

Any room

Any room any life may be the place taken over.
While you still huddle wondering is it too late
for words like beauty and love, the dog is shot,
the door you trusted cracks open at first boot
and camouflaged men swagger into possession.
The writer's pen is driven through the writer's flesh.
Any powerpoint converts to simple coercion.
The place you played as a child, where your children play
the trigger and giggle of fantasy: From any ceiling
ambiguous shadows hang, splinters rise
from walls, and stained floors mutter unlikely tales.
It was always too late for words like honour and truth
which are always blindfold words spat at hooded faces
or scratched on familiar walls by shattered fingers.
Under the hood is it stranger or neighbour or twin?
Anywhere quiet and safe may become the place.
Any room any time now.

Certainty

He knows he is George.
A crusader maybe or
maybe a myth but he
knows he's Saint George.
She? Vacillates:
one day the maiden,
another the dragon.

Notes from the planet's edge

Some meteoroids make it to the surface simply because they're so small that they literally float to the ground. There are thousands of these interplanetary particles in the room you're in now, stuck to your clothes, in your hair, everywhere.

Geoff McNamara

The last tadpoles
strangle
sun-pinned in mud.
Desiccate.
One night's rapid rain it's marsh again
open for business,
pobblebonk frogs plunk
their deep-belly mandolins
expound their name, advertise
one more try for spawn
to grow to legs
where primal ooze edges the planet
still testing its options
between life and vacuum.
Early nights clench cold
on lavish water.
The last tadpoles
stumped
drift down and rot.

*

Under the ceiling's blanket
under a wafer of slate
and thin air
I crouch naked



where the planet's particular edge
is nuzzled and pawed
in passing
by the expanding everything

*

Out here on the planet's rim we live
between earth and sunfire, between wind and water.

Onto our beach the weekend visitors
crawl out of their glass
protective husk where no-one hears
a fricative cosmos scraping the huddled Earth.
They thrash the margin of water or bake
on sand's edge, tide's edge like tadpoles out of luck;
or insect over the surface with oars and rods.

We who inhabit the weekdays see enough,
too little water, too much. Wind fills the sails
and crumbles the cliff.
In the freshening pond pobblebonks yell for the brief
comfort of procreation, the myth of escape. All
over the planet's knobbly rind
the frogs are dwindling
but their mud our mud
is starred with the invisible sift of space.

Being private in public

Your habitable life demolished by that choice –
had you ever much choice? and afterwards certainly none.

Various ways seemed (yes) variously open
the way of the desert, desiccating
back to your basic grit (scaly heads
snapping eyelids) and a hermitage among piled rocks

or the mountain track (at a distance a Chinese painting
but underfoot yellow mud among dark trees
and bright cocked eyes) consuming your salvaged pack
to climb at last free to a wind-hammered hut

or to carry your books and a couple of bags to the car
drive to where you are going, shut the gate
(face turned, once again being private in public
shrugging away from bright lenses cocked in the street)
shut the door and hunt for kettle and matches
in the sudden huddled silence of a strange kitchen

various ways bracketing
the one urgency: to arrive at a stunned stillness
where fractured stones may knit from the dark cellar up
rising a double helix of wall and stair
you explore as it grows, learning to trust this step
after step till it towers to an upper room
of new symmetry, a landscape, a quiet sunlight.
Which is the way it always intended to be.



Stolen

for NM, my student

Don't leave that cuff unbuttoned.

I sidle eyes
not to see the nib lines on your arm
where blood has followed blade across your surface
welling words that clot before they say.

The family mirror shifted you
off-colour. You wrote it for me
stolen from the stories you don't know,
spilt away with the waters of your birth.
There must be somewhere another name
from a different part of the throat,
elders and siblings of your skin.

I could teach nothing
to your grim grip of research.
Enrolling in the history of yourself
you reached beyond due time
the hidden blade of your mother's death
waiting for your own hand
all these scratched years.
You reached
another family of other strangers
who could not place you.

And I sit coward, sidling thought
from arm and thigh and belly wall
where you have scarred down
your tangled practised signature
trying to name your skin

where speechless metal drives your point
home and home and home.

Neap tide

*washed up on the beach with the sea's general air of 'Is this yours?
I don't want it.'*

Leon Garfield, *Black Jack*

The pebbles shift alive.
The shallows hump and thrash with last-ditch muscle:

a dislocated run of fish
flatly rejected by the gentle ebb
of this apologetic little tide
the lost shoal lies at last free of the sea's
nagging tow.

This is the sackcloth of freedom:
beached without direction
sand grits them, air drowns them, their empty
gills run frantic
and fade.

The unfinished moon
cloud-finger to chin
sheds little light on this.

They flee from me

A copper copter after midnight
coarse-grinds shreds of what-who fear
into the chamber between thought and paper
where I was silent not to spook
whatever life on naked foot
might edge towards the familiar scent of crumble
to take bread any moment now
from my stilled hand.

Less than a thought-fox, merely
a laicised churchmouse – some small wildness
unafraid as that first-flight thornbill,
nest-fluff still tangled on his head
beside my window poised to watch me,
openmouthed for food not shock,
till his father came to fluster innocence
and drive him second flight
to a further tree.

One inhumane propeller
skeins out from my childhood
the sky full of a wounded bomber
and us wide-eyed beneath.
The kids next door know only in dream or game
the need for bulletproofed sharp-seers
boldly going
roughly getting somewhere
over our mundane city open to view.

On task.
Grinding away beyond my suburb.

Mood / Tense

She's camped well out in the subjunctives.
Were she to stay in this thin scenario
(jerrybuilt frames, splash of distemper,
in a slight breeze the uneasy paperbarks
rustling, lamenting *Had one but thought...*)
despite conditional character make-up
and a camouflage mosquito net
lest anyone come – the last syntax purist? –

imperatives would heavy her sleep:
Come home. Listen, act normal. Don't be a fool.

She juggles her billy and bed-roll.
Sighs. Treks towards some indicative suburb.
And perhaps she can settle between
concrete floors and walls, the oil-painted people.
Within some future she will concede
though her tense balance has never been perfect
her civil heart beats: *present, present.*

Incarnation

for Michael Elligate

God sideways
slides into the secular shyly
at first, testing out the feel of selection
instead of all-at-once: the fit of one skull,
one culture; choosing to focus female or male.
In this singular human he fetches up
nose to nose against secular bewilderment.
Pushed under the mechanical hammer
of *socio-political reality my*
friend, are you stupid or something?
(One more bug in the system ironed out.)
A couple of days gradually resurrects
the clarity of singular being to enter
headlong into whole God.

This practical experience registered,
God sideways
slides confidently always
into any secular. From the outset
the Big Bang like the essence of sex
or a fist right through the drumskin.
Boiling out of craters, ashes flying.
Word into words into speech: anger and love,
engrossed study under a hidden lamp,
names of the disappeared clutched in silence.
The gossip of rain on bushes, chit-chat of runnels,
streams spreading subordinate clauses
across the landscape as shoot and nectar and nut;
rainbow feathers fluttered and scattered,



lying around where we happen (not even
paying attention) to find
God sideways
sliding to be found.

Jump

You jump down
run and hide
I don't tell you there's
a red sleeve peeping from the bush
I don't tell you there's
a clue of giggle I just
walk your footprints
carefully bemused
till you leap your paddypaws
round my leg GotchaMum

You drive off
in clank and smoke
run and hide
There's no red pointer
no clue or giggle I just
walk strange footpaths
eyes down before the street
-dwellers -prowlers -cops
Each night
a shadow follows me home

I walk your footprints
waiting for a kitten leap