

Immortal Treasons

poems 2012 – 2015

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Calm, thinking villains, whom no Faith could fix,
Of crooked Counsels & dark Politicks;
Of these a gloomy Tribe surrounds the throne,
And beg to make th'immortal treasons known.

Pope, *Temple of Fame*

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Martyrs

1.

grasping & grasping the tenuous shore
incandescent with alcohol, the campfire songs
ring out among the leaves & lift
the spirit of a thousand martyrs newly dead
abandoned in the labyrinth of custom

granting & crimping the neurotic syllables
of immortal treasons

immortal traitors gasp
in smoky bars their songsnatch comforts
and plot illicit barnacles, grenades, & strikes,
each within the other's perfect crime, dreamt up
but never realized

treason – such a word
will never outlast shipwrecks

outlast dread
of suicide, dread of cloven promises

dread
of athletes huddled with new boyfriends
in the dark abandon of the curfew, the lights
from the carport shining on their immaturity,
their breasts & thighs streaming with sweet sweat
and other fluids, some unnamed & unremarked
amid their phosphorescent trophy

2.

I never thought that you could be a stranger
staying as you did one step ahead
fashioning serene republics from your failures

this tide of ignorance, the humiliating fact:
that what is dark & complex in our natures is the rule,
& your bleak optimism, your Hallmark goggles,
your quaint delusion that man is something to be reveled in,
& what is ugly is mistaken,
comes to nothing, dragged down beneath
the wave of human thoughtlessness

a fucking throne or a bed of nails
a bed of roses for our caustic gaze
my gold tooth & genius
pounced upon the cat's eyes in the road;
poured, like a careful dram, into her cup
the jubilation of a fountain,
long before the crowds come spoil the song

the whispering of rumour through the endless trees
that line the sunny serpentine in rococo throng;
the winding alleys from the castle past the graves
of martyrs paying for their patriotic folly

an eternal cost as though martyrdom could save
an atom beautiful or true & one day (at last)
achieve that cold & confident perspective
that widows bear in a morning's jubilation

while children huddle in the shadow of the station

... & traced in plasma I have seen
women smothered in their childrens' plasticine,
women wounded in their cunts & with their thighs
preserved in aspic through lack of exercise

Not yet five years, no, not so much
 And yet there's nothing that remains untouched.
 This five year span has seen so many deaths
 It is unseemly that we still draw breath.
 In truth this calamity was long foretold
 While lives & honours were being cheaply sold;
 While children cast down mines were soon forgot
 And parliaments & kings alike proved despot.
 Besotted with celebrity & fame,
 As if the public good were just a name
 For private advancement, venality, & greed.
 Why then should any public care or heed?
 "What weight of ancient witness can prevail
 If private reason hold the publick scale?"
 In the bowels of their want, their lack, their need
 The rabble of all nations quietly goes to seed.
 And yet, complicit in this slow & dank decline
 Are those whose mission is to teach the fine,
 The good, the pure, exposing evil & espousing truth:
 Their careers now indefensible, uncouth.
 Who now can say I find in me no taint
 Of corruption? They would be a saint.
 Implicated in the politics of envy & of lust
 Even janitors find themselves harbingers of dust.
 The quiet fascism of the tiny mind
 Gives birth to monstrous ignorance, unkind
 Conceits, desperate violence, murderous deception
 Counting on the public's ecstatic reception;
 Huddled by the TV as their forebears might
 Have gathered round a fire for warmth & light.

The light of love, all but extinguished, flickers
And almost dies, & we are sicker
Now than we ever were before:
The only palliative may prove a total war.

softly strangled by a cord of purest snow:
that's how I'd like to see the old world end;
full midnight rakes the tremors from the eaves
while all the nation's slaughterhouses mourn
the eyes that focus all the hands on thieves,
the swift brook whose frailest banks are bournes
unbreachable, whose crass simplicity awakes
too many dangers from the harbours of our sleep:

we sleepers, lost too long among the brakes
of cane, the fields of rape, the hills of mustardseed;
we, the strangers, condemned to avarice undreamed,
emprisoned in our middle-class enclosures,
our chattel & our slaves poorly redeemed
by chisels bent on historical erasure

dreamers of dreams!
 chocolate men & orbitals, newspaper chewers,
 bayers at the broken moon!

ye wolves of Capital,
 high-finance coyotes, bankers lean & desperate to perform
 a tune that we might dance to, where are your trumpets now?
 the brass balls of your bonuses, your severance pay,
 the lonely evenings dreaming of a distant dhow,
 its sail unfurled, its women young & gay,
 where pleasures too strong for the waking mind to bear
 go for a song, a loaf of corn, a snatch of wine,
 but only for a moment, & with an unaccustomed air...

