

Greetings from Hammertown

Huge uproar lords it wide.

 A tim'rous grader halts
Before an overflowing ditch, its
 big bad boy body slumped
As if thwarted at its gigging.

 In the shed's cartoon shadow
Wee dinosaurs sport and romp, their urgent
 Territorial beefs
Strangely comforting somehow. The missives
 of October
Tonk against the upstairs windows
 like desperate and ancient flies . . .

. . . fuck 'em.

 I tried to climb the glass mountain
But I kept hitting
 the glass ceiling, so
If you want to read
 “decay”
Into this rocky heap
 of nasty moss, this
Eggy newspaper intrusion, that's your
 quattrocento prerogativo—
But the pheasant remains,
 nailed to the outhouse door, the hare
Limps trembling past the dozin' cat, the sedges
 and streams of my late youth
Are cleared and flattened for you
 even as I write this;
The damp air does not retard enlightenment.
 The engine of progress rests upon granite blocks . . .

. . . close crowds the shining atmosphere, liminous
 smoke billows orange
From the banked woodfires

of the working class, where earlier
A row of beets had
 bloomed into a gleaming wound
Beneath the suddenly open sky . . .
 Alas, the streets of Hammertown
Are certainly strange,
 the few who walk them
Hunched in the posture of exile,
 past grim houses with curtains
Drawn tight
 against the encroaching
And inky night . . .
 . . . past the park's leaf-stuffed
Artillery
 which points toward
The empty middle distance
 beyond the boarded laundromat, as
Do the birdshit-streaked copper eyes
 of the founding father, whose massive hands
Rest blankly upon the open pages
 of a blank and massive copper book . . .

Alas, in Hammertown
 the days move like bugs
Or slugs, leaving translucent trails.
 The days move like horned snails.
Mountains, fields and forests
 move through my brain
In a flood
 of light; controlled by blood,
Until, coming into focus
 the torn memory of another—
I don't know why I bother.
 Seated on an autumn boulder
Dappled sandstone
 above my shoulder;
A neat cube
 of green light

If I am not mistaken
 was where I took
The seat not taken.
 Across the concourse
My double, of course, was
 a book of matches idly with involved.
He would not meet my gaze
 nor I his,
He lives in my house
 and is writing this . . .

. . . below the unsightly plain
 a brown deluge, near that edge
Of Hammertown
 that is a zone
Of permanent permission, where
 the damp exhausted firework of polis
Bobs to the surface of a tainted puddle,
 where the cattle from untasted fields do
Bitterly return, their lowing ting'd
 with unhealthy intelligence, that
Light industrial
 lunapark, where those that take
Their pastime in the troubled air
 gather in knots
Of intransigence
 and woe
Pouring their curses into
 the dark flow . . .
Struggling through
 a dissipated grove
One comes at last
 to a version of a path—
Thus delineated
 there is no room
For hesitation—
 but it is all hesitation—
The woodpecker

rears back
And slams
 its full weight, all the power
In its teeny shoulders—
 PECK!
Into the unyielding spruce—
 PECK!
PECK!
 PECK!
and words it right out
 and slams it right out
and clears it right out
 and erases the blackboard
and erases the tape
 and pops the lid off
and tears the roof off
 and boils it right down
from an oil tanker
 to a teaspoon . . .
. . . at length, into the obscure
 forest came the vision
I had sought
 through grief and shame—
A caravan
 of bright yellow trucks,
Jostling like bland mugged thugs
 along a granulate roadway
Of broken bottles, bristling
 with crab claws, with arms like
Monstrous barbed
 dog cocks, depositing
Layer after layer of
 sulphurous spoor
Into a vale of rubber smoke . . .
 Sleep frightened flies:
And round the rocking dome
 howls the savage blast . . .

The Provisions

Between the cannon
 and the father,
Between the thicket
 and the cave of light
A large rectangle
 of lawn, deeply scored
With muddy tracks, a scattering
 of minor trash, loaded
And sodden as is customary
 For such places, drainage mostly
A matter of chance—
 an impromptu canal
Formed by loose shoes and bike
 gouges over the course
Of a winter, emptying into
 a vast depression
In the roadway—
 such matters convened
Under the heading
 “infrastructure”
Are a species
 of art, that is
Attended to
 sporadically
By hooded figures
 walking on their knees
Down endless halls
 of polished granite . . .
Odd patterns
 and congruences
Of traffic, birdflight, roofing
 material, the high keening
Wire, the thick pink
 translucence
Around the treetops; these

are the maps
Of Hammertown, and
at that leafless edge
A cone of crosshatching wind
escapes from the mouth
Of a little fat cloud.
I named it
But I did not nail it—
from an ancient thicket
Of blackberry
Leviathan emerges
With a bloody nose, lighting
his way with sparks
Struck from the buckles
of his coat . . .
. . . and continues down
a street called Pine
That conduits
and is a spine
That wanders through, then
follows down
The underside
of Hammertown
And skirts the rim
as round a bowl
Of zoning slipped beyond control,
then sudden low
It passes wide
a place that is
All underside.
And coming at last
To the park, enraged
from the copper book
He tears a page . . .

Between the storms of October
And the storms of March
the deep, wide trench

Of this afternoon, one
 in a series making up
This temporal lapse, this
 interregnum
In which we are involved.
 Ignorant as I am
I hardly dare
 to speak of it,
But the fabric of its projection
 tears against
All the provisions
 I can bring to bear—
The distant groaning metal
 of non-being, the self
Afloat in a saucepan
 of burning sugar, myriads
Of little salts, shaped like
 double wedges
Diffused through water
 earth and ether.
A flock of what
 resonates through the low thatch.
Retrieve the sample
 as a dog would, its noble and stolid
Shoulders versus
 the booming cataract,
Because it knows nothing else,
 because I know nothing else.

The Voice of Kathy Sledge

“The green morocco binding of the spring, emblazoned with blue stamping.”

—James Schuyler

the voice of kathy sledge—
stevie’s ‘another star’, the
long melismatic fade now
as in ‘79 once again most
of the song—
echoes outward faintly
through the window over
the blue railing to
the grey snow, as if
my taste had somehow
saved me
from the question of
imaginary shutters and
then of making sure
the actual door is properly shut
which it often isn’t, or why
the sifto consumer grade road salt
glimmering faintly, pearly,
bounces off the clouds off
the sweet potato water orange
light from town, and
on the stairs seems
to draw from the frozen wood
a thin layer of sap
slick as five-in-one
destabilising the
thin grit underfoot—
within shotgun
outside of porchlight
seventeen versions
of “la buena vida”—
forms fill themselves in
with poignant dependability
shapes you like I like
the ones with acoustic guitars
the ones that make you cry

a page from locke
ground into oil,
rolled on the buttery
leaves of the 39 Articles, dipped
in formaldeheyde
and left to dry
a blunt as big as a badger
a vancouver special with
obverse lions
rampant meringue
treetop tea-rose pillar
rinsed-out bungalow
roofs reflect
the oxidised light above
your spindly widows walk
the space in the air
it occupied
jupiter, comfy
on the lip of a blue hill
but once again
the twinkling attention
of the lights below
chills the remix, a cat
sets off a motion sensor
and an operating theatre
appears beneath
an infant's basketball hoop
a mode of deliverance
once entered into
even the crabgrass
asserts in dimpled relief
its ancient encroachment—
all down the line
by invective transfer
the means by which
this or that domain is secured
woodgrain panelled rv habitat
oddly sloping, wide
sidewalk but you trip
carport, or south of that
shed, or out here
dogbark instead of shotgun
berkely instead of locke