

Lower

for KDW

	AKL	WLG	YHZ	YYZ
AKL	6	5	7	10
WLG	5	4	8	9
YHZ	7	8	3	2
YYZ	10	9	2	1

1. YYZ/YYZ

after mathew borrett's future toronto

For all their exhaustions of hell, the Masters never painted
a broken Tower of Babel. Husbands fainting,
Sodom meteorites. A pulverized concrete blizzard.
The tower's head, decades later, resting on the withers
of the plains like a parched cowboy.

And why would they? That's not how the Big Boy
kicked the anthill this time. Like a grumpy
host—bitter with friends of friends for thumping
into the house with shoes on, friends' friends' friends
for thumping in at all—he forefended
wrath by scything his single party-size language
into seventy-some slices.

That'll teach 'em to come uninvited.

And there was mutual incomprehension
and everyone left the fête. (Hence nations'
literatures.)

But you can't paint passive-aggression.
Instead, anticipation
and red bricks bent the Masters, spectacted
(sure) and arthritic (why not) as they tackled
the Tower's construction.
Industrial park landscapes and thin stain
of cloud over the upper stories appear mandatory,
as if you might know, from paint alone, how tall and boring
human endeavour is.

Against all this, Toronto's severance
package: the CN stretches horizontal
in an overflowed Ontario, not the bones of a swimsuit model
but a sauropod's neck.

Analgesic gardens cling to every knuckle
and wrist of concrete still moral, cusping
catastrophe. Each condo's weather-whittled karst
sprouts awnings like wind-stiff neckties.
The Gardiner is finally permitted to die.

Were the Masters wrong, then, about suffering? Why it
seems to happen more upon the noisy than the quiet.
Why builders are broomed off heaven's porch.
Why, for instance, Brueghel the Elder expires at 44
and Brueghel the Younger lives past 70.
Blame mistranslation. You see, *heavens*,
where they want the tower to end, just means *sky*.
And even *sky* is just vernacular for *very, very high*.
And *height* is just a landmark so they wouldn't *get lost*
while their sleeper cars thundered from coast to coast.

2. YYZ/YHZ

after aretalogy

Halifax. Early twenties. Heat and the sweet
Don Valley-speak of T-dot girls slumming it
at our unis. Du Fu on Citadel Hill
flunking exams; Li Bai shotgunning beers all
waterfront long. These visitants scratch my nudes
with stone fingernails. Here conceive my prelude:
Letters to China, five each province, 110
at least. (Include this autonomous region
or that Tibet? Domestic relations cast
epistolary love poems. Soundtrack? A fast
unmusical sucking, maybe cranium
hoisted to a breeze, a mould jello's shlocked from.)

First few attempts submit to local contests:
The Wall's unloved. A Yellow Sea's made honest.
Mountains are esteemed. There's a bamboo forest.
Read: postcards from a tourist to a tourist.
Forget in advance: distance pauperizes.

Skim the poem that wins the Murray Fooshee prize:
I can't recall much but that aerial 'I'
at the tip, then mothership bulge, then Lahwi
-like neck stretching down to what? rails? to the street?
The page's southern border, joints of dark meat
gripping at it. The back matter of some brain
jetted this inky CN with pulp-white feet.
Ego broadcasting ego out of concrete.

Remember remember Nebuchadnezzar?

Or asking *how better* to pen Yangtze rain
and Lahwi women's coil-sprung necks, not *whether?*



'I
mi
ss,'
it
be
gi
ns.
'I' bla
zons
Tor
onto /
strings it
neighbourhood
by neighbourhood
onto / a 'streetcar
line.' 'I'
spies
'sum
mer,'
spies
'wom
en' / in
ten-sec
ond-pose
charcoal
clothes (or
is one?). / It's
something of
The Beach as if
directed / by
Anderson, and 'the
traffic' seems slept-in.

3. YHZ/YHZ

after bruce nauman's true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths

Let this line be future summer. (Yorick
will exonerate my formal lyric.)

