

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 mummers,
Watching ourselves at a distance, advantaged
And airy as a man on a springboard
Who keeps limbering up because the man cannot dive.

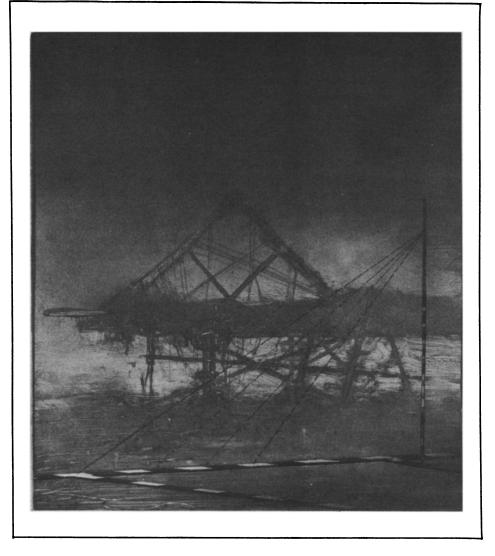
And then in the foggy midlands it appeared, Our mud vision, as if a rose-window of mud Had invented itself out of the glittery damp, A gossamer wheel, concentric with its own hub Of nebulous dirt, sullied yet lucent. We had heard of the sun standing still and the sun That changed color but we were vouchsafed 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 umber 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.

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—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,

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.

through winding pipes, through dark veins, like a fetus.

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)

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