

# the Whitworth

Transcript of *the destructors* (2019) by Imran Perretta

i.

'i forgive you'  
he said

'i want you  
to know  
that *you* are  
forgiven...'

and  
as he moves in  
i breathe out  
praying he's  
looking  
for someone else  
though  
i know already  
its me

and he's  
stooping  
low  
willing up  
my chin,  
trying to catch  
my eyeballs  
looking

so this time  
i engage,  
shoulders back  
knuckling  
my keys  
hoping

to survive  
this encounter  
as I have  
many before

and as he  
edges  
in  
under me  
i can smell  
    this  
    noxious  
    haze,  
        all  
    exhaust fumes  
    and ale

eroding  
the air  
around me  
    clotting  
    the back  
    my throat

'i forgive you' he said

    'for the bombs'

(the penny drops)

and as our eyes  
    meet  
    it's like  
he's not looking at me  
but  
    over me  
with this  
obscene gaze,  
    full  
    of terror  
    and disease,

    unfeeling  
    uncanny

gliding  
from  
limb to limb  
with  
a precise vision

a drone's eye  
view

and I'm  
looking all around  
for  
an intervention  
a random act  
but  
i can see  
everyone's eyes fixed  
on the deck

so i breathe deep  
wait for  
all the things  
i have ever wanted to say  
to come back  
to me  
to fill my mouth,  
to sharpen my tongue  
so i can spit  
them  
at him

but as i inhale,  
it's like  
there's  
this toxicity  
seeping in  
through the gaps  
in my teeth

a  
silence

insidious  
caustic  
thick  
blistering  
the inside  
of my lip

and he's repeating himself  
like I haven't heard  
what he's been saying

'i forgive you,  
for the bombs'

and the whole time  
i am pleading  
with myself  
to take my own  
hands from  
around my own  
throat  
and cry out

that his  
forgiveness  
is an  
unspeakable trauma  
that  
touches the deepest  
part of me

that  
i must bear the weight  
of responsibility  
for the actions of others

no them without me

all of us held  
in contempt

accused  
of this  
pre-crime  
this  
brown anomie

'we forgive you'

and all i can think  
is  
what  
he must be  
seeing of me

a twoness

two headed,  
two hearted

see it say it sort it

one part human  
one part djinn

but  
if this bus  
were to blow  
and our  
bodies found themselves  
strewn  
then  
together  
we would be  
an accumulated wreckage

of entrails  
western values  
and all of this  
sanctimony

so  
i swallow it  
all the way  
down  
choke on  
the scraps  
of this diseased imaginary

lumpen,  
unctuous

laced with white fury

and  
i can feel this  
    blunt ache  
of a stomach  
both  
full and empty

stuck

metabolising  
the  
supreme fiction  
of another's  
bankrupt ideology

alien,  
unknowable,  
religious,  
fundamental

all myth,  
no reality.

ii.

because  
when you  
    have been  
outnumbered  
your whole life

                    sometimes  
    it's not  
about who you  
claim  
but about  
who claims  
    you

and most days  
    we walk the  
main drag  
with  
this practiced lean  
    all  
    loose  
    and  
                    slow  
    chest out  
    arms in  
    waist low

with my brothers  
    in arms

the axis of evil  
the deviants  
the destructors

all equally to blame  
all as bad as each other

stalking  
the same corner  
    of the street  
    our folks were  
    firebombed

and spat on

and  
i'm wearing  
my friday's best

jeans crisp  
hands dipped  
all  
armoured against  
each  
pale stare

top down  
bottom up

weighing heavy  
on our whole

and  
we're here  
because  
there's nowhere  
else  
we can be

just this  
feeling  
holding us

a native energy

of love,  
location,  
solidarity

and always being ready  
to run for our lives  
fleet of foot  
preparing our route  
to safety

because every time  
i hear those  
sirens coming  
it's like



i feel this ache  
in the balls of my feet

of having taken my leave  
over trip-wired ground

with the best laid plans  
someone else  
has made  
for me

and we know what it is  
we're accused of  
but never what  
it is  
we have  
done

all of us IC4s  
with no fight left  
because we've been  
emptied so many times  
before

and  
in the ruin  
of  
young faces  
it's like  
they're seeing  
the enemy within

limbs  
scattered  
across far continents  
in  
martyrdom  
and  
myth

and sometimes there  
is  
a harshness  
between us

a toughened skin  
where our  
foreheads meet

but  
in each other

we are measuring  
the extent  
of our  
selves

young innocents

full of infinity

and  
at the hard end  
of the deep state

we're just trying  
to survive  
the condition we  
find ourselves  
in

under protected  
and  
over exposed

to a dense  
suffering.

iii.

and  
i remember  
the feeling  
of being loved

i can remember  
it deep in  
my marrow

but i can't  
remember  
all the parts  
of her  
anymore

because  
i've  
already seen  
so much

and i can still feel  
the weight  
of carrying her  
as she had once  
carried me

feeding her  
as she had  
once fed me

cleaning her  
as she had  
once cleaned me

and i remember  
that as her  
body  
failed  
mine became stronger  
like this curse

a theft  
of her vitality

and i remember  
the incense  
the prayers  
the calm  
and this divine maternal energy

all  
infused with  
the lingering musk  
of latex gloves  
and  
stale bedsheets

and  
i remember  
being turned away  
because no matter how bad  
it got  
there was no capacity

and when  
the nurse asked  
loud, slow  
'just what is it that *you* believe?'

and  
all this  
apparatus  
would dangle  
from the walls  
of the house  
like limbs,  
half-heartedly  
  
because  
they could no  
longer  
abide by the cost  
of  
what was left  
of her autonomy

and when  
the state finally  
gave up  
    on her

the world  
    became small

    and we were  
    left in a heap

    the sunken cost  
    of austerity  
    and the bodies  
        that lie beneath

and i think of  
    the worlds that have been  
    plundered  
wars waged far away  
from me

    and  
    how everyday  
    she would pay the price  
    of staying alive  
    with some small sense of  
        dignity

because when  
the welfare state  
is  
the warfare state

and we are so invested  
    in pale supremacy

then it seems  
that  
brown life  
can both  
    cost too much  
    and seem  
    so very cheap

and when i think  
of that time

there's  
this ulcerous rage  
that i fear  
will immolate  
    undyingly

and if i let it touch  
all my sides  
i know  
    it will  
    lay waste  
    to the softest parts  
    of me

so  
i consume myself  
instead  
with the earth-shattering labour  
of learning to aim  
my ire  
    vertically

and  
    now  
    i can see

why every time  
we embraced  
    she would  
    hold me  
        still

talk me down  
from all these  
unthinkable  
    masculinities

wait for me to  
relent,  
to soften into  
    the creases of her  
    limbs

so that i would know  
without a doubt  
that my body  
    belonged  
    safely  
        to someone

even if  
it did not  
feel like  
    it belonged to me

and  
she knew  
in a way that  
took time  
    to reveal itself  
    to me

from before  
those twin towers  
came crashing  
    down

    that embodiment  
        would be an everyday  
        cruelty

because  
i had come to her  
    endangered  
    in a loveless world  
    of  
    endless hostility

    where i could only  
        see something  
        of myself  
        in the faces  
            of deviants  
            and detainees

and as i strained  
with every fiber  
to

become

she would  
hold our whole  
so delicately

and  
rub away  
everyday at the  
target  
that  
grew on my back

world-making  
a beloved imaginary

in which we  
could both  
believe.