

James Hoggard

WHEN EVEN ONE IS HIT: A PANTOUM

When even one is hit the world explodes,
the mystics have kept telling us,
and although some will reject grace
hot rain, if rain should come, will bathe us

The mystics have kept telling us
despair will be the fate that's ours
unless hot rain, if rain should come, bathes us
and scalds a scabrous portion of our world

Despair will be the fate that's ours
and we won't change that fact unless
we scald a scabrous portion of our world
to foster justice and redemption now

And we can't change our fate unless
we learn to think and act clearly now,
to foster justice and redemption now
in compensation for the blood we've lost

But trying to think and act clearly now
we know that some will reject grace
in compensation for the blood we've lost
because when one is hit the world explodes

DOME AND FAUCET: A GHAZAL

There's an ancient mosque in Mosul whose dome
looks as if hair is growing on the dome

High winds have lodged enough dirt there
that weeds and grass sprout on the dome

A suq and a water faucet with a glass on it
are near the mosque with the balding dome

But recently bombs exploded near there
Did their shocks wreck that headlike dome?

And if the voices the mosque houses are mute
are dust and stone all that's left of the dome?

The people I saw drink from the public faucet
put the glass back—it looked like a dome

ONCE, IN DOWNTOWN MOSUL

In a narrow gold-dealer's lane
I saw a Bedouin whose tattoos
told one who her family was

The fine interlocking blue lines
on her forehead and cheeks
and her gold-spangled head wrap

said she was far from here,
and her deeply set dark eyes,
coppered by desert scorch,

spoke an intriguingly distant look

We held our expressionless glance
but no words sang or murmured
echoes of hope, desire or grief

Nothing in fact marked our meeting
but a memory that came later,
an image that named that place

where a thousand dreamworlds meet
inside and outside lyrical tents—
they're made now from concrete blocks—

in Nineveh, that ancient place I once called home

WINNOWER WHEAT

I'm swimming in the Tigris again,
I'm walking through Nimrud's ruins,
I'm looking at a vast field where,
hefting their pitchforks rhythmically,
men winnow wheat in the wind—
Nineveh's been fire-charred again

ON THE EDGE AT SOUNION

Standing windswept at the cliff's edge,
the sun-reddened sea swelling below me,
Poseidon's ruined temple behind me,

I watched the wild water below me
and thought about Athena, her enormity,
though she was centuries now behind me

I had not come to that wind-slapped edge
tempted to leap toward the oblivion
that the reddish green waters offered,

and I was not lonely for God
or for any portion or rite of God,
the stirrings within me were God

I was listening to the wind-loud sweeps
of the world, to a portion of the world:
I was listening to a wilderness within me,

its music a language whose waves
splash against rock then ebb away
disappearing in the sun-reddened sea

washing undulantly now below me