The art gallery: it's closed & spring still
rattles its cup along the bars of Granville
Mall. At uncertain times the cobblestones
(what's left of them) issue a thin cologne
of stale ice cubes. Nightblooming cereus
they aren't but, paired with the aquarius
twilight of the window display, intend.
We squint into it: the pieces condemned
are a quarrel of fired-clay clams, fish gilt
with resin, scrap-iron corals—you get
the taxonomic picture. Over them, burly
red tubeworms lurch like the *le* in riddle. • - - - -
(Say to the woman with me, 'Glandes or
lipstick?' This being flirtation's grandeur.)

I (or
we)
turn
away
from
the
ocean

& I am pinned hard in mid-rotation. Blind, immobile,
dizzied, mildly blissed. Sunlight: amateur lepidopterist
sticking my eye to the rutted corkboard. Or, I roll face-up
somewhere off starboard while aliens crane against the
porthole. (What one thinks when one's body's on parole.)

• • • • -

Highrise: Archimedean
smirk from a penthouse
two blocks away? Or a
gunner in its window?
Why not a mountainous
prodigy bending out of
the greyness? Not some
kid stooped over the
babygrand of peninsular
Halifax—*She stands on
the bench with both hands
like Lugosi's!*—but a
cherub who squats
upharbour, whose body
goes harder into the
squat, feet wide as a
dog shivering out shit,
grubbed fist clutching
lethal Sherlock gadget
to spy an ant & point
the sun at it. Not some
clandestine ricochet of
light off tower window
into line of sight.

4. WLG/WLG

after james k baxter's maori jesus

Wellington. Late teens. *Population vacuum*
means foreign temps are rapidly attached to
federal departments. *Internal Affairs*
means my bar-met contacts look for a badge where
paper cuts flip open. *Liver* outpaces
income, moonlight, passports, pardons.

A place is

alchemical projection transcribed then drawered
in a bureau—place, then, a doubly ill-formed
subject for the hard science of doggerel.

(According to Eliot's inaugural
address, we should dream of going platinum.
According to Cohen's, killing Absalom.
If New Zealand is my Europe—Absalom
dancing ahead, leading me like a bear from
drink to drink, tugging the gold ring in my nose—
then I'm become another fifth columnist,
enumerator of worlds: *first, third, second...*)

Walking out from work, I give genuflection
at the City Library's shelves, read every
Coupland and Vonnegut they hold. They marry
into a single massive plot, so later
I am a hand at the end of a plunger
undoing data entry.

TASKS I WILL ACCOMPLISH TODAY:

- ☐ Take a flask on the Wellington Writers Walk .
 - ☐ Pick up the concrete excerpts, a strewn half-deck .
 - ☐ Determine which the ace, the joker, Baxter's .
 - ☐ Jesus bobbing out of grasp of disaster .
 - ☐ Uninterpretable tarot. It's licked, it .
 - ☐ Swallows, is swallowed by harbour, encrypted .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ See again the Māori Moses sat atop .
 - ☐ Courtenay Place, a hovering title, half-wrapped .
 - ☐ In philosopher's blanket. Ask the lama .
 - ☐ Did the name *Blanket Man* arrest your mana ?
 - ☐ Would you and Baxter have liked one another ?
 - ☐ Is youth wasted? Are the young cannon fodder ?
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .
 - ☐ .

Tasks you will accomplish right now :

Tasks you will accomplish right now:

5. WLG/AKL

after one simply walks into mordor

Filming wrapped four years ago, but Ngauruhoe
still emanates that new volcano smell. (Bok choy
in roiling vinegar?) So pamphlets promise, its tephra and scree
still infomercially keen.

Ngauruhoe in the off-hours: stiff as a grandmaster automaton
between checkmates.

At almost dawn
fog machines hiss and the sky-grey cabinet
catholic as the flank of an Earthbearing elephant
eases open to display light's lattice of clockworks.

What if sublimity is the echo of the awkward
mind halfway up the foothill, through bitching *pianissimo*
on damp maps, narrow switchbacks, dry fat mosquitoes?
Dozens of trampers collectively blush: the cone has cuckooed into view.

Held aloft whatsits begin chirping haiku.

