

BOMB DAMAGE MAPS

West London blues

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The Lore of the Land

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Underneath

THE LORE OF THE LAND

On other occasions the people did
convince themselves of intentions
to uprise and take back control
but apathy and commonsense
soon sent them back to work,
to daily routines, to shop, to bed.
Each day went much as before;
is a tradition among inhabitants
to do so. Is a blessing and a boon.

On one occasion the car was towed
to an unknown garage. Was never
recovered or repaired, though always
had an MOT, bought round the corner
from where he used to live. *Win a trip
to NYC* said the chocolate biscuits
wrapper he couldn't afford, *Tories
out* said the wall and the gossip
in the pub. But they wouldn't go.

South of the village is an intersection,
and storytellers agree that questions
must remain unanswered. The book
is a magic ritual, maintained to be
written by the natives. Sickening
is not allowed, of neither the heart
or the body. All must be restored
by unknown powers and you must
show you are available for work.

Traditionally, ghosts are associated
with the past, what went before,
but others call this idle fiction.
Reformation and revolt is often
punished and misunderstood
by other generations. Condemned,
we ride through implications
and denial, accused of sorcery.
Questions remain unanswered,

answers remain unattached. Let
the show continue, let bygones
be history and history be gone.
Let us commence, let us be lovers,
let us in or out, just let it drop.

Legends about the city abound.
No son of mine will ever die
by drowning, I own my luck and
each day happens much as before.

It is said tradition only speaks
when spoken to, and speculates
that it ceased and was filled in.
The screams of a woman haunt
this place and the king and all
his army became stones. Which
tree is meant is unclear, as no-one
will own the watch. But all agree
what this is is not said or known.

TOPOGRAPHIES

She made a suit made of maps,
made a dress made of maps,
papered her kitchen with maps.
She was going nowhere but
she could dream. And did.

Made a map made of maps,
a world to get lost in, a world
of impossibilities and broken
mountains, roads and streams.
When I reach this place I will stop.

Walked in shoes pasted over
with maps. Host in her hive,
guide to her own inclusive holiday.
Made her son's football into
an abstract globe, all ocean

and land, and then another.
Papered chairs and the table,
doors and windows, blinds
a squiggle of roads and lanes
all leading to her backyard.

The map as an image is
a popular form of decoration,
thereby showing its qualities as
substitute for travels as well as
a means of orientation.

Made a map made of maps,
all borrowed mountains and hills,
blues and greens, red lines,
a public house by the stream.
She owned no right of way,

was no safe passage marked
across her land. Imagine being
lost everywhere, imagine quitting
in the middle of a tour. She paced
round her garden then went inside.

WESTWAY

See the scars beside the concrete
where houses used to be, people
used to be. A horse in a dried-up
muddy field, graffiti for company:
Where is your god now? a dripping
question that can't be answered.

Painted the scene purple and gold
but couldn't hide the damage. Cars
drove faster to get to nowhere quicker
than they ever had. A skatepark
sprang up and splintered, the gypsies
moved on, leaving a scrapyard behind.
The tube offers the best view: squint left
and imagine a neighbourhood divided
by demolition and elevated road. Imagine
a riot on your hands, a fire 24 stories tall
and next door dying or gone missing.

Where is your god now? He is a row
of concrete statues holding up the road,
is a horse remembering grassier days,
is speculation all, no material evidence.
Is working for human rights groups,
is plotting the ley lines that gather here,
is looking for his name in the phonebook,
is probably a prince looking for a princess,
is too old to move away now. Is stuck,
is buried in the cellar, is underneath
the arches, is pouring cold water
on all his own ideas. Is forgotten.

Is Saturday morning in the market,
the discarded is being repurposed,
the freeway connection ignored.
Jazz and reggae lubricate damp clothing
and stale smoke, everything is cheap
or overpriced. There's nothing I want
but it is somewhere to be, something
to do, is a diversion from the rest
of the week, is a diversion: you must
turn left, follow the yellow signs until
they stop and you is lost. (Rumours
that ghosts are to be seen walking.)

