitter of leagues and charters

but after all is said and done
trying to change sad lives
wracked by disease and abuse
is superior to interpretation left languishing
on the study table

and whether the Jews and the Negroes
of whom he could speak harshly know it or like it
whether the Saxon illiterates or Polish drunkards
he tried to rouse know it or like it



whether the eyeless powers incestuous monarchies
all those grubbing factory owners he dissected and hated
know it or like it

we all have to live out the movement the whole brutal
transformation
of competing interests into latent solutions this movement unfolding
agonizing being the very guts and substance
of our lives

*

More than a century later after the mayhem
the purges executions labour camps
cancerous thought/police with mad manacles
collapsed worker states
made in his name

after all these

there is still our (im)possible need for a classless
art morality economics
enhancing realities shaping fleshing ideas
so we will wake to the embedded dream of harmony

*

Near the end
On a beach
He sat with sand between his toes
Granules slipping through his fingers

History at his side
History of seen/unseen struggle
Old man despite his boils
Still exuding a fierce love for justice

LINING UP

o u n d p o e m t e s t i m o n y o f R o m a n r i s t e r Y a d a s h e m

In the mornings
they usually take the sick from the sides
at five when its roll call
fresh slaves from the first row
it is safest to stand
in the second or third row
in the middle

so make sure where
you stand
make sure
by all means necessary
make sure

in the rows
make sure you are in the second or third
in the middle
make sure

when you line up for the beasts
know and make sure
of your place

make sure
when its roll call
you're in the middle
make sure
by all means necessary

make sure

SCORING

No money

no dope

the crazies line up
getaway cars stacked along sidewalks with flat tires
hookers lift their skirts for inspection
 the penicillin in their purses
 ready for injection
the aspiring movie maker checks his pants
what's inside is not very impressive
 he hopes
 it's the gab that will count

beyond the mountains
the rest of the country goes to hell
 those hicks know nothing anyway
and the heads in the metropolis
turn heads
and the wonder bread in the freezer
moulds
 as we return to the situation:

no money

no dope

so goes the interrogation in one of those crack houses
off Main Road Salt River

 this is for real
 give me
 I have the need



HUMAN INVENTION/EXTINCTION

The successful interception of several Grad type missiles fired from Gaza days will be seen as a milestone in the history of the Iron Dome system

Ha'aretz, April 20, 2011

There was a time
In cosmic terms not so very long ago
When humans warred

The second Lebanon War and its unfortunate ramifications led then Defence Minister Amir Peretz to order development of technology that would counter short range high trajectory weapons

Whole societies devoted their time and efforts
To defending themselves from and subjugating other societies –
These being other human colonies dotting the earth

His successor, Ehud Barak, later contributed to the project the idea of layers prompting the development of the Arrow system for long range rockets, Magic Wand for the middle range and Iron Dome for the short range

And war constantly gave rise to new ways to ravage
Inventing ever more advanced, effective machines
To increase this capacity

The proven combination of the developers and the operators is a valuable asset that will be influential later on and help sell the system to other countries

Whole industries were established
Endless resources used to counter the enemy
Confound its ability to bombard and demolish

Calls for adding up to date defence capabilities to significant offensive capabilities have been voiced for years Now there's an instrument to realize this vision



That's correct, children
This fork on our tree of evolution
Named itself *homo sapiens* – the 'wise ones'

Active defense is vital psychologically for civilians threatened by high trajectory weapons A string of successes will increase the public's sense of security and strength

Before them we had other prototypes –
Australopithicus, Habilis, Erectus, Neanderthal–
A whole zig-zag of Hominins

*The doctrine of active defence did not come easily for years officials debated fiercely
Some officers argued it was an inappropriate deviation from the
traditional emphasis on attack*

So it went
Their long and reckless responses
To internal and external changes

*But these impressive achievements come at a price To create the necessary umbrella over
population centres and vital national and military infrastructure many batteries are
required And buying and operating them is very expensive
This is the root of the problem The greater the success, the greater the demand*

How they rationalized their choices
Easily bored and eager for profit
Sado-masochistic and obsessive, as so many have noted

*As such, the government will have a hard time withstanding the pressure and will be
dragged into increasing its investment in the system All this will divert resources from
vitaly needed social projects But is there a choice*

Anyway, children
Don't be too shocked or awed by the subject
Your essay on Extinctions must only be in by Friday