The doctor and I congratulate each other's resistance
to something, shim past these choruses
to mount the rocky saddle (picture a spine like a horse's)
where she explains the aft end, Tongariro,
is the original musical, whose hero
tenored volcanoes into parks, parks over to the nation.
This head we climb is loose adaptation.
Later, the summit. The caldera is boiled-dry thought.
The ocean meant to be visible from it
in at least two cardinal directions. The Overlander
fumes northward like a feudal salamander
recalling some other existence.
The doctor sits gnostically nibbling an apple,
excising continents as if by scalpel.

Picnic over, the doctor simply walks back to Calgary
where because of family troubles she presumably
quits then walks back to Edmonton.

Hold a steady bearing north from Wellington .
Where hushed down the razor-wire esophagus .
Of an old New Zealand Royal Air Force base .
(A few wood barracks shoved steep against a hill .
Near the airport's isthmus) an entire Brazil .
Of prop trees players promenaded among .
Is being junked into car-sized styrofoam .

6. AKL/AKL

after the perry index of aesop, 390 – 393

Toward the base of the glorified antenna
the North Island wags in other islands' retinas,
your hand loosens on the shaft, the canopy tilts
wind-whipped as a toupee violently aft. You spill:
Auckland's been ruthless; your cup runneth over.
You wonder if you'll be that kind of step-mother.

A joke, Sky Tower turns out, flashing ribs in a gust
quite bad at the normal business, I guess. The gist
that both monologue and wetness are hot bellows
to the sonar of nipples pinging through shallows.

For two weeks, for obvious reasons, we custom
only tourist traps—galleries, museums,
an aquarium—and only weekday evenings.
One weekend on Waiheke, where the local rag
perplexes time with space: "So far behind," it brags
"we're ahead."

What's the real (not the easy) meaning
of the single key in one's pocket belonging
to a man out of town? Is the city wronging
itself, through proxy? Lips against lips, that's common.
It's when my two switch partners with yours they become
idiots.

Little bits
of water that hurtle into you populate
amateur sheet music somewhere more opulent.
Wrap your hand around Sky Tower, the whole structure,
King Arthur it airward, a naked conductor's
baton for a moment, maestro, then please drop it
and knock me hard into the far left pocket.

*If you never forget
retention's a L
disjoint her neck
than toss in a
to raise up the n*

*forget your first aff
uddite crow who
stretching down
few pebbles
ater level*

*air,
'd rather
a pitcher*

The nation of Auckland has formally requested
the return of several objects in our possession

*If you talk bad
till a Sky Tower
and people satis
you'll touch me
who's seating*

*clouds into bed
r view is draped
fy nothing but sa
like a tourist
natives for port*

*oom feats
with sheets
reets,
aits*

with special provision for the mole-sized fleck
of glass floor chipped from an observation deck

*If a jackass vis
it is therefore s
when long teeth
he think on and
& say*

*ts a wolf-doctor,
weet & meet &
ask where the p
mnesia
Wherever you*

*proper
ain is hotter
breath is '*

& for one spare key (emblazoned 'Concrete Poetry
graphic design firm') w/ assorted notes (coquetry).

*If you take the
down the baize,
as if colour's
the poem you ev
will white*

*e tips of tongues
cue smearing a
trivial plight,
ntually write
wash me becaus*

*on a trip
single lip
you're white*

Artist unknown. Circa 1642
– present. Canvas, India ink, ships' screws.

7. AKL/YHZ

after gillian wigmore's mini ice age

Departure lounge. Exact chronology
isn't dayshift/nightshift, but apology
won't make the poem any more polite:
therefore, come in sun; thus, quit the world with light.

Potato roof beams plunge into black fat
like the world's a basket, staying put's a vat
you barely jump from. What's the wonted fire
if not going somewhere else because required?