I envy no man's nightingale or sprig,
for even these have since become corrupt;
every truth & every beauty, crawling, bankrupt
even among honest people – let them sing
their platitudes, let them flaunt the comforting
lie, the soft & sweet half-truth,
the musick that does aught to soothe
their nightmare breasts; this is their time:
nor let them punish me with loss of rhyme.

were we 3 days out from dien bien phu
or 4 from omaha beach?
the molten shingle & the punji sticks
have put that memory out of reach

necks craned with window shopping
the grace of almond blossoms
lighthouses

warning of rocks

strutting the frostbite sky
grey as frozen flesh
cleaving the arctic wind
from the unseen mountains

sunk below: this stirring city
stretches like a waking cat
and settles once more
into its echo of death

predictable people
monitored by parallel cranes
benevolent gods of spiderwork
geodesic philosophers
sparing us thought

sparing us thinking
& unused perpendicularity
unwonted activity
this frozen city
yoga & gin

such sweet fetish
 must herald deep depression
 the gimp's dungeon
 dominatrix hit single
 roast dog
 and the killing fields

that secret flesh
 fragments in the dead of night
 this graft
 this knife, this needle, counterpoint
 aspartame
 and the needs of deaf men

childishness
 the rebel gauge
 the motorbike gaze
 the cherried sour
 duchesse de bourgogne
 westvleteren XII

crown & guinness
 dicing in alleyways
 nastassja kinski
 & the vanity of thieves
 the unity of liquorstores
 the levity of drunks behind the wheel
 blondes & lumberjacks
 cash in hand

new york subterfuge
 franciscan tears

boston calabash
studded belts

studded belts
missing teeth
ownership
body by body

grindcore panties
long island ice
christina piercing
singapore sling

aspartame:
pure intentions
black label:
assisted suicide

st francis of assisi
the death of pride

skull, crisp as wafer, falls to dust
smooth bone shatters against rough bark
the last sound a man's eternal laughter

the broken bones of children piled in heaps
beneath the killing tree

under a howling sky centuries stretch
like skin for a lampshade, twist
like a slave's tattoo - our monumental ruin
the ribs of a ravaged planet

can bach redeem auschwitz?
the scourged skulls of kids denied revenge,
the empty whistle of the wind through jaws
of broken teeth,
the mute answer in the empty orbits
of a snuffed lamp;
the fearful laughter of the new recruit

buried my blade
 centuries standing
 unquestioned
 psychic disorders
 and mind, major
 roasted red with
 while the willow
 the beech bears
 standing sentry
 carved a question
 of a thousand years
 conservative concepts
 buried my blade
 of the old world
 ready for reason
 mad vengeance
 on the owners

behind the beech
 sentry to certainties
 quarantines & queer
 sickness of soul
 ruptures of morality, men
 revolutions, civil wars
 withers & rots
 witness to the beast
 seeking nothing
 into the cork
 thinking, thoughtless
 conqueror's wetdream
 by the brittle bones
 weary & warblind
 ready to wreak
 violent & virile

on the teachers
on professors
on policemen
on parliament
on my friends
on thought-preemption
on lazy books
on metaphor
insurgency
the state & the nation
world order operates
with the speed of snow
wearing down the weary
of a defunct dream
crippled constitution
and in this arena
we work without wearying

and their operatives
and the taught
of prostituted thought
and imprisonment
politicians & property
feelings, fellowship, fascism
thick & seductive
on love & on loyalty
and on mistaken metaphors
is no emergency
slowly succumb, the new
on other levels, overcomes
slightly, over centuries
rearguard warriors
a dying dispensation
crying for compensation
asking no answers
waging a war

of position merely

we make & we murder

masterful martyrs

no more

day breaks like a hulk of broken coal
faces wet & shining with futile hopefulness.
what kind of hope cries for the diamond drill?
is there a core that we might read the augurs in?

samples stacked upon a lost shelf,
each bleeding grief sucked
from the warm ground, the cool earth
tightening like a toothless mouth
around a finger.

what can we read in that skull of molten wax,
that laughter, that use of tools,
if the disease fits...

