

The Painful Abyss

in memoriam David Kelly 1944-2003

at night
the darkfold trees over

we enter these woods
from their ragged edge

on paths lost to memory
we start our journey with others

hardly aware
how to enter or gain shelter.

each step more uncertain, more
obscured and overhung.

armies move in a distant
pale bleach of desert.

sexed up the dossier
is released, carried

into press conferences
introduced to others, a pathogen.

leaving the sunlight
he is unable to find the path now

self disappears into shadows
in the uneven pelt of words.

and the trail is taken up
by news reporters. still spin

in hindsight.

a low functionary, no expert.

all chillingly predicted
and so dark evoking.

alone under the quiet
to find death in the woods.

and dead you emerge
finally out from the trees.

Embedded*

The Americans storm their mile yield

They have come not to make

but to give the gross formation
of his terrible goods

his overwhelming economy

It is the cause of victory
against adversaries of every kind

This is the time of the migration of birds
to the marshlands

Ahead there are new formations incoming
Divine justice spurs them

Aircraft strike one to one
the signal air without stars

wings in cold time to wide and full formation

The city is already gone
abandoned to pain and rubble

You will see behind
the long draft of those who have lost everything

people between exile and displacement
those who have left every hope

They are dust
each alone nearby the others

They come drawing troubles
from the almost dead

and more than a thousand shadowed monsters
or monstrosities unnamed

Those who cannot be consoled
now the no longer gentle sky rains

Who is it that can hear
this sad chorus of harsh languages?

Those that had reasoned this commotion?

I have heard in the heard sky
his adorned word

and the President saying gentle and flat
with his slow voice

I have your word your very understanding
Let me finish my Father's work

This is a man ennobled though without high talent

thinking himself heir
of an empire that owns the empyrean sky

Satellite images
lay out the whole planet before him
as from a high mountain

Geophysical features
the movement of troops

supply lines
words in typeface upon a page

The ire of God continues
over video reportage

Again they come to the ancient place
without understanding

such that another's misery may not touch them

It will visit us by proxy

television faithfully imitating every cruel movement
until we also are removed from you

The Oil Ministry guarded as the library burns
and the museum looted of seven thousand years

Who will hear?

Those embedded -
fixed firmly in the solid mass of the army?

We are given reportage fixed in a viewpoint
It says from within the machine itself

'this is what you shall see'

implies being on side
remaining on side

So your assigned commander
has brought me also

to this dark place

where headlines and truth meet only in irony
a bloodied mess in my hands

Freedom
becomes a mob stoning a suspect
or white goods shouldered through broken windows

Hope
a badly burnt child with both arms amputated

We touch the world of blood
a dark coast where thinking is consumed

- perverse in ways that still offend

So we descend this time
through approximated light
to view not representation but storage

Certain things may need explanation
photo credits map references silences

whatever
the glyphs as they appear are lost to language

hung from ropes in the darkness

Some recognized saw and knew the shadow
that is contrived to generate and preserve blame

Saw the tired virtue as an excuse
that arranged the President's words

Ramps that curve gently down
to suffocating depths

to fumes and heat

where locksmiths and metal workers generate objects
that speak

Clearly we are not machines

but inescapably a form of speech
consigned now to indebtedness

Outside the Gate

Don't tell me
hold your doleful thoughts

(it seems so long ago
before)

Only outside the gate does law succeed

*doves call
with wings rising to the safety of their nest*

It once briefly held the earth (this law
the incoming attorney-general now corrects)

After this is over we may speak
in graphic isolated hands

and cry less than you think

My love your martyrdom to weeping
no longer has the possibility to make me sad

(hold still while I dry them
eyes that have reddened in this coarse wind)

Without words what can be said
of tears and invitations?

From our first love I have lost affection

We have both lost

that time when we were young and healthy
without suspicion

lost our days for delight

When love disappears
it is replaced by survival

We may question
if it is possible to be set free

before the body leaves
imperative of many favours
to luxurious defect unfit

broken off
from liberty and happiness in its law

I console myself - only a point was won
but it was a point that won us

Concede the mouth you kissed now trembles
already mourning

this is not after all a ghazal

coupled
constant in its endings

Now given pardon
I would test with a head of rain

another country a long time away

anonymous as men in the rain pass quickly
touching small futures in their living

Certainties

from this first Tuesday
it doesn't matter about Ohio

it never did except for this

the white picket fence remains
and beyond the pale

one hundred thousand Iraqi dead

(not small sorrows).

if such people have much value
it is as the end consumer

from the ace
to the bottom of the pack

(for we must never mind the cost).

they have felt the presence of large shadows

a semblance of birds
given the weight of industry.

-

a single voice under the blind world
many times to the fact saying less

No
I never

I was duty bound.

This does not save you.

Nor being new in this state that force arouses
regarding order as grounds for doubtful comfort.

