

## Here

Here, in the desert, one walks and imagines an architecture in the distant haze. One measures progress by the disappointments of its unfolding clarity.

Here, the shimmering outline of the eternal city becomes the stripped carcass of the tanker truck.

In the desert, one walks to escape, but finds only more.

In the desert, one is only a word adrift in the sands.

In the desert, ruins have been scattered in mock anticipation of Paradise. Here, one scavenges the abandoned sheds and trailers without expectation.

In the desert, one moves only in the space between remains.

Here, one loses one's way in the void between words.

In the desert, one can no longer think.

In the desert, one sits or walks.

Here, time begins and ends with false occurrence. One sits days for the vehicle that does not come.

Here, one's skin carries upon it the ash of forsaken pasts.

Here, one no longer knows one's time.

In the desert, historical time lies savaged by the cyclical time it has falsified.

Now, one sits or walks, but exists amid hours that mark nothing.

One longs for no time at all, but knows only boredom.

In the desert, the past is a land of stateless images awaiting redemption.

Here, one stares at a shard for hours, almost believing that it is tomorrow.

He points in silence: The shell entered here. The bones lie there, the helmet just beyond.

One looks on without expression. If one comments, it is in single words: rebel, refugee, trespasser.

In the desert, it is identity that assigns one's fate.

In the desert, one becomes one's borders but cannot know them.

Here, disrespect is the one and unavoidable crime.

Here, marauders drink whiskey instead of water on their last day alive.

In the desert, life is marked by the separation between the here and there. The world stands there, but one's death occurs here.

When one flees in the desert, one is already lost.

In the desert, the movements of all men in the distance appear threatening.

In the desert, space and time are produced by and produce paranoia.

In the desert, paranoia becomes original sin.

It is here that one sees the most, yet feels most observed.

Here, one is stalked from afar and will be extinguished from afar. One's survival is due not to the other's inability, but to his distraction. Here, both target and stalker live in a time no longer their own.

In the desert, belief means future betrayal.

Here, one declares one's enemies so as to be caught unaware by friends.

In the desert, terror is either felt or denied.

It is the speck moving on or above the horizon.

It is the glint of light before the explosion.

In the desert, all battles are over before announced.

Within seconds, bodies and wreckage assume archaeological stillness. The fighter beside the vehicle stood no hope of attaining those rocky hills.

In the desert, one encounters all that can elsewhere be overlooked. Here, one recreates ignorance from the poverty of language.

In the desert, terrified imaginings acquire the certitude of prophecy.

Here, despite the air, one pictures one's end by suffocation.

Here, one hears the jackals that one will not live to see.

In the desert, one stands no chance without a weapon.

In the desert, the best-armed man knows that he makes the best target, that his weapon is worth more than his life.

Here, a man looks at his gun knowing that it will outlive him.

In the desert, flies cover the surface of all things dead.

Miles from the next source of sustenance, they arrive at the corpse of a goat within minutes. From this alone, dynasties will live for weeks.

Here, optimism is only a deadly mistake, and as such ceases to exist. Thus, too, pessimism ceases and enters the regulated motions of the day.

One gazes until blind. One has seen enough mirages to not believe in them, yet their presence must be a sign.

In the desert, the shiny object still drifts through vast tracts of obsolescence. Its momentary glimmer portends the discharge of unconsummated rage.

In the desert, a child's doll or finger drum carries the possibility of everlasting joy.

In the desert, children run with glee toward a pit of kerosene-soaked garbage.

In the desert, the young child still gazes at the distant hotel with wonder; still regards the barking of the tied dog with amusement; still collects interesting shrapnel and carries it home.

In the desert, truth depends on the reappearance or the disappearance of a plastic bag.

Here, the wind and the water re-stage history for yet one more erasure.

To its unmerciful silence, the desert demands submission.

Those who acquire words upon leaving soon return, mute as before.

One can only return to the desert with nothing.

The time when the men of the desert were poets has passed. If one hears poetry, it is a reconstituted rhyme sung from the ditch to tourists under the protection of security.

In the desert, one exhausts oneself daily with endless variations of the same thought.

In the desert, one searches for the word that will once more be the word.

In the desert, one pretends to ignore the voices carried from the distant prison.

In the desert, one hears an eternal echo in the recurring detonation.

In the desert, one is long accustomed to the smoke billowing toward one from the edges of one's world.

In the desert, one imagines one's body borne to the heavens on a column of smoke.

From the desert floor, drifting contrails bind one to the far-reaching powers. One points one's rifle at them in blank parody of rebellion.

Whether artifacts or not, the fragments covering the plain are stained with oxide. One kicks them aside as one walks. One picks them up to throw for no reason.

One walks and one walks.

For weeks nothing happens.

One can almost believe that one is alone.

Along the border, children collect the twisted leads of ancient machine gun fire and deliver them to parents who drill and string them as necklaces.

Life goes on amid the undying wind. Here, the flapping of eardrums reiterates the sense of siege. When, toward sunset, one returns to the tent, the canvas too begins flapping.

The desert is not a retreat from the world, but a descent into it. All that surrounds penetrates, turns what is accidental into what is essential.

In the desert, only a god can summon enough wrath to redeem the world.

Yet in the desert, every armed stranger bears the countenance of a prophet.

In the desert, even the angriest of gods falls long before his annunciation.

Here, one waits for the comrade now half-covered in sand.

Still, one wanders the basins and plateaus and senses a presence. One hears fragments of voice beyond the flapping eardrums and canvas tent.

But for now, one continues to walk.

Despite the longings, one can only sustain imagination in short stretches.

Once more, the unredeeming horizon closes in with eternal tedium.

Once more, one wraps the cloth more tightly around the head, narrowing vision to the smallest possible opening.

Once more, one limits the future to the next dozen footsteps.