FROM THE AIR

flight arrival meeting wandering returning

High over Lake Malawi
clumps of pear- shaped clouds
drift

between the curtain of vapour
I see a frill of sand
 dirt roads leading to
 brown cultivations
spine of rock bridging
straggly green vegetation

scarcity
 satiety
 scarcity

Africa's
broad bent and buoyant back and thighs
 scoured by flood traces of fire meteors
 volcanic eruption

granite breasts
necks of canyon and kloof
thumbs imprinted with sand palms
lined by dry rivers
prickles of hair/trees
white wigs of salt pan
thick tufts of waves
carving the shaven bare sand
a million wrinkled veins streaming
 below

the

clouds

BEADS OF DELIGHT

Two twigs jammed between rocks
and every now then again
the stream rises touches the tips
leaves a liquid bead dangling

above the flow
never knowing
how long it will live
light laughs in the jewel
till a wave comes
a wave from the stream
surges snatches bears it
away

Summer in the mountains

two twigs suspended above the stream
beading miracles

IN THE MEANWHILE

Air is winter still

human effort so very petty

the infinite and small spaces in

my brain swell

beat against stillness

try to bind dissolution

while blows are falling

and hope well hope almost dies

waiting

for some new take on global poverty

sex

drugs and

evolution

E FOR ESCAPE

Naked
nipples pointing
to a new land
there is
firm ground for pleasure

i cross the border
and the hand i offer for your bidding
is more than willing
and soon your closed mind
trusts when you open
above and beneath me

i watch your face soften
but then
after that moment of ease
you leave

WHITE HAIR

With apologies to Dylan Thomas

White hair

he thinks of dyeing

but had he better not accept slow blanching
accretion of poisonous tension
paling in the sun?

as the skull tightens as dead ends multiply
every cut of the razor bleeds deeper
 every lingering moment unrealised
bleaches each turn of the year

white-haired
the mirror presents a reflection (this reflection):

in this my final season?
 can there still be a spring?
can i spring in the depth of the coming winter?

then light rebounding off glass brightens
his question

he stands in the sun
offers praise for the remaining hairs shielding
his scalp

do not go angry into the whiteness . . .

SILVER

The seller of silver tells
How the Japanese bought all the amber in Iran
How the Arabs want to chase away the Jews
Now that the Jews have chased away the Arabs
How the sea-walls of Jaffa have welcomed pirates
And the sea stayed flat
And how history cannot be sequenced
Like the bracelet i admire
And so the present is not altogether bitter

Then the seller of silver holds up
The ring I have chosen
And while he speaks
I see u and hold yr hands apart
And slide the ring long promised
Slide it to the end of the finger
Where you flash cheap plastic
And i see u smile
Because this silver ring had better keep away
All evil as its ancestors promised
And why not pray as well as act to make certain

So when i come home
And have u blow yr breeze over my eyes
I will unveil these gifts
And once the ring and the bracelet
Graft onto yr flesh
U and i will unify
And that is why i bought u
These pieces of silver

REFLECTIONS ON SUICIDE

or Robin Williams

The photo of the man on page 4
seated in a chair hands at his side on the armrests
his eyes catch me so soft wistful drenched
gathering up his dignity
even as the empty glass
takes him back and back to the bottle

the man on pg 4 would stand in front of rooms
of strangers and make friends
talking to them from inside a spotlight
he would make each feel humble affection
for it's cold here on planet earth
winds blow from the ice caps
tunnel between skyscrapers
and the smiles of security guards loading cash at mall exits
freeze as the stock market corrects
and a new war on the edge of paradise props up
revenue for certain interests
(nudge nudge)

the man in the chair was famous for many years
brought charm and lightness
into the hearts of many
children like my daughter when he rode his bicycle
round the neighbourhood asking
after dogs and school grades

the man photographed
propelled himself from stage to stage
drinking strong spirit to keep up his spirits
and as the blizzard from the Andes reached southern California
the white powder of the snow

brushed his cheeks as it sat on the lip of his nostril
he breathed in so the jokes could crack faces

he was comedian an actor who liked to dress up
who dressed himself up as a comedian and actor
dressed to kill off the blues
dressed to make warm
and when he dressed up and made a fortune
on the screens that feed on and filter our feelings
he was immortal but now this man has died



he made sure he died because there was an ice-ringed hole
so jagged at the edges it cut thru skin
if you tried to climb out

and the rope he used to climb out
and sometimes he did climb out
that rope
was a long time
knitting
that rope he used to hang himself
was supposed to help him climb out forever
but it slipped and he found himself floating inside out of
the hole with the knot round his neck
tight as the sense of his strangulation and failure

i felt very sad looking at the photo of Robin Williams

from the outside he seemed such a lovely person
i watched his films like millions had no idea
what was going thru him
after hours

he seemed to genuinely like others and wish us well
so i'm tempted to say
-and i don't usually respond like this
to the death of a celebrity-

'spirit
unquiet
pray rest

quietly rest'

