

3.1 A short walk near water_____

Build all the hotels you like –
the sea is still a wild thing.

Black cats picking through the jack-drilled
lump-rock of the tide break. Their eyes

have focus, living between
the elements and the sport-fishing dock.

Power out in the hotel last night. Everyone saying,
“This will make such a memorable conference!”

A beach, clouds, a sunset. At the height of the tide-line
a Sagres bottle that has done such tumbling

still whole, and a dead cormorant:
grey body ruffled, black span stretched.

The cats are yet to find it, out on the sand.
Go back for your dinner – focus your eyes how you will.

3.2 Reading Shire on a flight home

You say there is a gulf
between her work and yours
and yes, people are crossing
bodies of water

You are working your way into a definition
a counterpart status
a witness of other events

You also are trying to document
so by definition
reading many dull documents
you do not have the power to shock

At best you achieve
polite interest
which seems about the right response
and you do retain elements of shyness

You exist in a kind of culture
where sages say we need more appetite for risk
Others know risk well
not always through choice

(and they may be right

As far as you can work out you are refraining
from over-indulgence equally
in self-castigation
and complacencing your privilege

You have the obituary of Ian Traynor open in your phone browser, have had for a while, wanting to do something with it, wondering what to do with it. Your line of thinking: in the years when he was coming up as a foreign correspondent, it must have felt like there was good news, from the perspective of many, if not those in the news itself – the fairly peaceful fall of the Iron Curtain, the orientation of post-Communist states towards democracy – and you can't identify that kind of narrative now. You do not have the foresight to say whether it is melodramatic or perceptive, this sneaking feeling of living in 1936. / You discussed this walking home with Alex one early morning. He, feeling open and generous hearted (a phrase you think you have picked up from a Rafael Behr tweet about monetary policy and the closure of Fabric), mentioned his hope for getting a majority of Democrats on the Supreme Court bench – but that is not your field of expertise, he recognised. / Now you are struck that Traynor, after that presumed hope and then all the horror of disintegrating Yugoslavia, later chose to cover documents that also sometimes cross your Brussels desk. / Alex continued, told you that Traynor had achieved that status where he could ring the staff and just tell them what the story was.

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With your Venn diagram of FT and Guardian opinion
you hope you make some good choices
but what are you doing
directly?

Come here baby I love your company We could do it and start a family

She was living alone unhappily We could do it, it's right romantically
Unless being in your position is your great decision
you must be flunking the hard decisions
while conveniently receiving your share
of benefits

You are establishing a position
providing such security as is in your gift
hoping you will not do a bad job with any that come after you
and loving faithfully

(or more –

how define the fraction? All this is coming out because you finally read in the single sitting
it deserves the Warsan Shire pamphlet on a flight back from
business. You hesitate, decide that situational precision is probably
best left out. You kind of got away from the point.

(The left bracket voice is your inability to put any judgement to rest)

(Keep the central poem as general as possible; let the worldly ephemera come in the paratext)

(Let yourself have this voice: your sprawling poems are always intertextual.
Succeed with generality elsewhere. And just put the situation in the title.)

(With this third point you realise you have created a set of instructions.
You realise that you may throw them in too. Accrual, accretion – this is a direction – so be it.
But leave the last line alone.)