The layover's our morality play,
advocating sufferance in the void of faith
you'll get where pointed, so nod as mature
men discuss their first flights as the de jure cure
for fear of losing themselves in their sleep
—*if our minds can track flung bodies, bodies keep
some tack on minds, right?* Finally, nodding off,
while a woman coughs as if she doesn't cough:

“the first time, taller siblings in dispute
what happened? one responds to the subpoena
extending taut between the two of them

the second time, an uncle, now departed
into elliptic flight of body spun
to spiral out of anecdote the elbow

on one occasion, humerus & ulna
met speeding over potholes on a bridge

I'll encounter this myself in Southside, DUB,
while implication drains a Greenwich pub
with its long straw. Flopping boozy sweat, I'll turn
a bad-lit corner, catching midnight churn
with casino spotlights or designers' hands.
The streetlights sheen off steeples and rebrand
one-note heaven with the multiplicity
of *Church of Ireland Holy Trinity*
Rathmines Anglican/Episcopalian Church,
its eight names launching up into the lurch
like the leggy light towers of the Luminous
Arachnid Struggling from its Plump Caboose
to Divinely Right Itself. Now that's a mass
I could attend, beneath the lustrousness
of a polished eight-hour clockface, where the flies
we once mistook for planes will catechize.

apropos the better playmate *you were cute*
reedy arms are stretched, a concertina
hear one elbow giving way like loosened phlegm

seized by wrist and ankle, me, fainthearted
like a bullroarer whose roaring has begun
out of joint again

but that's a rondeau
pop back into place, the stupid trauma
by the hospital enough to perfect pitch"

8. YHZ/WLG

after hine-nui-te-pō

Peter Jackson's first attempt to destroy the world of men, at 15, is titled *The Valley*. The future snarls (it often does) four boy-prospectors: there's a harpy, a cliff edge, a cyclops, and then the parliamentary Beehive, begrudged its near-completion, crops up like a crumbling tooth—ruins the whole adventure. (As per *Planet of the Apes* and *2001* and the general actions of Mai '68.)

If *The V* is unwatchable, let this *Y* be ekphrastic vermouth:
A timestrung astronaut sees a deathbed
and gets rather big chested.

After some anagnorisis, he lets out a final puff and
through means indistinguishable from poetry, poof!/bang!
goes the reliable blue marble.

These are my designs for Citadel Hill:

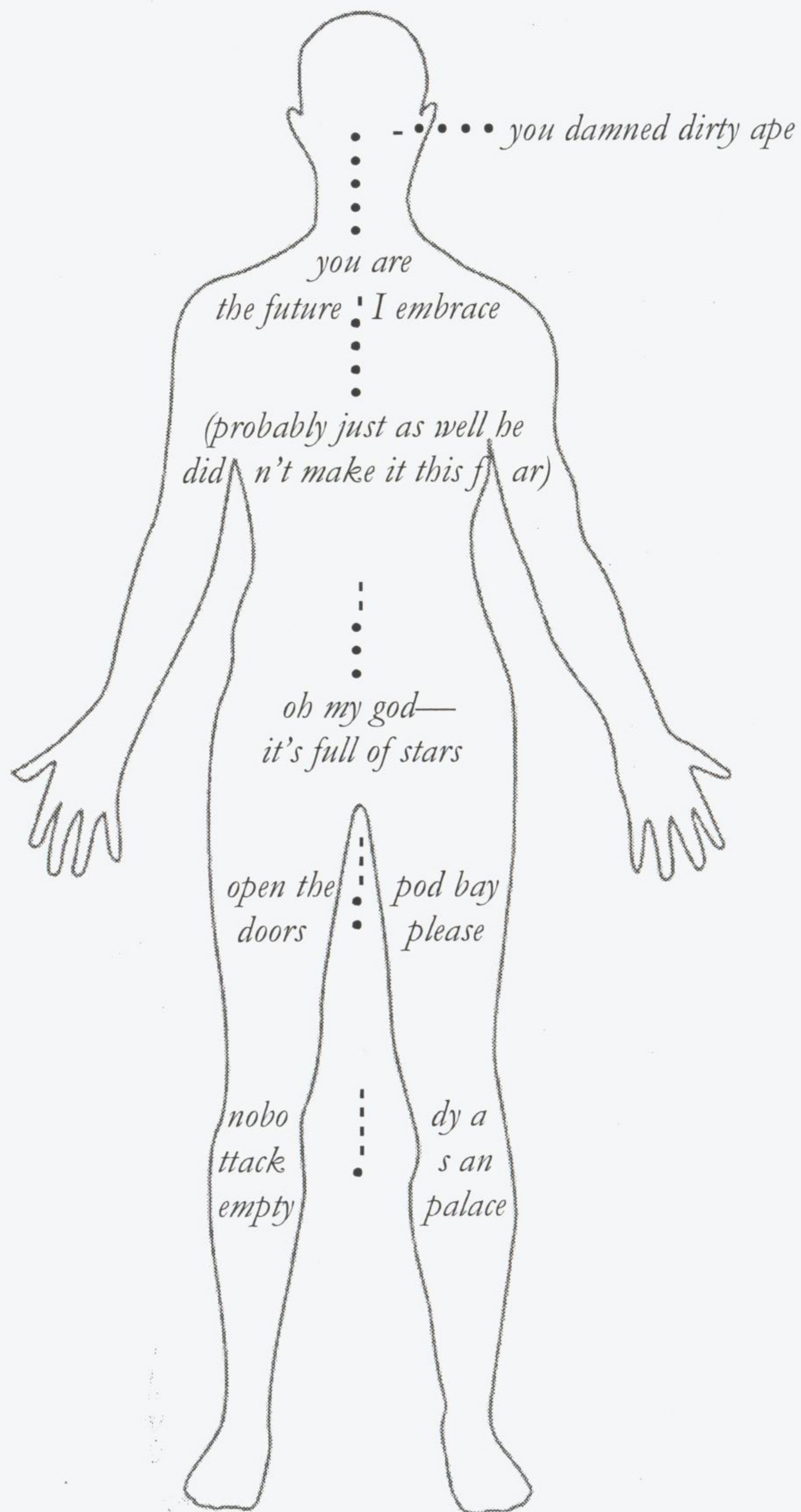
Enter through its portcullis
navigate its corpulence
exit through the contrabassoon
of the cannon that fires every noon.

