

BODIES

My father's the first I've seen;
the grief tinged with interest.

Taut skin and white lips, open mouth:
I keep expecting him to speak.

Leaving him; the unbridgeable
cruelty of being individual.

Lying in bed, waiting, crowds:
all those things which swallow us.

DOUBLES

I'm back, in Welwyn Garden City.
The pure white houses concatenate;
my childhood, adulthood coexist;
behaviour, repetition, workplace.

In the evening, waiting for you to round our corner.
That walk from Welwyn North, along the Mimram –
my childhood river, in truth a messy trickle –
perfect in fields of forgotten horses.

In dreams it's enormous, foot bridges,
flooded hills, a shopping complex. And
St. Albans Cathedral with St. Paul's behind.

I keep asking strangers how far to London;
why it's now moved so near our town. No one
knows, girls from Poland explain my accent.

Your true river of course,
the Wiltshire Avon; its
clarity of chalk and memory.

Your rowing boat? It's ready –
Normandy from the landings.

I can't talk about scattering,
it's only dust into nothing.

NOW I DREAM OF INDEPENDENCE

Dostoevsky's devils knew the serfs despised them and feared their 1861 emancipation our liberals hate the working class and know that immigration sermons are self-loathing plus a dread of being English I always feared poor families their smells and tastes the appalling furniture and often a parent who smoked so once I was forced to eat dumplings by some northern bitch who'd 'never known a lad who didn't like them' her ovaries exploded at the table and we sheltered in an old Anderson hut with its walls covered in obscene graffiti last night I revisited Welwyn Garden City someone had found a river at last and it flowed through the dell below Shoplands with its sweet waters foaming in optimism for the walls we could now erect so even if yards away was ex-local authority our houses were Black Forest gateaux nostalgia and how I loved the arrival of frozen food even lasagne could become a ticket to sunlit uplands the sailing lake during a heat-wave so gorgeous even capsizing held no fear for me.

Everything is monitored in a land of mountains that makes me cry as I remember my father it seems to be alpine but Tibet is visible above crystal slopes a chairlift over the tsavorite ridges best to let dad go first he clutches and swallows his vertigo how I love him but it's too late for that.

TRAFFIC

I have no choice but to apply my few remaining talents to such surroundings.

To others are left the crashing oceans, transgendered victims, soaring peaks.

Ephemera on which lyricism never blunts its sparkling blade.

Over me roll the low acid clouds and their halogen tang.

Flare-lit tracks by smouldering slag-heaps.

Perilous walkways over rivulets of black and foam.

Jolting epiphany. An ancient 22-year old swerves to light a cigarette. A volley of abuse in their incomprehensible dialect.

The estates are beautiful, specifically in the tungsten light from my high balcony.

Each Platonic solid is replicated, within the various groups of symmetry, encouraging untethered memories of molecular orbital theory.

Sexual matters are complicated.

In theory there are prostitutes, but exchange is limited to comestible or market-garden products.

Yet the local council have restricted my reading to Victorian pornography or medical manuals from the old colonial days.

Graphic illustrations of penile umbrellas and distended scrota make self-manipulation near impossible.

A photograph of the latter, with some tribal chief parading his testicles in a wheelbarrow, draws from me unforgivable laughter for which I am severely beaten.

‘If this doesn’t cure your recidivism, nothing will’, chortles Clarke.

How astonishing are the high clouds and new motorways.

These I have always loved.

How innocent the drivers; how childlike as in sleep; how fleetingly they enter then leave; how difficult to photograph; how easy to assign them names for the narratives which will follow.

How certain are their colour-coded messages promising liberation?

Ballard detailed carnage then copulation yet I smile contented with their endless passage and softly-surprising susurrations.

Two years from my arrival, Clarke drives me round the network.

A trip of four hours, although the neuroopathic traffic makes estimating distance impossible.

I am now a happy man, I tell him as we part.