mezcal at the dead of night
 glows in the chipped & greasy glass
 like chapped wheat withered
 under a swollen sun
 and you have the gall to ask
 me to let you sleep some more

i mewl & puke instead of talking
 still better than the silver tongue
 of unemployed professors circling
 the barmaid like impatient buzzards
 still better than the cars
 paralyzed in their icy lanes
 exhaust hanging in low blooms
 like mould on an unripe cheese

bruise of morning
 deep as song
 thick churl of snow
 greets the arctic hare
 asks how long
 until the magpies shriek again
 you shiver
 when i peel away the blankets

somehow you thought
 you could stop the scabs from crossing
 the salient picket line
 and yet you don't agree
 that the dictatorship of the proletariat
 is the real & necessary christ

there's a professor deep in thought
crawling up the marble eaves
of government house

a maddening ornament
to brutalism's steep
conquest of space

around the graves
of terrorists & the enemies of peace

nothing eats the brain like this
secret critic of everything held dear
crabs & waterfalls
the paintings of van gogh

the beastly triumph
of tyranny & rage

children break the seals of their convictions
there is no progress for the pilgrim
no stations for the cross
only the ashes of the fire

the cracked compass

the mutiny of loss

no goal in the retch of mouths
no rule or law of anchors or of arrows
the waste
of catheter & blood pouch
soaking the nuisance-ground

sterile dust of fingernails & hair
worm-cast, sparrowmoult
the filthy humours of a body
under the seeping sky

a nakedness too harsh for volunteers

high-finance calculus eugenics
 highways of the mouldering city
 dusty eloquence of bureaucratic death

the shallow grave of peregrines
 gallows, young turks
 torn flesh of palestine
 judicious application of the knife

whatever is beautiful in the world's fruit
 is claw & tooth & has the devil in it
 a weed among the daffodils
 a dog who finds a bone & calls it good

the calm apocalyptic music of the french
 their organs shaking dry the molars in the queer
 skulls of teenage archaeologists
 questing through building sites
 for a token of eternity

beduin blowing across deserts
 cushioned in the cool breath
 renouncing the gross world

gadfly
 rünş
 a death in life

The crackling of thorns under a pot

salt, that crisp progenitor, awaits
 its culmination in a fire of colour
 sapphire flames dance a nebula
 while my feet sink into this clay

salt, that impresario, daft as a dollar bill
 swings fearless over the gullet chasm
 a weary dragonfly gasping for a cloud
 a muskrat gagging on a six-pack ring

salt, supreme magnificence of dissolution,
 sinks like iron filings to the bottom of the glass
 the inadequate fingers of a child slip
 & in the slime that coats the kitchen floor, reads

pulse & beat & commonplace
 bread & butter to ordinary folks
 inscribed upon the dna of race
 mixed up with shibboleths & jokes

splintered bone & winter's whoreson
 afterbirth, hope & head full throttle
 sweet connective tibia frozen
 like a baby in a bottle

tissue in the knees & in the throat
 opens like an orchid in the heat
 a bloom of blood, a prophylactic overcoat
 hope dies

lift our lamps before a golden door
 stooping like lazarus
 unwilling to live
 a life no longer hazardous

how I long for something like a real war
 to take the place of this anaemic peace
 that scrabbles at the edge of trivia
 like a dog who finds a bone & calls it good

i step out
 alone that saturday morning
 intoxicating air that fills my lungs like novocaine
 and cures my romance with its vigilance

dreadnaught dave came to work today
 sweeping up the tickertape
 after yesterday's parade
 before the headlines of the rape

appeared in all the newspapers
 & starbuck wakes in his attic flat
 awakes from dreams of salt & makers
 & dreams of thin, malnourished rats

that are the politician's sons
 sitting now in a jail cell
 wondering what they must have done
 to be treated so well

after such a clutching crime
perhaps their birth protects them some
from the vagaries of the Times
handshakes & the rule of thumb

that says all human life is weak
corrupt & murderous we destroy
all we cannot fuck or eat
from the bengal tiger to the little boy

assaulted in the shower by his coach
or groped inside some leader's dismal tent

...

...

...

...

we have turned the earth into a place of death

starbuck lays back down & sleeps
the morning sun drifts through the blinds
dreadnaught dave cleans up the blood
before anyone who matters minds

you work the coal face, i'll comb the barren beach
 at least till winter come
 & sweeps away the will to play
 beyond the swell of love's corrosive reach

you plumb the deep well, i'll fish the shallows
 until the traitor's spring
 nine seasons coming infects the plumbing
 & drags from bony fingers the widow's ring

join petrarch in his solitude
 john donne in hell
 all that remains of beauty's strain
 misanthropy & christmas bells

wining the ghosts of yesteryear
 tolling the dead of the flood
 bear witness next to corrupt texts
 ringing changes to the traitor's blood

strutting the frostbite sky
 grey as frozen flesh
 cleaving the arctic wind
 from the western shore

sunk below: the stirring city
 stretches like a waking cat
 and settles once more
 into the silence of coma

loitering in the black hail
wearing my green hat
i shiver like a child
touched by the first finger of death

the night is not my time
the clouds are not my clouds
& these pillars of cement
are not my prison

the snake glides across the asphalt
like gretzky or lemieux
and i loiter in the black hail
waiting for its skates to cut me down