Q & A

How do you fund the revolution? Attack an imperial atm

How do you publicise the revolution? Occupy virtual space

How do you frustrate the imperial leadership? Infect the imperial brothel

How do you ground the imperial airforce? Blow up the imperial airforce
on the ground

How do you build international support? Pay cash for arms

How do you free freedom fighters locked in jails? Send in hi-grade
marijuana

How do you instil fear in imperial troops? Cut the throats of imperial
hostages

How do you ensure people's solid support? Cut the throats of imperial
informers

Then sing together:

In blood and fire the nation fell In blood and fire the nation shall rise

Inbloodandfireinbloodandfireinbloodandfireinbloodandfirein
bloodandfireinbloodandfireinbloodbloodfirebloodblood

DEFENCE AND ATTACK

In the war
warriors wage
blood of innocents
wets the scales

who is counting
the shells
the smithereens
who is keeping
count
of the
muscle tissue ripped by barrel bombs

in war
warriors
rage
innocence hides
under the stairwell
propped against rusted bicycles

*

in the street idling at a red light
a man smashed the rear window of my car
grabbed a bag off the seat
the bag contained money
my ID other important documents defining my life

i jumped out of the car and chased the man
i threw him to the ground
but as i did this his head hit the kerb
blood spurted from the crack

i took out a cloth and propped it under him
the blood still flowed
the man's head suddenly flopped to the side
his eyes closed
his breathing went quiet

i stood looking at the body of the man on the ground
i wasn't sure what i felt
but i had my bag back



DOES NOTHING MATTER

Alert to rhythms
you focus but the target shifts

you focus and your little
Self
dissolves

then your Little Self
adjusts
becomes a hum

no rush
no pushing
no desires no doubt no anger no pity

you accept
your conviction the present

you only lied to yourself when
the truth was too heavy
you were too weak then to walk
even the few steps to your bed

so you lay in the sun rays warmed your face
your face that runs its lines without thought of the endpoint
you lay in the sun and smiled with the cancerous warmth of
the rays

INFORMATION GATHERING

When tongue cannot speak
 swollen
 it chokes the throat

day after day
brother questions brother

 attaches electrodes to his testicles
 forces his head down into a bucket of water
 chains him upright so he cannot sleep
 laces his gruel so he shits without stop
 bombards him with screams and heavy metal
 beats him with a rubber truncheon

then as brother drops to his knees
 confesses and signs
brother rapes him with the lie
 that he asked for it

“DANDELIONS IN THE DESERT”

A line from a poem by an inmate of ‘Sun City’ Diepkloof Prison,
Johannesburg

Maximum security: murderers rapists hijackers
minimum sentence: fifteen years

*some seek to smuggle their hearts out
smuggle out the bruises*

branded in orange suits sterilized monks
divided according to their studies
ability to manage the daily blur of lockup
 without shrieks conspiracies to escape
 without records of internal mayhem
boxed in with a double-bunk table toilet radio
 a few books to shine the shallow skin of concrete walls
boxed by scissor-sharp bars across a window
 often three men together so if one is killed
 there’ll be a witness

they watch the clock hands with or without hope
 with or without fear
for whatever happened happened
whatever took place at some place at some time
 took place
now each day must wake to boiled food
 coarse and joking warders
smells of a cage the smells of other cages
 stiff cocks or dead/soft
they must wake in the night clutch their blankets
 clutch themselves
 clutch at the saviour sugared by chaplains

and these clean shaven men bring us their poetry
their cries and rants their whispers

*yes some dare to look within the deeds
that cost life cost them their lives*

these men bring out their poems
these clean thin smiling men
recite and chant then listen intently applaud ours
they come to dispel dead weight
starved sterile strips of living
these poems made of the guts of those who
took dignity took limbs took trust
took away from unknown strangers
took away from those they loved
those who loved them

*yes some have visions of those
they murdered raped savaged soiled*

and we sit in the rec room
try to paint faces on the smooth walls
the blank benches
word-seed fertilizing minutes hours months the years
ground out in this compounded space

we dissect give voice to the karma of crime
embrace these bearers of guns of knives
who carry no head-horns declare no jagged finger nails
no scars running from ear to neck
no gaping toothless mouths no hunched backs
no foul breath swamping our noses

and they sit in rows and laugh
shout "bua!" when the mood rises

STRATIS THALASSINOS

*'The first thing God made is love
then comes blood
and the thirst for blood
roused by
the body's sperm as by salt'*