Is years later and nothing has changed
although traffic jam above is longer
and slower. Is a shopping centre nearby
and an encampment of homeless men
living in plastic and cardboard. Is
a desultory space, curving shapes
divide sky and landscape in visually
arresting ways. Is private and is public,
is glimpsed from the train, is whiplash
and shadow, sounds of purpose up above.

Is two chairs and an upturned crate
around a fireplace made of stones.
Is signs of habitation, desolation,
abandonment and discard, is home
to no-one anyone knows. There used
to be a second burial chamber
in a field not far away, used to be
a jumble of boulders, was once
a church on a hill here, houses
where people would eat and sleep.
Now is only grim skyline, cold ash,
the great round eyes of stray dogs,
next day happening much as before.

HIGH RISE

24 floors of incendiary backfire,
flames reforming the sky, sirens
for miles around, repercussions
for years to come. Most local
tower blocks are not yet safe,
is money to be made elsewhere.
Is not a priority, accommodation
will be made available as and when.

Life on the never-never is not
enough. There is not a dry eye
in the house, there is not a floor
left habitable, there is nothing
to be done. Nature as divine entity
is part of our relentless desire
to classify, label and burn know.
Each person's narrative is still
their own, but they own nothing
else, live at the edge of negative
space and grief, poverty and guilt,
with the lingering smell of fire.

Everything is subtly blurred
and discarded. Lives taken away
in skips, a tower block dressed
in green beside the motorway
into town. Gawping drivers
and old news, a charitable fund
and lost neighbours. Other
variables are in play, emotions
run high, trains run late.

Not an attempt to understand,
is sound given shape to words,
distant observations from the
train ride into town. I live
in the suburbs, haven't had time
to look into these things
or become a misery tourist.

24 floors that could have been
saved, 24 floors that are too high
for normal habitation. They are
building 44 floors nearby:
scratch the sky, hope no-one

has vertigo or drops a match.
Will not be clad with same,
will meet health and safety
regulations, will cost more
than risk and death can justify.

Bomb damage maps show what
is missing and what is at risk.
Areas destroyed, areas of fire,
areas where it is not safe to live.
But there is nowhere else to go.
Grief and rage mark anniversary,
72 people died, you we are doing
almost nothing. Put your trust
in anger, in official inquiry,
in a black sack over there.

A wall and barbed wire fence
separates towpath from
an area under the road,
but local legends are made
from cultural ragbag, fleeter
than wind and faster than fire.
Next time, you should and must
link up with the neighbours,
form one massive community.

Council housing blocks around
the church were adorned with
green scarves and the nave was
packed with people wearing
the same colour, holding up
pictures of loved ones they lost
and carrying white roses to lay
later at the base of the tower.

CATALOGUE

I bought the book because of memory,
not because of art. Paintings retain
an appearance of speed, spontaneity
and freshness, vital satisfactions
I depend upon to navigate my past.

Major creative uncertainties are said
to have been founded by an otherwise
unknown saint, a plucky little survivor
in the shadow of the concrete monolith,
trying to be heard above traffic's roar.

A fenced off and graffiti-strewn area
is the most common item of village
mythology. Arise and march on to
victory or the local on the corner.
The official enquiry is still going on.

A ghost used to be seen here, legend
has it that he was a wizard or a tramp,
maybe the disputed site of a church,
a mighty tower reaching to the sun
and a road where lorries could race

across the aimless landscape beneath.
Over two miles of elevated motorway,
sliproad crossing the railway, two stubs
on the north side built for connection to
the planned line of an imaginary route.

Strange creatures inhabit this underworld,
bodies buried in the motorway walk
the streets and tell stories, sing songs,
and a local tradition has grown up.
Ask anyone who knows, they'll tell.

Attempts have been made to regenerate
once-abandoned land, to brighten up
the front cover of the official report.
The future requires substantial demolition,
but there will be no compensation.

A WINDSCREEN ON TO THE WORLD

The dank chambers of an underground resting place for London's dead might not look it, but this flyover was built out of a respect, a way of escaping the unkempt, swampy cemeteries that were overloaded with bodies from the cholera outbreak. The roads are rarely open to the public, save for occasional tours. Remember, it's an arterial route, not an old railway line.