Sandino's rebellion: a structural deceit
 Zapatista: a bygone world
 Spartacists: forgotten in their graves
 Mutual Aid: five buck cover

Dominion tavern: knocked out loaded
 Cool tequila: Hadramaut
 Lost proprietor: ploughman's lunch
 Red brick suburb: living death

T.E. Lawrence: vapid charity
 Liquor salesman: absent metal
 Jehovah's witness: emergent sulphur
 God of the book: devil's own

Gauged effects: arm in arm
 Landlocked cabaret: Hutterite meth
 Junk desuetude: Tom Waits' seat
 Slipping bra strap: no dessert

Crowded harem: laughter lines
 Nightfall combines: missing lead
 Sikh policeman: homeward bound
 Cinqueterre: BDSM

Aboriginal: big tit shackjob
 Chinese dominance: true viagra
 Steroid monkey: withered pride
 Subaltern humour: the white man's rage

open-late what have i done
to be set down among abandoned yards
& railways bridges dry boulevards
cracked as desert lips?

set running like a clockwork mouse i
achieve the corners i dam the waterways
reduce once-mighty canals to oxbows
and taking a meandering approach i

mislead my opponent into striking first
goading him with cake plying him with stained glass
reducing him to shivers with my black spires &
as i set fire to his ships & watch his sails

curl up against the sky as so much smoke
i wonder yet again what i have done
to reduce myself to ruin with this masterstroke

galileo, was there an idea worth dying for,
worth bomb & megadeath & nagasaki?
galilean, what sacrifice supports
the mighty fortress of your god?

where are the riots & wars that awoke us
 from snug tents & canopies weeping?
 our tarps black with mould obscure
 the foul heaps of privies overwhelmed

serious ideas, serious men & women
 are disposed in suburbs neat as cutlery
 polished until the teardrops shine
 on paltry faces flushed with fire & wine

let me remain a demolisher of pillows
 my wry neck twisted in passionate complaint
 this chip on my shoulder is never a hardship:
 the blot on my record a trivial taint

o give me the run of an arctic encampment
 a research station or a DEW-line post
 leave me to dig out the doorways & one day
 my breath will freeze over & I'll give up the ghost

tonight we strike in the name of an anomaly
 tonight we roast the hunters in their blinds
 tonight the wild untamed shall have their moment
 tonight all the miners will be counted & named

these are the wheels my legs were broken on
these the jeeps that stole my pots & pans
these are the steps where I first was kissed
these are the swings where she held my hand

winters of my childhood faded out, fingerprints
world of shadows & pale hints
there was a harsh religious depth when I was young
tinged with sadness & made thick with doubt

but I was sage within the gardens of damp stone
no blood yet drenched nor baptized my new shield in gore
& i have grown rough scabs to heal me from the rest
delivered from the guilt of blood a stricken god

deliver me from the guilt of blood, o stricken god,
my tongue will sing a psalm of this thy righteousness
will you not be displeased by my slight sacrifice
the bullocks on thine altar, they are meaningless

scorched by cedar flame, the singed & stinking hair
leaves us naked, ash-blanketed, newborn curled,
howling for protection, as if at some point there
would come a saviour with his brittle flag unfurled

riding a lame horse with weeping wounds & hooves
cracked & split like skin stretched upon a stone
the banner flies though no wind blows, it moves
upon the banner: a bracelet & a bone

“alive? he might be dead for all i know”,
 one of the naked children whispers low,
 “seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
 i never saw a brute i hated so.”

the saviour speaks, his voice like wine
 soaks the earlobe of the naked ape
 “your salvation lies in war, & you'll think fine
 your centuries of greed, & fire, & rape.

“you'll call it good, those bleak millennia
 of stagnant progress, of sin without an end
 this earth of yours you'll burn to a gehenna
 & never give a thought for how to mend

“your own hairless flesh, torn in a thousand places
 your own cracked planet, her heart exposed
 your own fixation on sexes, gods, & races
 your kings & your religions one-by-one deposed.”

the saviour turns, limping & afraid
 and leads his horse into the weary woods
 the naked children follow him to raid
 his armoury & rob him of his goods.

I came to grips to write this epitaph
 to trace the fractures of the vellum skin
 with thorns & casually to calligraph
 the years these weapons were invented in.