George Seferis

I draw up from your well jottings
with a fine pen
in the margins of popular tracts
ashes of orgasm
lambs in an abattoir

your words trail and splinter on sand
on wooden floors in attics
where servants hide dropped coins and
shiver waiting the whole day
for a query a tilted eye
a bristling moustache end

your words guarded and polished
rounded over years in many rooms
the same views of the sea plane trees
wharves where rats eat fish heads
your words wounded in wars to defend imperial lies
pass avenues of statues lurching on islands

and hearing the footfalls of temporary peace
you travelled to cities with leaden skies
knowing that evening leads to midnight
and tried still human
while friends stumbled over ashtrays
and broken bottles of mind-numbing liquor to
splint the fingers of an Apollo
whose limbs had been hacked to pieces by Nazis



MIGRATING DESIRE

Intercepted at sea: refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh 12 May 2015

Drifting for days morbid nights
the men and the boys
squat on deck and in the bowels
waiting for landing for land
 for a new land

three wooden boats
off the coast of Langkawi Island
bordering Thailand
one stuck on a breakwater
 two escaped
all sailing for Malaysia

coppery skin
hair short fine and dark shirts and
pants of stained white
 slim brown bodies
men migrants
upset by turning tides
detained on shore
abandoned by the smugglers
they had paid for new lives

flat on the seats of their pants
marooned on the floor of a police station
they show resolve
despite fear and foreboding
rows of faces waiting
for officials to decide

and all these eyes
mirrors reflecting:
why pay to be taken to the brink of drowning?
were we not already drowning?

JACKAL HUNT

Dew still fresh on the ground
frost on the windows
 they rev engines
farmers warm in the cabins
 runners huddling with sticks and tins
they ride to the edge of their lands
to beat the red sun

Runners advance shout and bang tins
 string out over the rande
runners make noise taunt red/brown flanks
 snouts and tails
 and dassies spring away
birds wave their wings out the trees

Kill the lamb eaters! marauders!
 spoilers of god's own flock
 goat slaughterers who leave half-eaten meals
let the hills echo and crows rise up
deep thuds of the rifle to raise piercing howls

And the philosopher wanders over black rock
volcanic antiquity the fresh spoor of a lynx
the philosopher wonders whether only fools believe
in owning the land the seasons the ages
whether only fools wish to deny the cycles
 of calm and catastrophe

Foolish the one who proclaims himself master
jackals come and go sheep mate and deliver
 crows feast when they can
the dull bass of the gun serves up carrion
mere plop in the universe
the universe of sound orbiting

FALLING INTO SLEEP GLADLY

Red splotches the fumbling light
hollow lines streak cloudy banks
spread and shrink the horizon
narrowing along a burning cheek
lowering with furious pulse
making the contents of earth
dark

