Poems

Grant Duncan
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Abstract
THEORY OF FIELDS, HAWKES BAY, OUTSIDE JUST LOOKING, THE TROUBLE WITH FIRE
It was what’s known as a quarter acre
but it was more than that
it was front stage and back stage
and a stadium too
it was an island with
too many heirs for sons
it was a locus of myth and fantasy
with imaginary beasts on show
it was depriving and it was nourishing
and the lawns were cut regularly
it was a superannuated and subdivided
paddock of mostly horseshit but
it was flat with no falls
it was ngati kahungunu
it was as if you’d never known it
the way it was
it was pure memory pure theatre
pure geometry of rectangular bliss
it was the bomb-site of reason
with unflappable edges
it was another chance like
nothing but a springboard
it was never mine even though
it found its way inside me
OUTSIDE JUST LOOKING

Reading is quite a different use of marbles from listening or just looking.

You needn’t read the window signs nor even buy.
Just looking is better than being in the dark.

Old and small as the buildings may seem at 9 o’clock
this must be an emergent centre of good taste.
The attention is drawn to the wine shop (closed).
the little cafes the delicatessens the former takeaways
and the image of the lonely knight roasting sausage by dragon fire.

It’s a symbiosis of myths and mealtimes
bricks and mortar sky and skyline buyers and lookers
while the wineshop has the good sense to close early
and open late.

So in the space of one day you can wear out
your best soles in looking at all the signs.
the party invitations floating distantly like harbour sails
the incantations and the golden kiwis roasted on electric spit
under a succulent midday sun.

Therefore the baker swats a fly
while his neighbour the butcher fondles his cold flesh.

No wonder you can wear out your best pair of eyes
unravelling the alchemy of commerce.
the nearly naked kodachrome truth the fiery vitamin-C sun
the alembic of vices virtues and vapours
for every orifice that swells smells and smarts.

the essential product is here and taken with a cup of tea
it animates your wisecracker sandwich as you listen to his humour
and makes you hungry for his lettuce
thirsty for his cheek.
THE TROUBLE WITH FIRE

Something's cooking
That's the trouble with fire

but you rise on its heat like a seagull
search for jailed singers and spy on the textbooks of patience

return at twilight like a ghost disguised by the humming of powerlines
and broadcast silence

By morning you will have imagined an antique landscape
and having the time to inhabit it

rub grains of sand between your fingers
make love like aliens and leave me a poem instead of your number

I am your one and only photocopy
the original dislocated

place of birth somewhere amid the agony of parents
pushing F1 for Help

Your name is a letter doctored
to detail that sorrow

But we will be lovers even if it takes us forty years
while our faces curl up and we meet only at funerals

We'll leave our memories behind beneath familiar furniture
become our own ghosts and vanish for a time

We'll find a place to learn to change
the raw into the cooked

to feel the rarity between our fingers
and know full well the trouble with fire