

THE THREEPENNY REVIEW

The U.N. Headquarters in the High Commissioner's House in Jerusalem

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The Mud Vision

Statues with exposed hearts and barbed-wire crowns
Still stood in alcoves, hares flitted beneath
the dozing bellies of jets, our menu-writers
And punks with aerosol sprays held their own
With the best of them. Satellite link-ups
Wafted over us the blessings of popes, helipads
Maintained a charmed circle for idols on tour
And casualties on their stretchers. We sleepwalked
The line between panic and formulae, screentested
Our first native models and the last of the mummies,
Watching ourselves at a distance, advantaged
And airy as a man on a springboard
Who keeps limbering up because the man cannot dive.

And then in the foggy midlands it appeared,
Our mud vision, as if a rose-window of mud
Had invented itself out of the glittery damp,
A gossamer wheel, concentric with its own hub
Of nebulous dirt, sullied yet lucent.
We had heard of the sun standing still and the sun
That changed color but we were vouchsafed
Original clay, transfigured and spinning.
And then the sunsets ran murky, the wiper
Could never entirely clean off the windscreen,
Reservoirs tasted of silt, a light fuzz
Accrued in the hair and the eyebrows, and some
Took to wearing a smudge on their foreheads
To be prepared for whatever. Vigils
Began to be kept around puddled gaps,
On altars bulrushes ousted the lilies
And a rota of invalids came and went
On beds they could lease under the skirts of the shower.

A generation who had seen a sign!
Those nights when we stood in an amber dew and smelled
Mould in the verbena or woke to a light
Furrow-breath on the pillow, when the talk
Was all about who had seen it and our fear
Was touched with a secret pride, only ourselves
Could be adequate then to our lives. When the rainbow
Curved flood-brown and ran like a water-rat's back
So that drivers on the hard-shoulder switched off to watch,
We wished it away, and yet we presumed it a test
That would prove us beyond expectation.

We lived, of course, to learn the folly of that.
One day it was gone and the east gable
Where its trembling corolla had balanced
Was starkly a ruin again, with dandelions
Blowing high up on the ledges, and moss
That slumbered on through its increase. As cameras raked
The site from every angle, experts
Began their *post factum* jabber and all of us
Crowded around for the big explanations.
Just like that, we forgot that the vision was ours,
Our one chance to know the incomparable
And dive to a future. What might have been founded
We dissipated in news. The clarified place
Had retrieved neither us nor itself—except
You could say we survived. So say that, and watch us
Who had our chance to be mud-men, convinced and estranged,
Figure in our own eyes for the eyes of the world.

—Seamus Heaney



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The mediators, the peacemakers, the compromise-shapers, the comforters
live in the white house
and get their nourishment from far away,
through winding pipes, through dark veins, like a fetus.

And their secretaries are lipsticked and laughing,
and their sturdy chauffeurs wait below, like horses in a stable,
and the trees that shade them have their roots in no-man's-land
and the illusions are children who went out to find cyclamen in the field
and do not come back.
And the thoughts pass overhead, restless, like reconnaissance planes,
and take pictures and return and develop them
in dark sad rooms.

And I know they have very heavy chandeliers
and the boy-I-was sits on them and swings
forth and back, forth and back, forth and does not come back.

And later on, night will arrive to draw
rusty and bent conclusions from our old lives,
and over all the houses a melody will gather the scattered things
like a hand gathering crumbs upon a table
after the meal, while the talk continues
and the children are already asleep.

And hopes come to me like brave seafarers,
like the discoverers of continents coming to an island,
and sit upon me for a day or two
and rest . . .
And then they set sail.

—Yehuda Amichai
(translated by Stephen Mitchell)