*

sunflower at
sunset
nods gently

imbues vapour with scarlet castles
shares its head with distant
curls

brings the viewer
to an awe full of
dusk

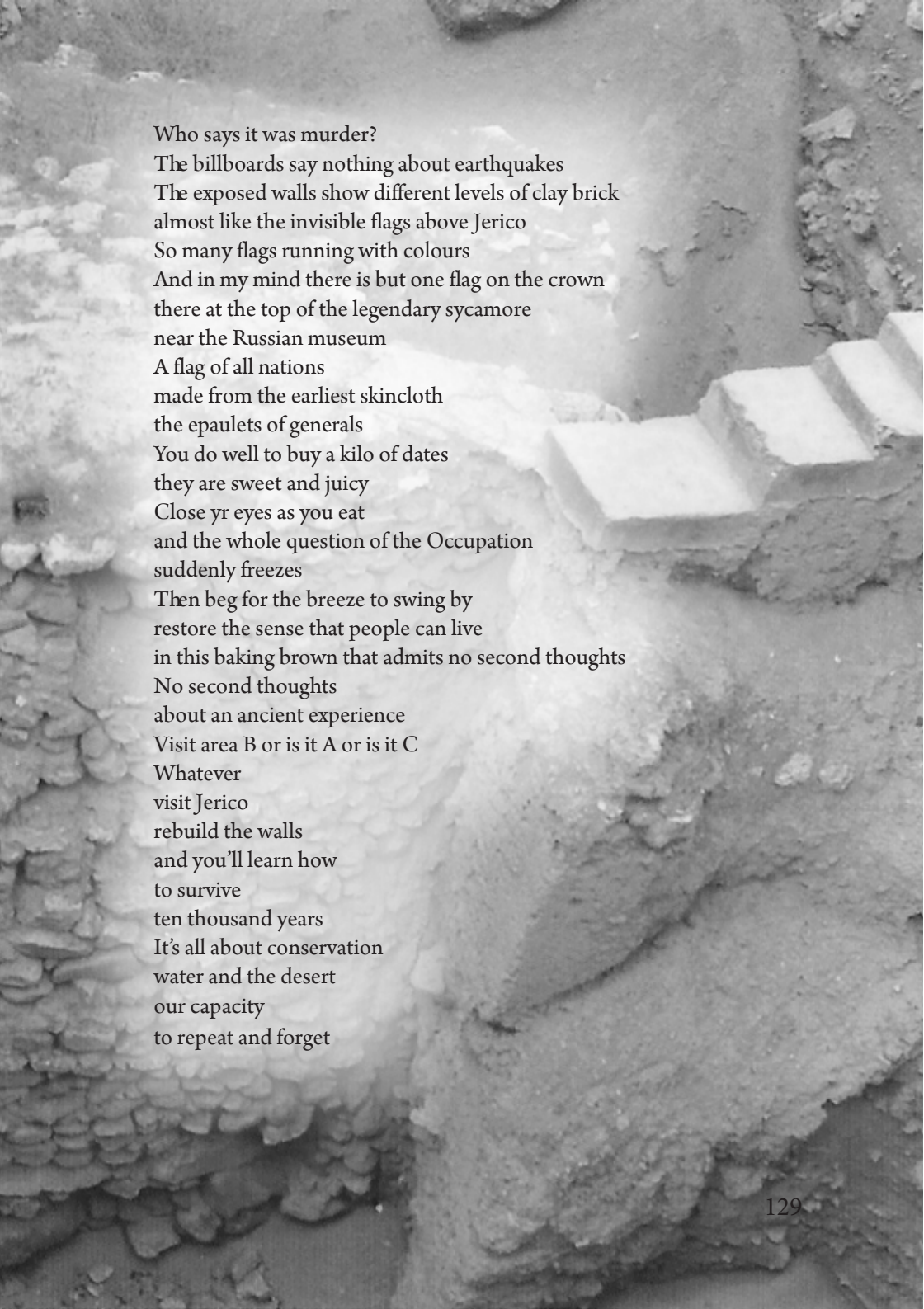
*

what is to come
when dreams swirl round half the earth
when we lie resting
holding each other
and fall into sleep gladly

JERICO

Area B, Palestine 18 September 2014

There's a midday breeze blowing thru the palms
slowly cooling houses in the refugee camp
Far off in the haze
yellow/brown hills hold patches of red
forbidding like bruises
There's a river at their base
Jordan of old
but u can't see it from the archaeological Tel
that is the ancient city
The heat sits on the river and the hills rising
the only shade under trees
the shades of shops along main street
Now witness the crumbling watchtower
mounds of stairwells and houses
trenches dug to open up what's buried
as revealing as the rest of this city
dedicated to the moon
rippling still with her springs
refurbished by an Italian grant
The squeezers of pomegranate juice opposite the site
are the true keepers of the Tel
They joke and flash change
So many layers
so many generations
I pursue my line of questioning
All evidence of a blistering fire
3000 years ago
cannot be connected to the first Israelite invasion
Coming up from Shittim
runaway slaves with the Ark of their god
Their ram's horns and dust-tipped arrows
they claimed to teach the Canaanites a lesson



Who says it was murder?
The billboards say nothing about earthquakes
The exposed walls show different levels of clay brick
almost like the invisible flags above Jerico
So many flags running with colours
And in my mind there is but one flag on the crown
there at the top of the legendary sycamore
near the Russian museum
A flag of all nations
made from the earliest skincloth
the epaulets of generals
You do well to buy a kilo of dates
they are sweet and juicy
Close yr eyes as you eat
and the whole question of the Occupation
suddenly freezes
Then beg for the breeze to swing by
restore the sense that people can live
in this baking brown that admits no second thoughts
No second thoughts
about an ancient experience
Visit area B or is it A or is it C
Whatever
visit Jerico
rebuild the walls
and you'll learn how
to survive
ten thousand years
It's all about conservation
water and the desert
our capacity
to repeat and forget

AT THE ROUND EARTH'S IMAGINED CORNERS

*At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scatter'd bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies, Despair,
law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes Shall
behold God and never taste death's woe*
John Donne