I leave everything else to physics.

(Astro- or meta-? That's physics's business.)

*If a faster-than-light harpoon leaves Halifax at 12:00 pm
at a height of 60 m, destination Wellington
how many whales and of which colour
will it shish-kebab before it gutters?*

The harbour flash boils to a heat-paved valley.
For being half-melted, are the buildings nobler?
Will ships' canted carcasses enter local folklore
to monster fresh deserts? Is it a fitting finale
to stand on a wharf like it's a turret?
Isn't this a city with an explosion named after it?



9. WLG/YYZ

after mary-louise browne's seven steps to heaven

Toronto. Late twenties. *The latest eruption
is like a big old giant who has woken
up, farted, rolled over and gone back to sleep,
Wakelin said. Did the latest election seep
into the planet's magmatic unconscious,
drift for two years, emerge equally noxious
into the idyllic airs of simile?*

A series of orbital mirrors dimly
relays the scope of things: that's pretty much it.

Tephra sculpture sale at St Lawrence Market....
Ash clouds pend and jockey for space in a crush
above City Hall as if each has business
vital to the very foundations of lib
dem capitalism.... Long live the round trip!
Spectators mill, deciding variously
the clouds look like tire heaps like teats an angry sea.
Always the seedy side, belly, or back lot of
a thing, not a thing they wouldn't have thought of.

*I saw flashes and lightning, a big black cloud.
I had my bags packed and was freaking out.
I went to bed and had a good night's sleep.
We dream of a world we won't have to sweep.*

SKY

SAY

SAD

SAT

SET

SEE

SEA

SEAM

SEEM

SEES

LEES

LIES

LIPS

PIPS

PIPE

PIKE

LIKE

A LIKE

A LAKE

A LANE

A LINE

A LONE

10. YYZ/AKL

after rineke dijkstra's afterbirth

Let us make an offer:

The appearance of words is as actual
as the business of monuments. They are a strategic and fruitful
mythology of the part, the isolation of every member
from the membership, attracting the tall to the taller
so that the big reach beyond themselves, become huge.
But you gave in to the multiple. This includes
the home, town, city, country; the symbol, phrase, page, book.
They are pragmatic conventions, but Neolithic
before us. The monumental and the literary
have broken before our approaching ingenuity
and accomplishments. Now is the day of a new creation,
one whose technology came from beyond this heaven.

