

Last Thing I Need Is The Shakes

He has mapped out the path of the (insert name of a river) in ~~breadcrumbs~~-cigarette ash. The dykes ~~represented~~ demonstrated by a ~~succession of corks~~ pocket-knife, a ~~biro~~ and a number of burnt and twisted matches. Pushing a ~~greasy mug~~ chipped coffee cup across the desk with ~~his finger~~ a cracked credit card, he bursts the banks of this waterway. Grey/brown liquid ~~meanders~~ wobbles into the scratched names in the surface (insert names).

Looking over the townscape from above affords a depressing aspect. On all sides beautiful landscape encroaches. Grass and moss like shifting sands threaten to overwhelm the buildings (it would inadvertently make them more pleasing). These buildings, uninspired beige boxes interlocking puzzle fashion, are uninhabited. Flashes of colour (I am discounting beige as not a very useful colour) are provided by the pennants waiving gaily in the wind. These are predominantly striped, red and white, or an indistinct colour and white. Some of them are folded and bound to their masts with old belts. Replacing people with something approaching a unisex utilitarian heraldry makes sense of this place. When there is a strong breeze from the north, south, east or west, the flags stand out stiff and flat. Colours in stoic rectangles and excessive triangles seem to be desperately trying to make the view into a charming patchwork.

The names on the table are ~~scratched~~ scored through like barbed wire's wire through its barbs. They divert the drink along their channels. 'X' (it doesn't know which way to turn), 'O' is ~~trapped~~ landlocked round and round, a lake with an island. 'L' and 'I' seem to work well in keeping the soggy tableau changing.

Another kind of block, stairs up and down in an apartment. Windows for eyes and history going in and out of its mouth and ears, a jigsaw assembled from mismatched parts. A brightly coloured washing-up tub on the pavement outside is jarring and acid against the improbable building (that it is still standing that is). It is an old custom to lay one 'brick' askew in such an assemblage, a token of man's imperfection, like weaving a flaw into a carpet. Through placing such objects, plastic or otherwise, in front of the view it changes everything from the plan by making a broken object instead of continuous solid one. The whole effect is so tottering together it needs constant readjustment and periodic additions. Eventually the foreground becomes a whole new façade. Like Carroll's Sylvie and Bruno and their mapping, ever-greater detail necessitates a scale of one mile to one mile. Apparent equivalence makes for some temporary respite.

'This time he was not going to let his passion or his dreams or his impatience get the better of him, but would build up his puzzle with Cartesian rigour' .

Destroyed by fire, apart from anything made from concrete or steel (amongst other things), the area had once been a bewildering onslaught of first impressions, the sheer height giving way to the realisation that it consisted of numerous levels. Steps and lifts interconnected vertically and suspended walkways and wooden bridges from side to side, platform to platform. This arrangement made for glimpses of the delights awaiting the visitor above. Any awkward natural horizon was avoided by a backdrop of an enormous concretised artificial cliff, oozing with last weeks rain and with trees and shrubs poking through round portholes in the mottled surface. Surprisingly the most popular attraction was a scale model of the resort itself, followed by the sculpture park a close second. Having fallen apart (or something like that, local sources disagree) the garden is now covered in old cornstalks, burrs, nettles and brambles. To carry out a semi-detailed investigation into its so-called 'sculpture park' it is useful to imagine oneself as its manager:

Orchestrator of the inert, immobile, statuary, birds, dogs, lions and people encased in a bronze shell. The 'first minister of sundry things' organises this civic object syntax with an eye-minded melancholic certainty. The confounding of these copies with their originals cannot happen. Each rank of beasts is barricaded in with wild shrubs and their real counterparts go about their prowling and scavenging outside the perimeter without having to make the acquaintance of their frozen selves. Seeds and burrs often do find their way out of the enclosure to be spread about the kerb side. On the horizon lies a cloud. A sliver of light from one of the windows stabs into his head. Slowly, carefully, he approaches the black curtain. It drinks the beam of his torch.

The coffee forms ~~makes~~ a momentary wobbling-strand filament as it ~~drops off~~ pisses between the table and the floor. This seems to be the moment to acknowledge the narrator as (fill in name). 'In a general way he has confined himself to describing only such things as he was enabled to see for himself, and refrained from attributing to his fellow-sufferers thoughts that, when all is said and done, they were not bound to have' .

Postscript

Fernando Pessoa said that he was 'astounded and distressed' whenever he finished anything. Finishing is the coward's alternative to quitting, as he gnomically put it. But between pairs of words that do the same thing lies a subtle path that meanders toward beginnings borne of this act of surrender. He never really started or finished because his system of classification kept changing. From starting a book of multiple texts with their own idiosyncratic titles (Dolorous Interlude is a case in point) the project mutated into a system of classification. Each title announced a mood into which fragments could be filed. The work in this publication is full of disquieting encounters and title riddles. Topless in Bora Bora blurs into the name of the novel, Eyeless in Gaza, which in turn points us back to another surrender of the tonsorial variety. A chained Samson tries to pull down the thematic artifice of Huxley's work from 1936. If Pessoa made photographs out of words then these images digest both whilst still leaving us with a fictive memoir to read. They are tantalising glimpses of confidences withheld and information bound up in near-impossible coincidences. In rearranging or concealing certain details there are casualties of fabrication that would point us to the centre of these dissolving worlds. It is no longer a question of the nature of these images but their composition whereby certain preoccupations can be recognised (though they have been transformed). It is in this paradoxical movement (to construct whilst destroying) that we find a treatment of time, time that no longer passes, time that no longer completes anything.

'To see all the things that happen to us as accidents or incidents from a novel, which we read not with our eyes but with life. Only with this attitude can we overcome the mischief of each day and the fickleness of events' .

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1. Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*.
2. Georges Perec, *Life: A User's Manual*, p. 333.
3. Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, p.43
4. Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p.246.
5. Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, p.211