

THREE POEMS

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MY TONGUE SOFTENS ON THE OTHER NAME



CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE



A PROSPECT OF BEAUTY AND UNJUSTNESS

MY TONGUE SOFTENS ON THE OTHER NAME

In my mother's back yard washing snaps
above chillies and wild rosemary.
Kapokbos, cottonwool bush, my tongue softens
on the rosemary's other name.
Brinjal, red peppers and paw-paw grow
in the narrow channel between
the kitchen and the wall that divides
our house from the Severo's. At the edge
of the grass by the bedrooms, a witolyf reaches
ecstatically for the power lines.

In a corner in the lee of the house,
nothing grows.
Sound falls here.
Early in the day shadows wash
over old tiles stacked
against the cement wall.
In the cold and silence
my brother is making a garden.

He clears gravel from the soil
and lays it against the back wall.
Bright spokes of pincushion proteas puncture a rockery.
For hours he scrapes into a large stone a hollow to catch
water from a tap that has dripped all my life.
Around it, botterblom slowly reddens the grey sand.
A fence made of reed filters
the wind between the wall and the house.
Ice-daisies dip their tufted heads
toward its shadows.

At night, on an upturned paint tin, he sits
in the presence of growing things.
Light wells over the rim of the stone basin
and collects itself into the moon.
Everything is finding its place.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

It rained.
I left my shoes outside
because there's no mat
to permit a polite rasping of mud.

There are places
where you take your shoes off
at the door.

I watch the cat calibrate the
distance between the man I love
and me, find the exact midway point
between us. In choosing
where to lie, she practises
a kind of architecture.

A neighbourhood practises architecture
with sound, the sound of children,
for instance,
or a mosque.

There are no sounds of mosques where I live.

But if I drive for 42 minutes to
the place I used to live
I will hear three mosques
whose calls triangulate me,
pinpoint my relation to God
and home.

Though you cannot tell from
the homeless grief of young men's mothers,
the architecture of mosques aims to create
a space for love.

When they look at Gatesville mosque –
a sight from the news, but
to those who pray there,
familiar as a cheekbone --
most people will not see
it is excessively lovely.

To the outside eye,
the blue-domed mosque marks
a strange presence.
To the hungry, inside eye,
its beauty grants a place in the world.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE *(continued)*

One can read in bricks and light
a numinous philosophy of proportion
and repetition. A pattern based
on the size of a single dot
in relation to the height of the first letter
of the Arabic alphabet can blossom
into infinity.

A mosque in Konya, Turkey
built in the 13th century,
is known for its roof –
a necklace of tiles suspended
by breath. In its centre is a hole
that threads its patterns into the intricate sky.

Where is the centre,
and where the end point
of its space?

One day
while the prophet was praying
a cat settled on the warm bed
of his robe, and started to give birth.
He did not move
until she was done.

A PROSPECT OF BEAUTY AND UNJUSTNESS

I walk down Heerengracht,
where pigeons dip their necks
like question marks into the fountain.
Then left at Long, while the sun slips

Toward the sea and the moon takes its place
above Signal Hill.
Above me, starlings clatter
like typewriters.

Higher still, turning right at Wale,
seagulls tilt like white kites
against the wind.

I step on the old silences of the city.

Here is the place on the hill where artists came
for peace and the view of the harbour.
Below, the city reveals itself.
We still walk the neat streets of their paintings.

Under the angled mountain, its blue light,
the starlings are cold but, looking at them,
I see the loveliness
of their chaotic and coordinated hunger.

What can explain
this exact and unjust beauty?

The flock clusters at sunset for warmth and seed.
Poetry cannot be afraid of this.

Sketching the streets, the artists stood
on the burial ground of the city's slaves.
In the paintings is something
of the private grief of their bodies.

In precise patterns the starlings follow one another
and redouble on their own flight-tracks,
slipstream of warmth,
blood-trace of the self.

Nothing to begin with,
and nothing again.

Around me, the air is thick with history.
Two hundred years ago,
slaves could no longer be sold.

A PROSPECT OF BEAUTY AND UNJUSTNESS *(continued)*

Nothing, and nothing again.

I look again at the painted city, falling
silent at sunset, even the birds stilled.
In the last flash of the sun, the city gleams
white and hard as bone.