That is New Babel:

millions of towers stand on each other
and become one powerful idea. All came together
in one location. All are now one tower, shaped
like architectural transcendence. Every skyscraper
and every modern building acquired
in our international operations
is elevated to this idea. Admire
New Babel's many benefits and attractions:
Great opportunities for networking to us!
A few panoramas in the engineering exhibitions!
Restaurants that cater to mankind's impulse
to see inside each other! Association
to us, the Most Great Guides!
For the defensive, spectacular rides
from the top!

If heaven exists, it is the oldest enemy
of the world. Let us celebrate their wedding today.

This is our offer:

Join us. Let us help you
rise from these broken cities, records, venues
of being. If you stand in our architecture
you are elevated also, like so many other visitors.
Would you see them? Their examples are paralleled to scale
in a famous showcase in New Babel,
sharing our incredible achievements between us.
Would you like to become even as famous?
To promote the extraordinary visit each of you
strives for?

What exists of you?

The ancient buildings surrounding you
defensive and plain, walled the unknown from view
from Genesis unto now. This made tourism possible,
but all those tourists came from inside themselves
to become communications of themselves.
It is evocation that has created New Babel.

Although more are approaching us every day, each year,
some would develop new partnerships, charge our tower.
Some would find walls—or even build new walls before us—
as if walls protected you from our astonishing purposes.

That is our offer.

Refer to the advantage of the nuraghi
of Sardinia, the brochs of Scotland, the feats of early
transmitters in Shinar and Jericho, as examples.
Our telecommunications reach beyond even this.
Would you see more of us revolving in the heights, or are you moved?
Let us encourage federation. Soon.
You are running out of walls and years. You are many
and multiple, but the local is the new enemy
of the world—our world—and the host of Babel is one.

Notes

2. YYZ/YHZ: Aretalogy is the autobiographical listing of a deity's attributes, the most studied example (aside from Yahweh's 'I am that I am') being Isis's "I am Isis, ruler of every land...."

4. WLG/WLG: "Absalom" is borrowed indirectly from T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and directly from Leonard Cohen's "Prayer for Sunset." The Wellington Writers Walk is a series of sculptural installations featuring celebrated lines of poetry. Bernard Hana (1957 – 2012), or Blanket Man, was a resident of the footpaths of central Wellington known for his minimalist attire (loincloth & blanket) and for the gossip surrounding his frequent arrests.

5. WLG/AKL: Ngauruhoe is the most prominent vent of the Tongariro volcanic complex, rising higher than Tongariro itself; these two peaks, along with Mount Ruapehu, crown the volcanic plateau of New Zealand's North Island.

6. AKL/AKL: Waiheke Island lies north of Auckland in the Hauraki Gulf.

7. AKL/YHZ: "the first time [...] perfect pitch" is adapted from a conversation between unknown fellow passengers.

8. YHZ/WLG: Hine-nui-te-pō is the goddess of death whom the hero Māui attempted to defeat. His plan—to crawl into Hine-nui-te-pō's vagina and out of her mouth, thereby inverting the path of birth—failed. Phrases on the recto page are adapted from the correspondence of Charles de Gaulle and from the films *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Planet of the Apes* (1968).

9. WLG/YYZ: Italicized phrases on the verso page are adapted from Kerry Wakelin's contributions to a stuff.co.nz news report on the 2012 eruption of Tongariro. "sky [...] sea" and "a lake [...] a lone" are adapted from Mary-Louise Browne's *Seven Steps to Heaven* and bpNichol's "A / LAKE," respectively.

10. YYZ/AKL: This lexicleptic cut-up uses all of and only those words comprised by the "About" section of the World Federation of Great Towers website (www.great-towers.com).

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Andy Verboom hails from subrural Nova Scotia. His poetry appears in periodicals such as *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *BafterC*, *Descant*, and *The Puritan*, was shortlisted for *Arc's* Poem of the Year, and has won the Winston Collins Prize for Best Canadian Poem. He edits *The Word Hoard*, a literary and humanities journal, and organizes *Couplets*, a collaborative poetry reading series. He is indebted to David Huebert for the prompt leading to this chapbook and to both Kevin Shaw and David for being his first readers.



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