

Words

Words, garlands that link continents,
shorelines stretching imagination,
rainbows bridging conflict.

Words, tendrils reaching above life's canopy,
secateurs of experience, protest, rage,
bouquets of desire, pleasure.

Words, spades of loneliness,
sods of grief turn, unearth poetic pathways-
Ritsos, Cavafy, Rich, Tsvetaeva, Akhmatova.

She sits at end of pink table,
legs crossed, head propped on left arm, eyes shut
black hair, black skirt, red top.
Papers, books set aside.
Giant vase of flowers reflected in mirror,
hanging with paintings on black walls.
Matisse's *Liseuse sur fond noir*.¹

Reader sits in Village Square, goats pause,
stare at stranger, turkeys cackle, donkeys bray,
valley explodes in pain.

Words, hibernating fragile petals,
creep slowly along blackened trunk
of carob tree, purple outbursts.

Words, furtive snowflakes,
decant gestures of love,
confront androcentric scholarship.

Her dour face, framed by back seat car window,
peers out vacantly, sluggish eyes,
taut lips, bony shoulders.
Black and white photograph.
Besankos' *La Pensee*,²

Thinker writes, her balcony vista a shifting canvas,
temper of Corinthian Gulf,
mystique of Parnassus.

Poet celebrates her framed gifts of affirmation.

¹ Reader on Black Background. Print, gift from G.

² The Thinker. Photograph, gift from M.

Interlude

Sunny Saturday morning.
Through Naschmarkt
contrapuntal culinary aromas
entice exploration.

Shimmer of colour.
Volksgarten rose beds
swathe us in scents
of companionship.

Swaying white acacias,
umbrella Rathaus Garten benches,
eavesdrop on our international
mobile call.

Studded with gold,
Klimt's canvasses hang in
Schloss Belvedere,
reminiscent of mother's tapestries.

St. Stephansdom,
beacon to Stephansplatz.
Black clouds overshadow exuberance,
collude with our disquiet.

Shelter, awning to awning,
in Kaetnerstrasse, swirling puddles.
We laugh, dance through downpours and
thunderous guilt.

Strike of lightning,
Mozart restaurant respite.
Deluge of customers,
escape from life.

Sunny Saturday afternoon.
Vienna resonates with tourists,
black clouds give way to white,
brooding to delight.

Sunday misty sunset,
forlorn steps pass gold crowned
Secession building, peeing addicts.
Mournful Opera House finale.

Statues of philosophers,
scientist, composers
serenade us,
placate foreboding.

Stadtspark Lake reflects despondency.
Two joyful but careladen days ending.
Wings folded, swans glide across
our feelings, forage deep for understanding.

Sorrowful flight via Athens
to Melbourne. Weekend interlude.
A tussle between life and death,
celebration and lamentation.

Solace in mother's final embrace.

“I’ve never lived through a war Mum!”

Most of the English middle class are trained for war from the cradle onwards not technically but morally.³

The Gulf War
January 17th 1991

“I’ve never lived through a war Mum!”
Sixteen-year-old innocence reverberates
in our embrace.

Baghdad lit up like a Christmas tree.
An exuberant American bomber declares.
Promise of a swift war no ground troops no civilian casualties.

I don’t know what to do Mum. Should I come home?
Twenty-three-year old confidence in final medical residency
quivers across globe.

A dreadful thing to say but it will be a good experience!
Israelis in gas masks nuclear casualties expected.
European hospitals on alert.

Sinking into bloodied desert sands
heads *of the enemy’s sons* razed.
Metal debris twisted like war conspirators violate our TV screens.

Stench of incinerated humanity decanted by media
into suburban life showering masses of twinkling stars
dazzle our eyes camouflage slaughter.

Saddam Hussein sets oil fields alight
George Bush Senior at peace.⁴
Coalition lackeys jubilant.

Intermission
ball games supplant war games
years pass
granddaughters

³ George Orwell, ‘My Country Right or Left,’ in *Books v. Cigarettes, Folios of New Writing*. Autumn 1940. This selection first published in the Penguin Books Great Ideas Series, 2006, 35.

⁴ Labour MP, Tony Benn, was reported as saying ‘The people who have called for this war are not going to be killed themselves. A few hours ago President Bush let it be known that he was at peace with himself. He is now at war with humanity.’ *The Australian*, 18 January 1991.

wake in warmth of a Melbourne Christmas
don tutus and tiaras,
dance under jacarandas in merriment.

Invasion of Iraq

March 20th 2003

George Bush Junior a legacy to honour a father to assuage
like a conductor spars with WMD's liberation
sways to key board trills of deceit incites invasion.

Tony Blair poses with his troops for photo shoot.⁵
Extols sacrifice corona of saluting fists and smiles
except for one sullen face of defiance.

Dictator's demise tribal enmities unleashed
Democratic deceits 'double speak'
For Robert Fisk they have not read
nor of families imploded in their beds.

A regime overthrown under the Baghdad sun
where daughters and sons now play amongst
the rubble of bereavement where invasion
seeds enslaved wombs and retaliation.

Loula S. Rodopoulos

⁵ Photo caption: *Blair popular with troops as pullout nears. The Weekend Australian*, 24-5 December 2005: The World, 10.