

Paper Skin

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The City

The Dark Wood

Night, severed by
shards of the city
artificial suns humming
in insomniac streets

cement slick with
oil, water, trampled butts
hiss of grates and steam
rising, the thick hot breath
of the subway.

The crossroads meet and part
a steady stream of chance encounters
sidelong glimpse of the
hunched, bunched backs
of murmurers

sulfur scent, cracked palms
rubbed over unseen
sources of heat and flame
smoke shadowmen, faceless

in the thickening dark. Traffic
merges, flows of tail-lights fused
into a line of fire, twisting with the
corners, a web of light.

Ahead, the building rises,
sly half-shuttered windows
yawning walls that flower and
spring from rooted earth

black bloom, it cuts an oblong
hole in the horizon. We pause-
time hangs suspended by a
strand of spider's web

empty rooms
and rooms
soon to be empty

The Doorman**River Acheron**

I will watch you
I that motionless sees the sun
tip and dip into a sea of stars-
you ebb through crushing streets but I
I am silent and I remain
under the flicker of nights and days.

I see the empty smiles to laughing eyes
cooled in pools of orange in the lamplight
The skull beneath the paper skin.
The drunken stupors of newspaper men,
lost in yesterday's times.

I see and I am silent.
A shattered lighthouse, blotted black
angered boils, the wracks of wrecks
tethered scream beneath

The glass door slides and beckons,
and welcoming your reckoning I smile and tip my hat
beguiled you enter

but I know
unseen I eat into the shadows of the eaves
coil deep into wedge of stone
listening carefully

I know you

I watch and listen to your shiver

and quiver with the expectation-

I will wait

as you seek

The Foyer**The Futile**

With winter falls a fog encroaching all
the ashen snow a haze, the gaze
of misted men
wandering uncharted through a listless sea of dusk.

The silver lilt of life now fades to grey
and I, alone with whispers
green from a forgotten spring
muse on truths that shift and drift and fall.
A dreamed existence drapes me as a shawl
and warms the rooted knowledge of the mundane days.

I tasted grey in buds of blossoms
and muted starlight silver tongued with words
yet in this twilight yearn
to touch the lost and obfuscated sky

meanderings of what ifs and perhapses
swell into symphonies of melting gold
elusive
through their radiance my fingers graze the cold.

The First Floor

Limbo

The room is still
save lotus rainchild Siddhartha jay
and a curl
sliding from a pungent puff

The jazz smoothes jay's forehead
creeps around the smoke
an elusive helix hangs
and dissipates

We breathe the calm
and languid words

drop earthwards

Heavy with the scent of sartre

Tongued thoughts
disperse in air
to lonely syllables

I pluck them as they touch the
corner of the cushion
and mould their meaning
plump and warm within my mouth.

Symposium wafts past my eyes
and Alcibiades lounges
a delicate eyelid turns and winks my way

Lotus cries a single tear
for the lost loveliness of the forests
I mourn the whales

We inhale

and in one small moment
the earth contracts
and nestles between my lips

Rainchild's hips are slender
soaked and slippery
as she dances beneath the droplets
shaken from the great grey beasts of rain.

The Second Floor

The Lustful

Spring and the sky was green
and I, smooth and rotund,
served myself.

A gasp and clap in exclamation
expectation placed upon a plate

I am the watermelon woman.

The salivating picnickers delight
to each a slice

yearning
a smallish scoop
from the corner of my skull

darker thoughts
nibble at my toes in turn

then apprehensions
fused regrets-desires

tear ragged through the cracking shell
subtly nudge the core

but I
immersed
drink deeper

intricately hollow out
freshly moistened catacombs

seize the veins and snuff the pulse
that rushed and
gushed warm over my hands

pulp squeezes through the splits
the pips pop
past the bone

bleached branches hang suspended
foolishly disrobed

carved clean
the tightened sinews wither
parchment caverns bloat

gorged
a thin metatarsal catches in my throat.

The Third Floor

The Gluttonous

Softlidded gaze unfocused and I fold
willingly to the blown breeze of guile.
Ceasing resistance,

taut and stretched as a trapped smile,
the sky melts to a mustard scent
nurturing sallow seedlings, their

tendrils stealth in growth beneath my breasts,
bloom baobab. I bare my baseness
new bled and tender pink

working my fingers into the skin.
Muddied veins dry with time,
parting gift of deep wrinkled rivulets

carved into creekbeds that slide
from the corners of my mouth.

The Fourth Floor

The Hoarders and Spendthrifts

Fashionable nudes and spartan lines-
Silk sofas float suspended
over sleek boards.

They stretch unhindered
aware
of their superiority.

Slight, she sits,
Ergonomic soles tipped
upon manicured toes

A single cuff slips
up a galatea arm
revealing wrists
Touched with gold

index finger poised
upon a slender cigarette case.
The clasp clips open

a mirrored shine
and the pale line rigid

Inside the case
a hidden sentence, italic small
cheapened by the polish
of an orthodontists smile

Ignored,
the clasp clips shut.

Samantha is cool of countenance
disengaged
yet she completes
a décolletage to the décor.