-

And in the painful abyss
you may discern the same thing

the long way of tears
even without the martyrdoms that others enter.

If such people have much value
it is that they are manipulable

the bottom of the pack

expendable once the work is done
the full deck of images collected.

While behind

shrewd as glass for your defects
the experts lie

-

What did they say?

Why did they do what they did?

not enough lost and so many offences.

Tell me

I am wanting of that faith
that gains in error

or turns on the anguish of the people.

That anyone would willingly...

Others may know the place
where pits uncover
the slack cream of a shoulder

that speaks a covert repose

eye movements become a film without sound
exhumed.

-

If I collected myself as a person
I saw only in part
and it was cloudy beside other certainties.

Why batter at the door of faith
or demand other sons and daughters

they will come.

Mothers cry
return to me the high sleep of his head.

What gap have we fallen into
a moment when everything seems to stop
and then start again.

Our way here from sleep was not long
we passed the hard earth
of nearby darkneses vanquished

going so as not to debilitate others.

But it passes
the indecision.

Do not dispute what you feel

honour the fear
that will turn other ways.

Across the shadow of the first relative
first I will and you will be second.

Others near
are become people
with late and serious eyes

shaved and with gentle voices.

Why not say of these

Rise up
relieve us of our infinite troubles all undead.

-

In open places see how many become luminous
with the sign of victory crowned
while grace acquires in the sky.

Beautiful citadel
of high walls, defended around

fire will enter me
and shake the birds from the sky.

Save inside how quiet

to adore
the certainty of God.

Eyrie

In the hard margins
where only river water saved the banks from fire

watchful under the waning moon
(that ruin in the flank of the sky)

I do not dare come down to the road
but use the extremity of a high crane

to look over
broken hotels and bridges.

An-nasr al-tair shines
as I survey half of the malignant field

the deep sink that cuts across the open
the bridge they have to pass.

These unrefined ones
all also watching

the great stinking swamp of fear
around the city

wondering which of them
will it arrest point.

And if misery renders us desperate
war had name

and in its life gained fear and reputation

flatteries and falsehoods

that we half believe
shadows running from a horde that passed.

Their haste to hypocrisy
that thieves those she honours.

Names you of all
and if the reputation yours after you

leaves unpunished
our swindled and bitten conscience.

How many cautious men are near?
Take the signal

that I master with the eye.
I swear to you I see through

the large and dark air to notice one figure.
Elsewhere sight

right ascension.
I find the time no-go to gauge lost

stepping on
you do not see me

but even I am watched
above me the two sentinels *shahin-I tarazu*

bear faint witness.

It was not that who gave the neuron path

to my prosthetic nerves

we were marked

quickly eyes and hands.

Nerve facing

the wind drift before it twitches

a Lyrid shower briefly radiant

that turns to infinitesimal

rupture

leaves to go the trace

where close to the end walks experience.

Back and chest

both the painted coasts broken skewed.

I eye them

placed by its master

within his mildew breath drowned

this coast of blood

in which bubbles violence

spurs the short life and the eternal

until slowly it embraces the converging worlds

And the face?

it was face of a man.

Just a pale store clerk
but an entirety of words and blood.

You want faith
I testify

I guide your condition
I attend to your dreams.

The Dog-Watch

Turn your thought to what was closed

an underworld of eternal trespass
where all is confused

Give me the means to enter

my eye guided to the split screen
it watches this misrule.

Watches this unpronounced sentence

through corner positioned cameras
showing wide angled

images from the control room.

Watches with disinterest
cold with brutal accuracy

watches over
those lost to the world

how they enter this hell
who if any they might trust.

Observe
as the camera does

without judgment

as they come in dumb
held low to the painful step

just another eye to watch over them

to observe violations of the code
contrary to every rule of combatants
see those *not entitled* to the protection
of conventions.

Already as we look their first year
lies under the second

Each day the same

without the repeated call to prayer
penetrating the day.

-

After so many solitary months
on concrete

short-shackled to any imperious new favour
to every place it takes them

they enter into dead flat fluoro light
buffeted and without sleep.

Already they seem mere shadow capacities

pallid and worried filthy naked
even their being alive intensely offends
gives clamour for life departing.

Place the hood
so they may feel the guidance of volts

the knowledge of their sins

it demands resistance
like drowning.

Unable to look I am moved to search
among the tears

water tinged with cold and grieving.

As soldiers place a strap

the calls you raise

are of minor pain
but many times turned to fear

*: they must be infidels
that can do this.*

More than a thousand shadow-fears erupt
monstrous and inhuman.

Life leaves

plunges to trouble.

-

Coming in to tell of the limits
of human endurance

touching the world of blood.

*He reached to me
and nearly unmanned me.*

Dead we lead to one died
who attends a life extinguished to us.

Our perversity
at still seeing the appearance of a good person
a just person who honours science and art
with a manner unable to offend.

