

The Election of Barack Obama

We needed chance to support this wonder -
not just the mechanics of evolution
littered with sacrifice and the dead,
nudging us on towards an edge -

but the chance of two disgraceful terms
and an opponent always too old, whose “maverick” heart
stalled at the crunch on fear and hate
wooing it in others and betraying himself ;

and then a thirst across America -
distraught in days of loss and fracture -
for something clean, fresh and remarkable
to be proud of and to lift the spirit ;

but then too we needed this man
from nowhere and from everywhere
who knew the time was his to claim
and saw his line

and held it and stayed upright
through months of hurricane.

Treasure him.
Keep him safe.

Rogan Wolf
05.11.08



*World Press Contest Prize Winner. Akintunde Akinleye Nigeria, Reuters.
A man rinses his face after a gas pipeline explosion Dec 26th 2006.*

The Last Emperor in Chaotic Times

i

The last emperor stirs.
Chaos inspires him.
It brings back memories
of earlier convulsions
when he was the apex
uppermost in disaster.
Now citadels collapse again
and strange new progeny stagger
sleek and bewildered
across our blasted fields.
The last emperor hunches
into a ball, wheezy and crackling
and hurries to join them.
He is sure this time
he will be our chosen one.

But what is there left to say ?
It has all been used up.
All the great redemptive words
fizzed and burned out
almost the instant they entered time
and for millennia
they've hung in countless rooms
like lumps of raw clay
twisted and re-modelled
to ennoble and justify
the frets and furies that have always been.

But the last emperor
has no need of hope.
He lost it ages back
amongst the paraphernalia
of cities and face

and full diaries.
This is child's play.
Yes indeed, oh yes indeed
there's nothing left to say.
He sings to himself happily.
Against the odds another chance.
Against all the odds another chance.
Let's try.



ii

The last emperor confided
resting his feet, reaching for the water jug -
“I had a cheering thought today.

I realised the past is just
another set of possibilities
as rich in guidance and new ideas

as anything present or still to come.
The dead may still belong in the dance.”
The last emperor was almost weeping now.

“And straightaway, the walls of my City
renewed themselves in my mind
and the dead rose from their mass graves

took back their faces, their noble eyes,
and became again my counsellors,
comforting me with their wit and high learning.”



“Blind Light” Antony Gormley, Haywood. Photo David Levene/ Guardian

iii

When the great City fell all those years ago
the emperor had to give up communicating
with crowds. Now he secretes words in code

under stones and between buses, whisperings
deep in caves by the shore, scriblings
borne in small balloons loosed to ride hurricanes.

It’s more intimate that way, he says,
more telling
more effective in getting his message across.

iv

He tends to avoid caves for his resting.
They are too obvious and accessible.
He goes for between-space
and between-time
on the edges of snug living.
Fly-tips do well, for instance,
or gaps between fences
in the more established parts of suburbia
where arguments over boundaries
can open things up a bit.
Allotment huts have proved satisfactory
shared with the odd fox or down-and-out,

or patches of spare paving beneath bridges
beyond where the cyclists pass.
And like the kestrel and the red kite
he is drawn to the motorway
and will often bed down within feet
of the juggernauts
blasting through
their sharp beams
searching infinity all night.



v

Since the last emperor lost his name
he's been invisible.

He asks himself,
does it matter

where I place myself
if no one can find me there ?

He wanders from city to quiet fastness
and there's no difference

except in the impact on him.
No one knows he has gone

and no one takes note of his arrival.
Yet on the mountain trail

he adds a small stone
to each cairn he passes.

There is no name on it
and no one will know

he placed it there.
But the stones will continue

to serve and guide
once the emperor is dead.

I've learned to be
an invisible servant

says the last emperor
to himself.

Rogan Wolf
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