There are uncorroborated whisperings of a skeleton fully dressed in 1960s finery, with one of the road's spurs named after him and some of his weapons. The locals will tell you that. His ghost can supposedly be seen wandering the tarmac. Other dead dwellers include a shared love interest and the ghost of an unidentified lady wearing white.

Bottled human fetuses, preserved monkey heads and misshapen skeletons are some of the creepy specimens collected for ergonomic research – and all are on display here, or will be when the road re-opens. If deformed bodies and organs don't scare you, then electric lights, hydraulic lifts and air conditioning still pulls fans in from around the world. The A40(M) is the hub of all activity.

Other ghosts have been seen roaming the Western Avenue extension. It might look pleasant enough, but Westway is a 2.5 mile scar with a horrific history. The elevated section connects the mutilated body of a society beauty – limbs strewn under the flyover at ground level – with displays of old surgical equipment, marble heads and dusty documents. The real attraction here though is two giant murals by an artist, just above a forgotten slip road. Apparently, he was so pissed off about the planning he painted these faded stories for free.

You might not be able to hear over the sound of traffic, but a little girl has been reported to weep, slam doors and run along the fast lane, overtaking drivers as they travel. Since the mid 1970s locals have complained about a brilliant orange light emanating from the concrete freeway system. It is enough to give you chills if you find yourself in the aftermath of punk, accompanied only by the echoing footsteps of London and the drip-drip-drip of a leaky sky.

What a great collection of semi-deserted open spaces! Abandoned railway land around the Westway now promotes raw urban ambience but Portobello is lush with vivid greenery although there is still something unsettling about wandering along overgrown cuttings to urban development sites rich in graffiti. It's a little on the haunted side: bleak winter nights in November, London leaps off the balcony of the modern city to find a temporary home out beyond Paddington. Westway marked the beginning of the end.

UNDERNEATH

At the end of things, death of course,
and underneath the shake of the traffic
and leftover violence, racist abuse and
things no-one would say out loud
written on the wall, offering new
perspectives on how to navigate
the surface of the city, teaching us
what people really think, why they
won't look us in the eye. This is not
abstraction, is not human perception,
is hatred, cultural war. Properties
of light do not spill down the steps
or ramps, the surveillance cameras
are bust. Everything's slightly blurry,
exaggerates the visual sensitivity
of sore eyes after a full day's work.
The city is not blank or flat: paint
and pencil, rain and weather, mark
and maim, move on to elsewhere.
Is all physiological, all contours
and edges, more than sum of parts.

Eye always looks for boundaries, you
are pushing yours. Where to discover
next? What can you say to inflame
situation that can be passed off as
a joke? Text and image, symbols
and signs: make a mark, move on.
Violence and passion, desire and fear
of everything you're not. Bitten nails,
dirty jeans, tattoos on your knuckles
and a future you forgot. But is not
just clichés like you, is parents,
teachers, friends you might think
better of. All want us to go home.
We shan't. Will stand all night until
time comes to the rescue, have no
other home but here. Will walk nine
times round the open fire, then lay
my head on the turf. There are both
women and men among us, we are
a living company and will be here
as long as it takes us to die.

The Bomb Damage Maps of 1940s London. Laura Bliss. May 5, 2016. Those 110 maps would be indispensable as records of the attacks and as guides during the city's reconstruction. Today, they are of tremendous value as artifacts of London's history and urban development. Written by Lawrence Ward, a principal archivist at the London Metropolitan Archive, the book captures the human stories behind the maps with firsthand accounts of bombings, rescues, and the work of the LCC. One civil serviceman, Andrew Butler, is quoted characterizing himself in his diary as a "ruin recorder" a sort of brass hat among the demolition gangs. It means getting into and crawling over the bombed buildings. The bomb damage diagrams are aerial photographs of Berlin, Cologne and Dresden, overlaid with coloured areas indicating how much damage was caused by the strategic bombing campaign. They were included in the campaign's so-called Blue Books - used as propaganda to justify the bombing raids. The maps, held in the Imperial War Museum's archives, have been collated by military cartography historian Peter Chasseaud. On the following four maps, colour coding is used: Dark blue - area destroyed or badly damaged. Red outline - area fully built up. Green outline - area is 40-70% residential.