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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

TAKE A WALK, MANNED MISSION TO THE GREEN PLANET, A FAR NOISE FROM NEAR THINGS

I'll bet, Roberta
you'd rise like an avenging angel
to scourge me, nightly
with pure grief, and scorn.

Stephen Oliver

TAKE A WALK

Disturbed movement in
alleys. A shift in wind
direction. Further
off over roofs, patches
of light. It is the
signals that, pushed out,
are coming back in
across the buffed zones
and upended days,
down the familiar track
of childhood, the
neighbour yelling from
behind hedges, destination
of the stone sure.
Somehow we soften into
the sum of all we haven't
done, seated high on
windy terraces, one step
from that which may
have occurred, outlined
there in silhouette,
hurtful against the sky.
The birds celebrated as you
dressed with stealth
though you'd gone long before
first light took you.

MANNED MISSION TO THE GREEN PLANET

Behind some night bush Rousseau green,
some dwelling in one place, some in another,
it had been agreed between us by courier
and hesitation to meet in the village centre
at mid night. The first figure to emerge
was to be greeted thus: America comes to
interpret its humour: the hurried reply: and
community halls abound. Back and beyond our
allotted frequency, The Generals who had
not been posted gathered over another Power
Lunch. After the brief and the oiling of
rifles we set forth across the causeway,
through the marble green of foothills, and
into the grey of higher ground. The thought,
like a saffron scarf caught on a thorn
bush seemed even now on the closed off terrain
a crusade of sorts, kept us ahead. Amply,
unnumbered rivers plashed into the battery
green of immeasurable hollows. So it was
that we became inseparable, spirit creatures
to the forest life, the journey boundless,
the orders which concerned the depot, unread.

A FAR NOISE FROM NEAR THINGS

That which has gained a little
further, high enough to curve out the
earth, the diminished rainforests

of Brazil, the hole in the ozone above
Antarctica, the lessened bushtribes of
Africa, the years pushed out by light,

the greenhouse globe over photographed
is how we picture ourselves back,
falling. Or rice paper moon in the

July afternoon. Bulkheads of tankers
whitelit on the horizon. Night,
underground with a silence of escalators.

Sky and cloud, a dream of snakes.
A fallen leaf against the skylight.
A leaf against the skylight fallen, so.

And we then who engage the light
take ourselves to the work of aerial
attention the Ancients were part of, and

by it, remembrance of time, but atomistic.
The seasons knew us as we learned. Our
lessons learned well, too. Around

the roulette wheel of the world, through
the yellow pages of the sun flicking
over decades what migrations made,

from the micro-chip to Star Wars,
digital sex to right wing abstinence,
eclipse of personal vision, limitation of

immediate memory, the object of our
desires objective love, love at several
removes in our falling. Sangsara.

The great lesson came in a sudden hurt
of killing, our first knowledge
reflected through caves ochre-images

of the slain. We began worship,
measured time, and built against the
shock, the pain. These sentiments amongst

the tumbled blocks of older verse are
gone from the heart, the darkest galaxy,
and memory alone promotes sorrow.

It is today always, green as a computer
screen and elsewhere, unrecorded, the
high surgery of the super nova which

never exploded now, but once.
Child dream. An abandoned railway
siding overgrown with nettleweed, hide

out for a wizard. Backdrop of gentle
slopes, elms at distance. Adolescent
visions of Irish burrows, hollowed

darkness, whisperings, a wish to locate
the signal in self back in time.
This resides still. Downwards and over

the garden (a dark, humped square)
my neighbour shadows through dropblinds
before a startled TV. Dirtied cloud

frames a full moon that is sideways in
this movingly. Gravity takes hold
and accentuates. Gestures weigh in their

orbits. Bright as cufflinks, radio
telescopes revolve on red tablelands
to uncover one more sacred site between

the stars. A brain based society
ornately tracks the lusty technologies
and the years recognise our whereabouts.

In the beginning wooden paddles echoed
from atoll to island. Air whitened,
thunder reverberated. A riot of leaves

under malarial rain. Then came the
creak of rigging, came the off-shore
companies, came synthetic drugs and

salvation, and finally, came migration
back to Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, Nuie
to light up the rim of the Pacific.

The hour turns, an electric train flicks
blue flashes over suburb and hoarding,
brick arch and emptied streets.

The day's news ceases amongst the
satellites. And high enough to curve cut
the earth Argos is falling across

the Southern skies, dragging her keel
across some coral harbour where, fitfully,
the gracious guns of goodwill ride at anchor.

David Kerr

RETURN OF THE LINGUIST

(For Jack Mapanje)

'Malawi's only semanticist' your letter self-scoffed.
Jokes aside, this place, with lost seams of gossip
and taboo-coated rhetoric lodged deep in fissures,
needs your skills - wild pick-axing or delicate
chiselling for fossilized signs.

It needs
the deftest rinsing in gallons of sweat to sieve
a single gem of meaning.