He builds a house to compose
lyrical valedictions adverts
 ballads odes and so on

he builds a house on firm foundations
 one room set on an ocean-bed
 one in a sun-baked desert
 one room placed halfway up a mountain
 and the fourth fitted on the edge
 of a swimming pool

he builds this house with roofs for protection
 one roof wears a baseball cap
 one is draped in a kaffiyeh
 one has a gauzy view of the stars
 and the last bears up under a very hard hat

then he builds four basements
 one basement to house secret love
 one basement for bloody fights
 one basement crammed with undying mossy badges of honour
and right at the bottom a deep hole for the desire to hurt
 on account of hurt

and there in a desolate hour
he hugs a mad dog till he renders him harmless
by cutting four windows into the dark walls
of that abasement

and each window looks out
 one into his eyes
 one onto his grave
 one points towards a lighthouse
and one looks directly onto a kindergarten where mothers
collect their children

 and it should be known
at least one window also rounds onto a full moon
 and is the first to frame the rimmed
 crescent

so he sings
never bitter after hours of flowerless buzzing
never bilious after hours of half-baked feasting
never blind enough to throw acid into the eyes of his beloved

this poet does not wait for judgement

 he writes his own

RED SEA CORAL

Slightly too small puckered mouth
plump without being fat
she receives him with a smile
though a little distracted by the polar bear on tv

he speaks kindly
her cleavage is cut
he climbs all the way up her high heels

hours later
he brings another set of demands
she is professional without being condescending

next day she wears even tighter black pants
a tighter white blouse

he goes to the beach
gives her a wink

on the way back
he again lets his little red fish
swim in and out of her lips

ANTHONY TO CLEOPATRA

On her 90th birthday

After the fanfares

The accolades

The steles

The plaques

The inscriptions

The dedications

The busts

The friezes

The orations

The panegyrics

The epics

May our wasting bodies

Still be given strength

By that ever-flowing and furious

Current

Our love

SUNDAY POETRY SALON

A n a l m o s t e n t i r e l y o u n d P o e m : L o n d o n R e v i e w o f B o o

In the second of our Sunday Poetry Salons
Annie F will be in conversation
with Annie K in the London Review Cake Shop

The Cake Shop will be serving an afternoon tea of
cucumber sandwiches
(crustless of course)
and brioche with strawberries and cream
accompanied by fortifying India Breakfast Tea

the discussion will be followed
by dry sherry in the poetry section

tickets
for this
event are
(a miserable) 15 quid

SUPERAMA SUNSET

Outside the half-price store
cut-price dronkies watch their moneyed brothers and sisters
stock up for the night

eyes hidden by purplish veins
they are afloat
connected to earth
by the iron bands of empty Bully Beef tins
their hell vacant but thirsty
oblivious even to avenging cops
in every way a bargain

now if you were nine-tenths slumped
would you not paraffin yourself
in public?

A FLASH OF GREEN/BLUE/BLACK AND GOLD

U come perfumed slightly wet in places
i mould my lips round yr neck
the curve of the nape makes me shiver

my lips travel lick your nipples
sing the songs of that madman
he of the harp
the temple the sword
man who knew evensong
and the morning song

now i blend into yr back traffic round your hips
stir my fingers in yr hair
and you sigh and i give thanks
and the day's gong
harmonizes
with the calling cries
of a glossy black bird

it flashes wings in the sun
to show the beauty
it is

MOON GAMES

Full moon
Solar light fills
Her grey hard face
Resplendent
Till cloud-drift
Wisps across her canyons

She disappears for a time
Comes back
Yellowy
A lunar rainbow
Orange purple scarf
Bruising her face
When the beach
Quakes
With her tidal suck
And heaven
Plugs her hole
With radiance

ANCESTORS AND DESCENDANTS

A meal the sharing of food and thoughts
my children at table
cyber cherries and rapt flesh

words dig runnels in the white cloth
range over plains and peaks lightness
and laughter fill our plates

so many horizons frame the faces of all the hours
the forms of need
the features of instinct

tonight at table festive and gay
we are who we are
much more than the germinated seed of centuries





HOMAGE TO VERNIE'S DON PEDRO

Between assignments
after the first tequila and *love supreme* at **don pedro's**
i unsheathe my book:
john berger's characters speak about arresting
depression with this challenge:
 u want things to get worse?!
then stop wanting them to get worse

in jail a woman is told by a *saint*
 -that nickname for lost souls
 who let go and love
 with such simplicity and care
 no one can believe they're for real
 so they get burnt raped reduced to dead meat-
let out yr anger
find something anything
to celebrate
so when u read elliot's *4 quartets*
u can see for yourself
how pedantic they are:
 phony philosophising
 religious repetition labouring to poeticise
 pomposity in purple

that's why madness lies in: thinking
too much
 trusting too much

*

across the road
afternoon sun on the shopwoman's face
lights the skin framed by black cloth

-this is her moment away from the till-
more music pours out of **don pedro's** speakers
joins with john berger
but i lose berger or is it he loses me?
pity i value his writing
but this particular story like elliot's verse
tries too hard
pity
'cause I feel close to berger's sense
of the world while
elliot always left me cold as a sinner clutching the hem
of a cardinal in the inner chamber of a collapsing
cathedral

