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## The Colony of the Dead (Poem)

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### Abstract

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of gold leaves a taste on the tongue and a nagging scratch

# The Colony of the Dead

Tony Birch

a colonial jewel of the southern sea  
this playground all columns and quarried stone  
its fix seeped in veins of gold  
leaves a taste on the tongue and a nagging scratch

beneath the foundation stone of the city  
(‘this is the place for a village’)  
lies the hushed consecration of blood and skin  
bones and hair and bodies —

500 tongues sounded the sky  
when the civilised ‘cometh’  
armed with bible tracts and treasury ledgers  
warning bells hung with skulls  
the dead swayed from tree-tops  
and the preachers rejoiced ‘Amen’

now the colony unravels in a daze  
this Victorian city tripping out on plastic chips  
and a vertigo red-black red-black marble-ball rave  
slipping into fits of strobe desperation  
the coloniser rests in a catatonic dribble

in *your* city of dead night  
when the quiet thinks of sleep  
the river snakes to life  
a thunder-clap heartbeat speaks back  
to a neon mess of global waste  
and the ‘washed away’ wait and wait  
to come forward in the deluge