So don't tell me the glassy truth
it is too late
for your affected smile
animal grace or benign visits.

-

Life returns in little exit fold movements.

You are in front of the ruin
a human rendered compliant becomes

only the meat remains of a body
lamenting bestial unclean.

Voices come to speak

but when in the sweet world we speak
you do not respond
nor look directly at us.

We no longer believe that words from us
will open doors

the press of us in malignant air
breathes evil

the saliva of dogs makes us unclean
and closes the door upon the sweetness of prayer.

Mouths opened and monstrous
make cruelty three headed.

From the quivering throats of the dogs
another offence toward the truth of blood.

Open selvedge this aloneness

not knowing where and when
inside the singing throats

they will be allowed
their mordant intention to fight.

If you are
given the truth down his throat
you are unmade and made.

-

Look as the camera looks
faithfully recording
all they say and all they hear

of strength and abandonment.

The ace
and a lot held low

reduced from the knowledge
of the everyday

the possibilities of the divine.

Nothing guards this inside fidelity
the impious now enter

to gain new unwanted understandings
of self

as tormented carnal without talent
of this of that of less.

-

Here is a man full of vanity
seated behind a desk
all quantity

power the reason they submit:

Damn him!
At which point was he degraded?

He asks:
Do you remember speaking to me?

About the one who risks fighting
and broke off faith to the guilty time

the other who denies fighting
and will allow privilege for that
and see love turned.

You will see when they will be nothing
nothing near to us.

-

In here
prayer and knowing both confuse.

Do not enter
we each go alone to vicissitude and judgment.

-

I warn you
I have no need to stop persuading you.

It is true that on the prod
you will open to me before organ failure or death.

There is no might or power except with Allah

The superficiality of bone
blood trails along the floor
techniques that reduce you to a fleshy pulp.

Take your time to tell me the truth
I'm in no hurry.

I'll go hunting along a topic
play with you

hang you like game
with blood dripping from your nose.

Then we can start up all over again.

-

What deformed births
have these confessions been given?

Tell me
I am no longer able to volunteer veracity.

They write what succeeds
without the heart to correct themselves.

-

And then no desires
that day when all is confessed

we did not read ahead to you

but fell as the dead fall
a body

thrown into dust.

Safe House

I was myself too much with crowds.
Endured new people that gain in

pride and generate excess
who told me words I believed

I'd foray half awake
fearing little outside.

And you see less
I did not know that.

Submerged flatteries, greased informing
other people's swindle or fraudulent possession.

Down the river we came
(sold down the river)

I'm noticed of course
movements out of the green zone

beyond trust and invisibility
lacking with the heart denying and swearing.

Their customs are forbidden you
I did not hide.

ears and mouths open
was this me?

a door into silence
as they came hunting.

From formaldehyde belief
the cement factory rattle

everything settles into its smeared glass reflection.
the cliché that changes everything.

Slow slow hours
extinguished from all you leave here

and elsewhere.

I am awake
I made no sign of wanting to speak.

Instead into the silence
the clamour of what I should have done.

This trickery *should*

hounds me into the unquiet silence.

Have my rebellion from me
it does not weaken what has already happened.

I hope only to carry these hurting limbs
and to escape scorn.

Nearby movements.
A man's left foot twitches.

I am arranged in on those spaces
reductions here in the low hell

that is mine.

I see only
the silent suggested burr of night
its muezzin darkness.

For hours I fix my eyes on a crack.

When everything lines up
it shows occasional deviations of starlight
that relieve the black jolt of fear.

Behind me
movements
then a retracted tread outside the door.

someone else is here but
is not seen.

Instead I hear, at the door
or beyond the wall

the place they go to wash themselves
to recommence as we remained

or wait.

Emptiness turns in me.

How many touches?
How many hours go by?

Knowing the end may be
to be walled in or shouldered into the earth
not even for martyrdom

but expediency.

That without guilt makes shame
the night shadows go some
attack fear.

I appeal to my captors
those that win

he who does not lose.

Speak to me
the people will see this.

What do you want?

The centre, the high point
where the angel of god
does not leave you

all the night.

Words cut and do not hold
careful how they are listened to
another breathes here

inside and behind that wall
every risk a necessary hurt.

My cure is to be concealed
I close my eyes and curl in on myself

while the guard doesn't even turn away.

They answered really to scorn you
another day they will answer they do not know

and I do not know either.

I feel of little worth to them
weighed against the broad ransom of foreign policy

a foothold in Central Asia.

But my captors keep me alive
I cling to that

I am filmed with a newspaper
and a gun at my head.

-

Things move also on
even abandonment loss irretrievable helplessness

for the extreme you do not leave your wish
reaches the broken one who cried
(not recognising himself).

But I do not believe
that worthy people have returned

and into this waiting
I pray they will be quick.

* The section 'Embedded' was first published in *Parts of Speech (Selected Poetry)*
University of Queensland Press, 2007