*

those who wish to fly
must expect buffeting winds
cold clouds blinding sun storms
flocks of vultures and geese

those who would gain wisdom without fear
who would forgo stolen bread
cast off brown coats
the sweated shoe
the tattered sock
the crushed hat
they follow the light as it lights up
the shopwoman's patterned skirt
her dark eyes her broom
they let the piano trip down the stairs of the afternoon
and drink the juice of tart fruit
sweeten it with intent
don't allow the monster to grimace
force open his mouth

of course the congas are friendly
but the man in the ankle leather coat
with an earring in one ear
looks sheepish as the guitarist
constructs tropical hearts and leaning palms
ecstatic beats and warm currents
and before you know it
it's time for coffee and tipsy tart though
wendy disappears
and the curly waiter who had to suffer
my lecture on the craft of poetry gets ready
to close up

another evening at vernie's **don pedro**
once 'the heart and soul' of revolutionary cool
woodstock

going go ing

gone!

SOLITARY

or Charles Bukowski

Love
indeed

another night of
untuned pianos
the barking of rabid dogs
bouncing cheques
sour neighbours
now haul out the beer crate stashed under the drainpipe
the plastic doll from the cellar

if only
the horses were running
backwards
and the cost of downers wasn't always
going up

in the parking lots of
Creation
demanding free space
i fought an attendant
dressed in a skull and cross bones

he fought me to a standstill
but in the end
-as is always the case-
my curses defeated the enemy
my curses were indefatigable
my curses covered the universe
with the shine and the slime of My Truths

in the neon haze i make out figures
i hear their muttered poems
i cannot see their faces
but i know who they are:

they are my branch drinking buddies
all sawn off my solitary tree



DEAD SHEEP

At sunset
in a blue suit and black boots white
beard on fire
he took a sack of salt to the fields
and sprinkled salt on the earth
then called the sheep to feed
called them to be nourished
but they were far from the tree where he stood
and were slow
so he placed his hat on his head and waited

now the sheep stayed deep in the bush
stayed far from the trough
roamed in the hills
daring thunder and lightning
they fled far from the man and the salt

and he stroked his beard
hour after hour till night came
and the storm broke and eased
and gathered again to break
then when day streaked the sky
he shouldered the sack of salt
and strode away from the flock
strode back down the path
to the house of his ancestors

salt sack light in the corner
black boots heavy with mud
he warmed his feet by the fire
outside snagged on fences
the sheep ripped apart by jackals
rotted in the sun

there is only so much one can do
he had done what he could

DAVID LIVINGSTONE EXPLORED

Vision Africa unexplored and unevangelised
At the age of ten worked in the cotton factories

Truth expounding the gospel
Love was the only saviour and he had never been loved

Faith conflict with superstition
How could the force of European genius be stopped

Courage encounter with hostile Africans
They are simple people who can be malicious

Mercy campaign against the slave trade
It is an abomination which our Lord condemned

Renunciation farewell to European friends
Isolation in the bush was driving me mad

Endurance the last days of illness
I treated myself, determined to survive even this delirium

Sacrifice Ulala, 1 May 1873
This is my great secret and mystery to share only with myself

The Last Journey his servants take his body to the coast
They, just a few, preparing me for Christian burial

A LIFE OF SERVICE TO GOD, EMPIRE AND HUMANITY

A MAP
OF THE
GREATEST PLATEAU OF AFRICA
SHOWING
THE GREAT RIVERS AND LAKES
DISCOVERED AND EXPLORED
BY **LIVINGSTONE**
AND
DR. **LIVINGSTONE**

those laid down by him in accordance with information
which he obtained from Natives and Arabs

Scale of English Miles
0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450 500

Dr Livingstone's routes between
1848 and 1873



PRIMARY FACTS

*'Introduction to Marxism' workshop for civic activists held in a junior school class
room at Bramfischerville, Johannesburg December, 2 12*

Faces alert but after the first words
turn away regard other things other sights
distant but close thoughts take over the classroom

who can understand this life
beyond the needs for food shelter warmth power
and the great mating emotion?

