



*Early morning in Rajasthan, India. March 2007. Photograph: Erin Michelle*

## The Emperor at Kerbside

i

Highness  
I saw you tonight  
creeping like a sickly fox  
across our street.

The camera's bound  
to catch you  
in that glare  
of white light

at the corner -  
it can't miss.  
I didn't know  
you were still going,

Highness,  
with your City a charnel yard  
of stone and bone  
and shard

of fine crockery.  
There you presided.  
Can death  
be worse than this ?



Picture by Alexander Chabwick

ii

Between our blurred and broken lines  
fox is worth picking out.  
He guards the word on the tip of all tongues  
the telling we are frantic to avoid.  
He slips between the cars at kerbside  
his home his own slinking  
his homelessness our street.

iii

He has moved in.  
I heard him last night  
scuffling by the open window  
emasculating my arrangements there.  
This morning  
as I put the garden  
back together again,  
I knew he was watching me  
from my window.

iv

All my life since setting out  
I have carried fragments and relics  
mementoes of a time intact.  
The city is fallen,  
undone and irretrievable.  
Bowed archaeologists scraping about  
shall not ease my desolation.  
The City is fallen.  
I am the ruins.



v

He makes grin  
his mask  
and he spins in the air  
his stink  
and lightly  
sleeps  
and lightly  
he shits.  
He has no shame  
in his matter.  
His game  
is defiance of death.

vi

There are real advantages  
to being nowhere nowhen  
no profile  
on the radar screen.  
I am the broken emperor  
so when I materialise  
surface breaks  
queues scatter  
and mouths gape in wild surmise.

vii

Fox feathery and starved tonight  
emerges from a bank of ivy.  
His back arches, he walks on tip-toe  
and his tail is like the skeleton of a wing.  
The cats take no notice of him.  
They know that they'll be alive tomorrow.



viii

The stillness of the Voice on Sinai  
foxed Moses. He'd made that arduous ascent  
in full expectation of Grandeur and Majesty.  
Still, small and crucified day upon day  
(until at last  
one day of sorrow  
He'll simply give up the ghost),  
this was not the God he thought had promised  
to show his people the Way.

ix

Cities in the desert  
picked over by camera and crow -  
history grows dim  
the present points to sorrow.

*Rogan Wolf*