

Approaches

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Writer

I Building

This city builds its future on its past:
Stark tower blocks shining like new china
In the sun, wool-sheds and workers' cottages
Razed and dug away, for the garages.
Across the road a block is rising now,
Telling its storeys as it climbs, arrayed
In waterproof and scaffolding, sprouting
Cranes, the roof-wetting only months away.

The opening will be a grand affair.
If I can get myself an invitation,
Tall glass doors will open on a foyer.
I'll avoid the cheese and wine, make my way
To the elevator and take a ride
To the top floor, out on to the roof. Free,
To breathe the freshest air, to take a taste
Of something infinite, and hear the sea.

II Growing

We have fashioned sturdy planter-boxes
Of pine and ply, filled with bright sods, rich
With cow manure, deep enough for okra,
Lima beans and tomatoes, winter squash,
Pumpkins, asparagus and artichokes.
Now you have sown the seeds and turned the loam,



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And watered seedlings, we look forward to
A healthy table for our urban home.

Is there a season waiting, strange but due,
When all the beds will ripen on a day,
Above and below the ground? All will bear
Their gifts of savour, sustenance and spray
To make one feast, like nothing seen before.
From that day, the kind garden will not spare,
The plants will ripen with the dawn, always
In fruit, unworked and free. And I'll be there.

III Walking

In the gardens of the seminary
We walk the modest labyrinth, a path
Bricked in the sandy grass, a pilgrimage
In miniature. There are no dead-ends here,
This is not a maze: one way will lead you,
Even though, as you approach, you may think
That you're losing your way, to the still heart.
There turn around and wind back to the brink.

I will return to walk the labyrinth
Until one day the grass is green, the earth
Is rich, the bricks are bright and clean, the trees
In leaf and bloom and filled with singing birds.
No detours, no deceptions: remember,
A labyrinth is not a maze. My way
Will be along the new familiar path
To the still welcome heart. And there I'll stay.

IV Crossing

Holding a handsome arc, from east to west,
(Or is it west to east?), the footbridge spans
The soiled canal. Visible from the south,
As from the north, but out of bounds, taboo
To pioneer pedestrians who know
That the slim bow is held in custody,
Like toxic waste, among the furnaces
And forges, the mills and the machinery.

One day an artless track will find its way
To lead me to the footbridge I have seen;
The old canal will shine again, the banks
Will bloom with bottlebrush and lily, fern
And weeping grass, keen to the nightly call
Of curlew, the song of whistler and wren.
Crossing from east to west (or west to east),
The world will never be the same again.