Some of the lesser singers, each
 with pinched breath clutch their pens
 and affidavits in hollow bedchambers
 long withered war-chests, desire

nothing but to raise their weapons free
 to bomb a school, a hospital, a refuge
 to dash the brains of children on the ground,
 eyeless in gaza

homo sapiens sapiens

What is it, father, that shakes from your tail?

*A green glove floating on the water,
White spray thrown up against the ancient weir.
A second glove lay on the sublime concrete -*

*I half-expected petticoats & quilts
To be strewn across the city
Like D-Day bunting or a ticker-tape parade.*

*Your papercuts all healed, the cigarette burns
Nicely sorted, almost invisible,
Before the superglue runs out.*

The slow unbending ribbon of the road
Next the green & still persuasion that the river
Harries down from the Arctic sea;

The trace of tires in tarmac caught like bees
In amber, the haze of northern sunlight
Scorching bulletholes of self-belief;

The crisp eternal skyline, grasping trees
At clear blue sky, the deep ravines cleave
The rock, a uterus rich with veins,

A cold & rocky womb for foxes, magpies,
Northern hares now camouflaged, now bare,
And flying like Icarus upon my bicycle,

In mortal combat with the world at large
I dodge the tracks of this, the diesel scourge,
And sweat the honest sweat of pride's purge.

Conquering iron of Tromso ships,
 Maersk-Atlantic havens on the rock,
 Coves & jetties lost among the waves.

The clean slate of the resisting sea
 Man's encroach, erasure, his eternal
 Filth & ὕβρις

The wide infinity of grey haze
 Not even dwindling with distance
 Constant as a drawn horizon

Brisk wind of lungful potency
 Hard nights of muscled balm
 Fire-lines on discarded fishcorpse.

Guts, sou'westers, naked philanthropes,
 Gather pints of blood from Irish faces,
 Fried bread & an ocean of rum.

The paradox of emptiness
 Pregnant with possibility
 In which to lose yourself

The paradox of stillness
 The quiet cove in which
 Seagull cries make every silence possible

Ships' laundry lost in the years
 Of fog & heartattack, net & guitar,
 Precarious houses on Battery Hill,

Crisp & calm as the columns of St. James.
Ocean: you stand for something
Undying, cool, inhuman.

Temperate pastels fade beyond the zero
The extenuated vision of the mists
Pale & aether, coral, mother-of-pearl.

Sky like eggwhite, silent, inhospitable
In its oceanic grandeur, its contempt
For all things small & human in its ken.

Hard drinking, molasses & coffee,
Rum & your oilskin, slick with regret,
Newfangled machinery, moloch's revenge.

Skin, blind & stupid with elastic power,
The disappointed wrinkle in the flesh;
The sleeping monuments to lust & bruises.

The morality the tired man refuses,
The ethics denied with every fresh
And complicated weakness in confiscated hours.

The desire for beauty mistaking beauty for desire,
Soft abstractions appeal to reason;
Only men like you, out of time, out of season,

Ache to be in the regiment called higher
To vindicate the absurd logic of duty,
The acrophobe on his high wire,

The oak sunk into concrete, poisoned
By diesel, throttled with rain,
The mangy seabirds & the crippled horn.

No room in this chapel for remorse;
 No appeal to the abbey for spiritual aid
 Or pecuniary easing will be made.

No prophets now but those who render hoarse
 Judgements on their enemies & friends
 While arguing the tenements & torts,

The chimneys & tulips, the purity of force.
 The magpie's path erupts with splendid insignificance,
 The cradle's lonely charge shrieks with understanding

& the lamb's withered flank rolls with a faint lethargy
 Until the renegade strikes the leather gate,
 The rebel shakes the weary shoulderblade awake

And turns to face the charnel afterthought:
 Massacres the enemy of the state,
 Tatto'd against the sacredness of mystery.

How do the drifts rise up to meet
The children's ruin in the empty street
The slipped disc in the frozen sleet?

How does the drink go down so cold
When merrymakers feel the night get old
And even the luckiest gambler folds?

Where do the liquor stores find ice
In these times of shortages & lice
These days of men instead of mice?

How do the teacups shatter, smash
In the bricks of the teeth of the teacher's hash
& the sweet bite of the lover's lash?

When is the winter's silence ended
When will the suit of clothes be mended
& a child's rough mystery defended?

I smoke but you have the smoker's cough,
That pink uncertain sphincter in the lung,
Roundly corps'd the ladder in the flood

Of hot rheumatic pressure in the gate.
The goose that of the needle drank the gin
& rained deception on the heron's wall

With piss & mucous storms the hungry gale
& with deep sucking meadows clears the drain
& sweeps the cobwebbed decks of Antichrist.

