

Revenant

Whispers through the wires
Patterns traced over maps
Lights on behind metal grills
Crazy pathways and hidden symbols
Of those leaving for the last time
Making the tangled world straight
And easy to understand
Meaning no meaning, fantasist
Jumble of shapes assembled
And worked into a history
A message
God breathes his name into a tomato
And leaves the Virgin burnt on bread
A love heart balloon
Tangled in the telephone wires
One man tells us there is no connection
Between the bombing of London
And the occupation of Iraq
That he spun so many lies to help achieve
And the newspapers agree
It's called holding a line
Even against the blatantly true
While another man tells us
It's god's will, and justice
For the dead in Iraq and Afghanistan
One set of wrecked limbs and wrecked lives
Makes up for another
More pain heaped upon those
Accidentally in the wrong place at the wrong time
An eye for an eye leaves us all blind

The blast that tore the bus apart
Shook my office
Windows and teeth rattling
The shock of violence driven through me
Like a fist
(And I remembered again what a friend had said
About the cruise missiles launched at Belgrade
"We had the windows open,
Even in the middle of winter
So the glass would not break.
We all had colds, and we watched
As the missiles followed the line of a road
Into town, and we all wondered where they would fall
This time.")
We all knew it was a bomb
Despite London Transport's assertion
That it was power surges;

I've heard them before
Canary Wharf, South Shields,
The Brixton Market nail bomb
Every time the same
Planted by fantasist cowards and fools
Wanting a simple solution
To something so complex
That there is no answer
Only discussion, an endless attempt
To live together, sometimes despite each other
Otherwise what?
The Iraq invasion, the bombs
That have pointlessly killed so many
Turning into your enemy is not victory
But rank stupidity
We cannot live apart
Or live alone
Because then we do not live at all
And if we cannot live with difference
We cannot live even with ourselves

I saw the bus after it had been ripped open
Sides splayed like wings
Dead bodies laid out on the pavement
Under wraps
Doorway to the BMA
Scarred with blood
And body parts scattered across the road
Sirens, the hypnotic thud of rotor blades
Camera crews babbling across
Miles of police tape
And already the answering machines and inboxes
And walls of mosques
Were filling up with blind hatred
The instinct to kick out at the nearest, weakest
Most different thing
Women spat at by strangers
And arson attacks at the dead of night
The same thing again and again
And again, and it scares me
Because this goes on forever
No happy ending, just the occasional reprieve

Within hours footage from mobile phones
Posted across the web
Showed thick black dust
And the slime of blood
Dazzled by tunnel arc-lights
Gore trailed across floors
And smeared across windows

The sounds of choking, screaming, pleading
One woman reported how she sat
With half the leg of the man who had been standing
In front of her resting in her lap
The smell of burnt hair
And charred flesh
People crying, thinking they're dead
Still a carriage below King's Cross
That can't be salvaged
A line of people bleeding and coughing
Walk to distant platforms
And this is justice?
This pays back the tanks
Crushing tents in refugee camps
In Palestine?
Cluster bombs in Iraq?

Flesh blasted off
Hung open mouth forms a question
Everything ends too quickly
Still grasping for more
The old certainties of action:
Marriage, kids, love
Everything in its place
Dissolved: the DVD pictures
Of the shattered stumps of minarets
In Falluja, the sacks of dog-eaten corpses
Headless legless guts hanging out
Mutilated women, blind eyes
And shaking voices telling of A10s
Swooping down
Snakes unleashed from the sky
A sick thump and rolling dust,
Dizzy nothing, shattered metal
Concrete lumps, scraps of material
An arm, disjointed puppet's piece
Laying across the asphalt
Alongside empty cardboard boxes
Looted electronic goods,
Vegetables
Polystyrene packaging
A smashed CRT
Prayers for the manufacturers
Their tax-free housing blocks
And prison factories
Ranks of women guiding machinery
More expensive than they'll ever be
An accident of birth
Scraping together enough for a life
An apartment, marriage

No time, the relatives waiting,
Callers on hold
For a kiss
Fingers slid across skin
The scream, the hostility
Incomprehensible but there on the line
Tears every night and shock
Wondering what they've done
To these fatted, barely-literate
Rich others

BNP graffiti
Tangled in brutal spaghetti trails
Across the sides of ordinary houses
Across your home
The inching corruption
Like rust upon metal
Bleeding into your soul
Your wife
And waiting for your unborn son
A society fed on sick fantasies
And boredom, vapid
Empty, pointless
Lacking any path to redemption
The pictures, endlessly replayed
Of massacred civilians, mutilated children
The innocent victims
Of a power struggle, rich against poor
Too late not to take sides
Choosing done for you
Hawk shapes, grainy and harsh
Against a blue sky
Death drops with all the beauty
Of a dove stretching wings
A rose bud blossoming
The sound that comes later is worse
The stink and the screaming
And so four bombs to save the world
So you think
In a mess of ripped bodies
And bust metal shells
Did you look around
At the men and women,
Muslim, Hindu, Christian and Jew
Those who believed nothing at all
Those who held nothing against you
This city that raised more than anyone anywhere
To protest at the war
You are paying them back for.
Do you look down now from somewhere

With satisfaction at what you've done?
The dead, the ruined, the crying
Your family in fear
And living in hiding
The idiocy flung at mosque walls
The spitting and insults
Do you look down at all?
You face the void
Same as anyone
While someone behind you
Without your foolish warrior's need
For your own death
Slips away across borders
Content with this.

Jethro Perkins
07 – 21/07/05
Rev 29/07/05
Canning Town