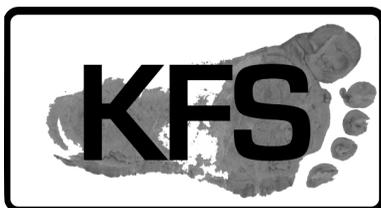


STRANGWAYS

Ann Matthews



NEWTON-LE-WILLOWS

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Acknowledgements:

This sequence of poems is based on my observations from repeated walks around Strangeways, Cheetham Hill, Manchester in 2011-2012. Whilst walking, lyrics and tunes by local songsters came to mind and kept me company; so these integral slices of my walking experience are integrated into my poems. They also contain other transformed 'pick-ups' taken from information about the prison and a Council Report on the regeneration of the area.

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Derby Street

i

A slight gradient.
A grid-work.
Empty squares
where buildings
once stood in
ruined squares
with mounds of
dirty brick
and bric-a-brac.

A slick mess.
Rank lime like
unset concrete,
damp wool and
sea-green algae
scattered with
gloves, old strip lights,
dull pipes, splint-
ered three-ply and
folds of clear plastic.

Small businesses thrive
messily – accents thick with
homesickness.

ii

*Out of place
within recollection
pink letters on white
laminated: ENVY ME
London and Paris.*

*Procure the city, mark
street furniture, drift
inner time.*

*Tied down with a rush and
a push and chimney still standing
the land that we stand on
is ours.*

*So hand in glove I
stake my claim – a quality of
lack that cannot say
through hierarchies vanished
before the old iron staircase.*

iii

Sweeps of old empire
porticos chipped proud
names chiselled doors
padlocked.

*The quality of
the public realm is
higher than the sun.
Two steps back
weighted on
shoulders.*

Songs ring
search
reel
look.

*Strong street
frontages locate
green spaces –
the visible link
nowhere and go
straight back there.*

Blacklock Street

Fabric strips
knotted in chain-link
ape prayer flags
flapping in the wind.
Burst bin-bags cosy-up
to palisade fences
hot formed and
cold rolled. Through
scrambles of
matter *they were*
hollow inside.

South

He stole boots
animated valleys
achieved a step change
and escaped the void.
Hammer fractures skull.

West

*A mysterious man carries
a briefcase edges in
a navy suit
triple-glazed glistening.
A glassless
window guarantees to
take me nowhere.*

Sherborne Street

Strangeways radiates under
brick star emissions
dapple skies.
A landmark
may be hidden by rags but
we have something they'll
never have from the
council estates of Collyhurst to
the rundown streets
of Salford and Cheetham.

North

Turn back on
red walls.
Ripped buildings
repeat detail.
The structure is
vibrantly unclear.
Promises made
provide visual clues –
a kind of tension.
I look to the sky.

Derby Street

iv

On
the corner behind a
newly clean window
fashion clasps and rivets
cheap metal.

v

*Talk
where it is
quiet – walk about
precious things where
corrugated roofs hide
cavernous spaces.*

vi

*Don't
mind the tangle
of webs wearing
a strategy –
the burnt shell up
turned. Open
eyes and watch
the road works.*

vii

In
a darkroom you see more above
charred wood and rings of dull
aluminium.
This quantum of
unclaimed atmosphere flutters among
curled paper and bergs of polystyrene.

It
is here
the human
spirit becomes
perfect
strewn
singed
melted
blackened.

Broughton Street

Retrace and skirt
old rag-trade sweatshops.
An ash tree waves a
muted fizz, coiled
barbs impale leaves,
brambles tangle in
cracked paths, wet
cobwebs pattern a
weak sun.

*Short change
Cheetham's image and
pick out what's in
the pocket to leave
his pocket clean.*

Drenched boots
squeak. Wet toe-skin is
wrinkled and rubbed against
cotton and leather.

The air is clear and
smells of autumn.

South east north west

Along
the brow a
white woman walks
idly.

*Obey this land
hemmed in
between arches.
Stand alone weighing
the gold.
Everything depends
upon how near
you stand to me.*

She doesn't ask she
scribbles *Asian* and
moves on.

East

Glittery dresses
beckon behind glass.

What are you
wanting?
Design copy
mine
no photos

Just looking

He enters the shop
watching.

Stasis

i

*Early demolition leaves
sites vacant – a definition
of neighbourhoods – a
community jukebox. I meet
old friends there, queue
up for cash there.*

ii

Jagged skyline upon
glassy puddles. Three
headless manikins in
silver are patterned
with sun-rays and
cumulus-stratus.

iii

Places *sidle-up to*
the fruit machine where
worthless fathers procure
high quality spaces.
Serial cuckoos oust
histories – *your mouth*
is sold out with
nothing to deliver.

iv

Re-profile
open – closed
exit belief –
it's lonely on
a limb and if
the people stare then
the people stare.

Woolley Street

N

Styrofoam vessels –
products of
systems beyond
their control and
hectares of bound
cellophane are
estimated to be
neglected where
tattered burger
wrappers *tap*
one another as
you walk in
the gate.

W

Set down with
debt due care and
repeat what is
on offer for
her victim was
her husband in
sweet candy-pink.

S

Thirties gaudy boxes sport
curved awnings –structures like
cinemas or Blackpool’s
amusement arcadia.

*Fitness trails are
part Irish but
the rain flattens
my hair.*

*A recreational
enthusiast on this
waterlogged landscape
told me of the
ice rink and its
gliding smilers.*

Derby Street East

*Some nine-year-old
peddles drugs below
filthy brickwork and
school uniforms stacked
above head height.*

*Are you old
enough? Faded in
blue enamel on
rusting metal forward
past the pub that
saps your body and
foreign names of
textile merchants where
design requires an
approving body –
who'll snatch your money.*

Westward

*Is there anybody
there?*

*My garden is
stone dressed to
preserve and
reinforce
bad times in
season along the
edges of the bluff.*

*Capitalise on attractive
views where the
proliferation of
fast food gets you
into the routine.*

U-turn

Notices on doors, passing
words through airports

New arrivals innit
No prams Trade only

Proposed community clusters
defensive below the surface

Rehab for no hopes, drinkers
from the slaughterhouse.

Industrial estate

Two slight men in
snug drainpipes stack
boxes.

*A new vision, a flat-pack
philosophy, started here to
earn some pay. Clean neck and
ears, heart and lungs – work, work
for all my desires there's
assembly required.*

Waterloo Road

Local lads stop
for a chinwag

Alright?
Yeah fine mate.
Just avin a mosey

Jovial until
halted by
outside forces
– football
– newcomers

No time for
a laugh?
What's your
problem mate?

*Little stands to
create a mental map –
you've been running
around a racetrack.*

Here

Silent traders mop up
puddles, empty buckets
into gutters. Unpack
crates, shift armfuls of
glad rags. Fast selling
lines Cut Price direct 2u.

*Residents leak spending
power, a figure walks
behind you. A shadow
walks behind you until
wheel-arches touch rubber.*

*Pushed to the
limit we drag
ourselves in, dress
disinvestment and
watch from the wings.*

*So join up all
historical facts, give
the past a slip. Every
corner is abandoned
too soon. Slow down.
Present – absent.*

A memory catch
sings in ears.

*Don't walk away
in silence.*