With throne of clay & battlements of bark
Awaiting only the waterseller's spark
Whom thirsty chimneysweeps a dozen times enticed.

The dance of cups & cutlery contend
With the moan of houngans, the sorry
Bleat of fouled midwives chasing lusty

Self-made men down snickering alleys
Performing late abortions on their histories
Inscribed vermillion in broken veins.

The bridge at Mill Creek, pregnant with the morning
Promise of vagrant light & mist & fruitfulness -
I walked the silent concrete spans, conspiring

The treetops grope my own squat stillness
Thinking of Roman vistas, Paris quays,
The first frost of a late October morning

Flaking the tops of fragile lawns, thin skin
Of ice on dark & fragrant puddles, rainbow-oiled,
Reflecting back the fatherly sky

That for provincials stands as Campidoglio,
Tower Bridge, Champs Elysees,
The spread pages of the city's folio.

Above the palms the hawks are hunting
 Tearing mist & flesh, full cry
 Resounds among the dauntless trees.

The muezzin's pre-recorded call
 Does nothing to the mist, the Hindu horn
 Disturns the slumbering divine.

Beneath Gautama's sainted tree
 The slums wriggle, the rubble shifts
 And falls to dust among the newly dead.

Frying meat in the oil of the lamb
 Blood spits, hot iron, the fatted calf
 Delivered on Abraham's sullen word.

The decadence of the wasting West
 Its thirst unslaked, its dusty throat
 Anointed with the grease of wheels

While Hindu girls annoy the birds
 Captive in the captive yard,
 And sleep comes rarely if at all.

The dark child steals into the cage
 The dog tears the distressed skin
 The hawk dives on the unburnt prey.

The crush of mere subsistence
Made glorious by the Brahmin's pace:
As slow & measured as the age itself.

The wail of prayer & strange birds,
Body after body, flesh on flesh;
The holy Ganga spilled upon the steps.

Is this the measure man has brought us to?
The master's hound allowing us to bear
Our mad fruit with a sort of peace?

A derangement of the mind echoes, thrills
When harmonizing, a million voices,
Two million hands raised in unison.

This is the desire that stills the heat;
This is the comfort of the sibling's bed;
This the rule that thrills the envious dead.

Does this precision contain a germ
Of meaning, the soft & trembling core
At the centre of a dying lamp?

Or is there more to say of flesh & humours,
Sweat & valiant semen, undismayed
By hatred or disdain, it stays its course.

Already the churning light has been suborned,
The dripping cars, the shrieking lights & tires,
That thread so many crumbling years together,

The dead men all marked, driven & suborned,
The nightly challenge, the morning beck & call
To battle, to suffering, to heartache, to change.

Are these abstractions any worse
Than Keats' poesy or Heaney's microscope?
How do you fight demons when you have no demons?

I walk past locked nightclubs & sleeping mexicans,
The sun's been up for about an hour,
I should think about heading to work.

The sour sunlight glints amid the dirt,
All the liquor stores are closed,
Rose & lilac linger in the air.

The dry & ragged prairie bearded with pine & wolf
Soil & fir baked brown as horse
The mew of flies, cicadas in their swarms

& the sweet rich air still beneath the branches
Shivering as if men had never been
Full of the hot green life that ice despises

Only the long straight stretch of shining highway
Betrays abandonment, empty as the great void
The black & blasted Rockies to the north.

Maybe you're in Montreal this spring.
Your pregnancy kneesocks gave no warning
You'd be taking everything.

Your craving belly swells the sundress
Taut with child already, sells you out.
Behind your dark glasses your eyes are only jelly.

The reverberation of space a volume carved
Out of chilly New York sidewalks
A widening armor suit of music

Adopted Montreal front steps iron & ice
The Montreal of Cohen & Richler
The freedom of being parentless

Ancestorless, the shape of jazz to come
A hitchhike down the road to something new
The warmth of the wrong chord

Simmering beneath clandestine doublestops
Notes crushed as petals deep as anchors
Dropped through leger lines

I walk around with mind unsettled
By work & travel logic gates & nihilism
Coming off a week of too much people

The glass sphere of Ida Lupino
Gives me some space some peace
Some quiet there among the compost of the keys.

This is the blueprint, & to interrupt
 It like a fist arrested in its flight
 Is to break a golden bowl, an heirloom cup.

Drunk like a drowned man
 Fingers adjust to the breakneck pace
 Withered whisper of a lost voice.

Write down your anguish in awkward prose
 With a clear suspension of taste, I suppose,
 & an absent promise to a vanished rose.