*

Outside a running a screaming for means masses marching
for basics
police and lawyers bargain with teargas and half-truths
the new black rulers legislate predatorial combat
deny sharing is more efficient and useful
than hoarding and lording

the faces in front of me now swing to the mine dumps
next to their small houses
the shacks on which dumps
spew dust at spring's start
mining company will not grass them nor give them up
but the community is organized
and here i am in this place of glaring need
to play a part in widening
breaking the bounds
*the want the absence the still born the limping
barely believed ambition*

and i wonder: can i really add?

spin concrete from theory for spiritual grandeur build
it on *funeral meat queues joblessness*
fatty chicken soggy with brine rat shit random fathers
soap opera cheap washing powder
despite the handshakes of old neighbours
the hurried breathing of first love and some success
in keeping blacklists from the door

can i fill out and bring to life words

class privilege corruption revolution
resistance decay decency pride
having regard to generations of anointers and usurpers hero
worshippers and betrayers

generations of take and take more
genocide migration stock theft and insurrection

*

Looking about the room

i imagine Marx and Engels watching the white drawn faces
of the sons and daughters of working England
those armies of stunted black toothed labourers
trudging back to their hovels in the gloom of gaslight
the two grey bearded emancipators silently counting the thin ribs
under their coal-stained rags

facing this class room

what would they say to this gathering of Africans so
recently freed of the yoke of slavers and kings?

how would they advise these newly commoditised?
these workers and their managers
still laughed at by the captains of spice ships oil
tankers and the mineral world

would they still urge a dictatorship of the dispossessed?
the centralized certainty of enlightened self- interest?
would they have the strength to thrash the comprador
class as it cruises?
and to make certain
train a bald security service to guard the Liberation?

*

Mention of Fanon has driven talk to revolutionary violence

Azania has many martyrs
the rhetoric canonizing their blood-soaked vests
cannot tarnish their heroism
even as the Big Men *Mbeki Zuma*
self-destruct

then talk turns to tenderpreneurship
those dining out business class/affirmative class
on the gravy train
is that not first choice for the 'colonized mind'
ignorant of Biko's Black Consciousness?

but what has this to do with you? white boy
who cannot tolerate the notion of killing for freedom
can your philosophy free people of colour?
can there be colour-blind bondage?
what right have you to speak?

you
with your silver spoon and degrees

*

An hour before lunch the citizen-workers of Bramfischerville talk
about what they wish
to change and so
heal the stress lines fracturing
their lives

thereafter
the soul will digest policy
 plan sewers and tar roads
many other 'deliveries'
to this township on the edge of Africa's grandest 'boom and bust' city
 this township pledging loyalty to a legacy
 naming itself in his honour



but who was Bram Fischer?
 who was the man who carried this name?
and i describe this white Afrikaner
 Marxist who lived his principles
spent many years above and underground
defying the racists
 spent many years in jail once they caught him

and affirm: he is with us today in spirit and he is still saying:

'What is needed is for White outh Africans to shake themselves out of their complacency, a complacency intensified by the present economic boom built upon racial discrimination Unless this whole intolerable system is changed radically and rapidly, disaster must follow Appalling bloodshed and civil war will become inevitable because, as long as there is oppression of a majority, such oppression will be fought with increasing hatred

and i add: accept nothing blindly from figures of authority
spend time with your family organize your community
find the powers that make you objective
free of sentiment and greed
build the power that delivers the good(s)
emulate Bram Fischer he of impeccable character

as Nelson Mandela declared

"Bram was a courageous man who followed the most difficult course any person could choose to follow He challenged his own people because he felt that what they were doing was morally wrong As an Afrikaner whose conscience forced him to reject his own heritage and be ostracised by his own people, he showed a level of courage and sacrifice that was in a class by itself I fought only against injustice not against my own people "

Bram
bourgeois lawyer son of the nationalist elite
in mourning for the woman he loved
almost broken by her death by drowning
their car hit a cow in the middle of the night
plunged into a river on their way to their eldest daughter's twenty-first
birthday
there in the Karoo on the road to Cape Town

and how was he to live without her and the struggle for freedom so long
and hard and the odds so unbearably high?

*

Dim light over the slime dumps
 rows of serrated edges yellow and trapezoid
 wind will come up offer minute flecks of gold dust
 gristle that blinds that lines the throat
so the people of Bramfischerville can't see or swallow their porridge

there will be follow ups ongoing sessions
maintaining a core of activists will not be easy
but right now i must be careful
ahead is a road block the cops are looking for cooldrink

i open the window

in the distance the lights of Joburg's twin towers blink
 i drive towards them
 foot on the accelerator

the past and the present stumble into each other
 i smile in salute
 as my foot presses down
 slowly

IF

If hearts do not beat in unison
then no coming together marks the day



OTHER TITLES BY THE AUTHOR

POETRY

Call from a Free State

Saving Water

There are Two Birds at My Window

SHORT FICTION

Un/common Ground

Out of the Wreckage

Meditations of a Non-White White

PLAYS

The Pump Room

Comrade Babble

Boykie and Girlie

Jerico

Book Marks

Keys

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Circles

**How many colours do we need
to express the shades
the nuances the tints
the enigmas of the elements**

**every contact
a variation
an enriching
not just black and white**

ISBN 978-0-9814205-6-1

90000



9 780981 420561