I'd sacrifice a child for a moment's peace.
 You can't cure gangrene by clipping your toenails
 In mortal combat with the world at large.

In one sense you can spread yourself too thin
 With skill & interest wasted in the cause
 Of curiosity, crawling eager for the grave.

Two or three activities might be the most
 You can devote yourself to, hand & mind,
 & hope to achieve a measure of success.

Not in the fraud's scales of the clamouring world,
 But with discernment Delphic & Oracular:
 γνώθι σεαυτόν, μηδὲν ἄγαν.

Reflected in the screen above the bar, the holy lie:
 Not only just, but necessary,
 The pious fraud soothes the barman's fantasy.

Out of sorts or out of rhythm with the age,
His polished glass reflecting nothing
But the vacant platitudes of teachers,

The silent schoolrooms of his youth
That seemed hermetic, sealed in unconditional
Knowledge passing for wisdom

Against the tide of filthy highways, crust & snow,
The muted colours of the 1980s, brown
Studies baked beige in mutinous enquiry.

Wandering as the cool evening shades
Into bleak night, alone & cold,
A comet hulking forth in strict galactic silence.

The universal rule, the empty waste
On my own arms unruly veins are traced
I saw then my mad solitude misplaced.

Quiet & calm the young dog took its death
 While we pale monkeys shrieked nonsense overhead.
 More aware than we how close it was to death

& less afraid than we of the uncounted dead
 Awaiting our indulgence & last breath.
 Perhaps the afterlife of dogs is cool & calm;

No traffic & no human being to fear.
 Perhaps the dog goes neatly to its death
 Because it is incapable of tears

As we ourselves incapable of dignity -
 Every passion the cause for an alarm,
 Every unlucky moment a malignity,

Every unjust act a riot, a crest
 Of cheap emotion, a beating of the breast.
 The young dog died & its quaking death was blessed.

Once, the dear dead daylight called aloud
The name of one who might one day have climbed
The craggy heights of power, but whose blind

And wilful whimsy led her on
To depths of darkness never spoken of,
Caves of soiled dreams & black despond

Full of dismal men & crippled beasts,
Abandoned children, women strong & sad
Whose silent counsel they themselves obeyed.

What is a word but wind,
Tossed on an errant breath
A hopeful journeying

What is Job but a man
With wearyness & more friends
Than death could wish for

What is a pearl but time
Caught in a web of weeds
Sanded till it shines

What is Christ but law
Come round to say
Learn & let me go

What is a word but wind
Three times tickled
Over the lips & teeth

Peach, rummaging through nectarine broods
Blood-oranged with the stain of clouds & reckonings
Beyond sense or buttressing nonsense

There is a heart in the still wood that speaks little
Horns in the deep brooks that are still
Wasps in the cormorants' nests that sleep

There are shoes in the common room, forgotten,
There are blankets in the dread crib, unlaced
Locks of hair, slim as evening, absence

Of voices, silence of rockingchairs, chill of the fire
Unlit these many mornings, peach, rummaging,
Through nectarine broods blood-oranged.

Why the fascination with the outside world?
It just *goes on* existing as it did before,
Not even a window, let alone a door

To some significance. Or else you risk
Putting on the world more weight than it will bear
As in *the wasted wineglass that she pondered standing there.*

Walcott's birds, Don Paterson's half-pint,
The slate of snooker tables in the gloom,
The desert wanderings of rodents portending doom...

A clutch of rabbits in a dry streambed
Awake as I disturb them with my spade
Peering like a curious god into their shade.

Perhaps they dreamt of carrots & new sod
Before my boots came crashing through the brush
Asleep, they heard no warning from the thrush.

But then, my thirst awakened, I replaced
The bracken that they hid beneath
Went back to my cottage, brushed my teeth.

They aren't like Van Gogh's boots, I bet,
Not honest working hands, & yet
There's something in them hard & set;

Perhaps the angle of the wrist
(that characteristic typist's twist) -
But on this I don't insist.

The fleshy privilege of tone
The traveller's song of the stubborn bone
Redeems the promise of the life, alone.

These typing hands on new year's day
Scurry & scrape in their mulish way
To accomplish something or else give way.

There's something prophetic about the pen
The keyboard lacks, I know, but then
The speed with which thought writes *vincens*.

& there a tree stood in a wood
 Since Adam's day before the flood
 & you & I were only mud.

O theorem, O thought, they cheap seduction
 Erects high walls of expectation, styles
 Of behaviour aimed at a reduction

Of ape irrationality & monkey smiles,
 Gorilla mystery, gorilla ignorance & rage,
 The wash of blood across the distressed tiles

That could be a symbol of the human age
 Which, if we were honest, we'd deny
 Was aught but a passing fad, a stage

The earth is going through. If we could cry
 Assault upon the platitudes, carry
 Off the rosy view of history

To its grave, perhaps then we'd bury
 Our weakness, our stories
 Our fear of death disguised as something merry

Until a second coming which I await with awe:
 A second Jesus, abolition of the Law.

Of crimson joy

i never thought that you cd be a stranger
 you have many faces but one pr of boots
 & sometimes tattood
 you give whatevers holy to the dogs

nadine,
 the scratches on yr belly
 harbour uncertain vagrants
 trembling in doubtful vagrancy
 nadine,
 yr cloven hoof distracts
 from the plaid skirt of yr immorality

contact cement, nadine,
 contact cement

these are the eggs of tomorrows breakfast
 unfertilized & lost
 this is the soap of tomorrows shower
 running btw yr tits
 the long curve of yr haunch

nadine,
 yr hair will straighten as it dries
 today, nadine
 the jugulars of passersby arnt safe
 around you

there are days
 when love is the greatest lie

there are days
when i have nt kept my vineyards

there are days
when my vineyards have been kept too well

i saw the band set up in golgotha
 the deadlock mikecheck of the grey epiphany
 drowned fiddle of the lesbo handshake
 & i saw the queer lake rise
 & burst the thrilling banks
 & flood the plain of canaan

whl arpeggiating thunder ran
 along the tempters ground
 & the djs waited in thr shades
 perfuming the allotted rock
 w/ horseshit & a melancholy rage

& i saw all the pretty women
 play thr double-basses
 pistols strapped against thr thighs
 raw w/ ruin

& babysitters treat the dogwalkers
 to erotic high-fives chaste
 & sweaty as a promqueens
 hotel sheets:
 a straining stallion who
 (cock hard as patience)
 will pierce unwillingly
 the prophetic sheath of her ambivalence

i saw the thrilling saxophones destroyed
 beneath the afrocuban freight
 a million compañeros
 thr political backbeats
 subversive as oatmeal
 & i saw the crusted semen

on palimpsest panties
the door locked w/ hooks
the old whore warns
about her sore

rules & laws lie heavy on the tongue that speaks them
 & shattered axioms protest the weight & squeal
 whl pregnancies ectopic & unblessed
 force abortions on those whose time to heal
 has gone, whose time to rest has passed

death sudden, death attended by long days
 in hospital, long weeks of feebleness
 the final moment of extinction a relief
 squalid daggers held to rebel necks
 hours stoln by age that subtle thief

the brain resists the flow of unclean blood
 & catarrhs bright by naive husbands wears too thin
 the skin that might protect against the flood
 of a wifes decease, a husbands absent sin
 nephews come when girlfriends fear to call

the pub, the bottle, & every loyal refuge
 cries for satisfaction, cries to dull
 the ache of living, dull as a dry bruise,
 the smoke of liquor smothers, cotton wool
 comes btwn the sheets & sheath

the withered blowjob hangdog & halfblind
w/ flavours wet & willing, sour breath
peel back the foreskin like a lemon rind
& every coil of flesh an inch of death

the worm of love, the worm that wills
a baby into life, the squalid hunt
that every violence will someday kill
for the comfort of the runt

a death in the family: & somewhere birth
pulls & tries the measure at the test
of cell & egg against the chemistry of pain
the lymph of limping crime, crashed & wrecked
& bruised, dying in the rain
whl children choose from parents that remain...

& i saw the cbc tshirts march
& the ignorant amptech hold forth
the sermon at the bar
the fruit of temple mount
the band at golgotha
the wedding at galilee

the buckled belts support yr stale jeans
& woolen caps yr frail bonhomie
stiff & stilted as encumbered speech -
heres how victims support thr victimhoods
beneath thr golden throats
conjuring in the shadow of a silver moon
some twilight lover, some hint of ruin

safe against the worst ravages of pain
brought on by the bright & fearsome world
outside that bites & bites again

puget sound
deep as a hopeless voice
reciting its round regrets
its acts & monuments
blue as puget sound

where are the stripmalls of yr youth, nadine?
the dark & gloomy foodcourts
gilded teenagers on the prowl

in little shops w/ identical arches
the tiled floors are
mortifyingly clean

the cutoffs of yesterdays brunette
her thirteen summers hanging from bruised fingers
like a spent cigarette
the rash on her thighs weeping like
the madonna at lourdes

i like to think sometimes you
masturbate over his short stories
tearing page from page
with yr cunty fingers

it does no good, nadine,
the pulp of a man
is no substitute
for the liquor of him
neat

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