Greg stands-
his gut a weight
his throat distinctly tight
his head a ripened fruit

Uncomfortably aware
of the pervading scent
of his moist
yellowed armpits

He knows she senses
beneath Italian leather
a hidden toenail,

chipped and clotted brown,
forgotten
by the six piece clipping set.

His collar chafes against
the prickle of his neck

Samantha curls
one delicate nostril
Relishing his discomfort.

The Sixth floor

The Wood of the Suicides

I have watched you, in my mind
your perfume wafting soft from soft formed arms
forgotten echoes of a laugh that
echoes hollow in a hollow room.

We have danced together, you and I
your wireblack hair, your stare
the smudge of red on white pressed collars
pressed with a quiet certainty, while you murmured
soft and low.

I wake to silence
the death throes of the morning
blanched light seeping through a spotted pane

and in the harsh interminable sun I suck
life through a filter
ashed heavy into a lukewarm coffee cup.

My greying cuffs and yellowed fingers
linger on the ledge the pigeons claimed

my toes curl to the edge
the dredges of black liquid suspended
splayed
billow over yawning grey

My gargoyle fingers search for holds -

I lean towards you in the night
the pillow cold

My toes uncurl
and, as the sail of some Aegean ship
my life unfurls

The Seventh Floor

The Abominable Sand

Jeans splashed with
four night old sovlaki
I wipe wide palms across them
leaving a sticky snail trail

The phone
lurks in the corner of my eye
shifting uncomfortably
it senses disappointment.

He warned me
his wife is at home a
lot these days
I couldn't call him he
he would call me

when he could
I said
make it soon

The grease from the chips
seeps through the now translucent
butcher paper
grainy with Manly sand

It catches in my teeth
gnaws against my molars
forced swallow of calamari
for one

My mind imagines marathons
of extraordinary dexterity
bolts straining to hold
the bed together

the phone
the phone
connections carefully checked
sullenly still

The Eighth Floor

The Panderers and Seducers

She sleeps.

Skin rises, a balloon of breath
her spine uncurls and arches each
willing node to my hands.

My fingers trace the hollows-
gently, very gently
taut over the bones of her back
embedded in the rich skin

pressed outwards under the
mass of her, porcelain and the
hint of perspiration. Moist skin,
warm and welcoming my touch,

blooming from the crisp crushed
cotton gathered at her waist.
Surreptitious I slide closer
head immersed in her hair,

unaware of the warped wood
in the ageing bed. She stirs.
I hear the murmur of her
waking sigh, exhaled deep into the pillow.

Lips parted, saliva-moist
traced by her tongue.
Her neck, fragile under
the weight of lolling face,

stretches. Hair hangs
lank over the spreading
purple blemish, insinuating
beyond the caverns of her eye,

brown pools filled with tears
and beauty and so I ache towards
her lips and forgive her again
and again and again.

The Ninth Floor**The Sorcerers****I- The Dreaming**

Trembling as brushwood chipped
by the reddish season
a boat, its keel

warm rotted in mud marshes
hangs in the mid morning haze.
You and me're fish catching.

A fly lingers on the
greased green surface
touch of feet forming

circles and circles and
circles slip towards me fingers,
wetter slick and dark in the shallows.

Under us, the shadow fishes dance
plunged airwards in a hurricane of drops
your teeth smiling tight as your grasp on its belly.

me muscles slow, soothed by them warm currents
air lined with the hum
of dreamingtime

you shape the rainbow serpent with ya grumbletongue
me eyes grow wide and me mouth hangs as words
slither soundless through bush scrub

the fishes flop lazily
eyes glazed in the heat
I think about me own belly

fecund undergrowth
alive with the tails of tales
your fisherman hand poised to snatch em from concealment.

A breeze licks our specked and freckled toes
naked and wriggling in contentment.

II- The Awakening

my mob would tell me
before I left the land-
concrete against mud plugged feet
like a fist in the belly-

about the dreaming, secret, place

when I birthed my kids
slippery limbs and earth placenta
I couldn't wait to teach em what I knew

in hushed whispers I showed em
the brothers roasting fishes in the sky
taught em how to track a wombat
before they'd even seen one

I'd do their pigtails nice and pretty
like the white kids do
and wash the mud off their pinafores
when the white kids threw it

I didn't mind, so long as I could tell them bout the dreaming
teach em in my own way
then my kids came home and put my head on straight

told me bout jesus and the songs they sang in choir
and how my mob's stories were in the fiction section
in their library at school
told me bout how their teacher laughed

and then they didn't want to see the pictures in the stars no more.

The Tenth Floor

The Barrators

I can see the bridge from my window,
steel and iron and a strip of blue
languid ferry, cutting the water in a
cadence of lazy white.

The night aches nearer,
grimy pearl streaks groaning
beneath dark anticipation.

Crossing the bridge last night,
feet padding noiseless
leather on concrete,

I paused, cataracts of
crosshatched metal clearing,
and below the black water.

Clasps clipped smoothly open
the briefcase hung, a broken jaw
spitting shreds of silent paper
far from prying eyes.

Traffic dulled, my eyes aware
of barbed wire, lining the stiff
barrier, curling inwards to
catch and tear the flesh.

I walked, and watched for weaknesses
snapped wires in the one
two three officious barricade

thought of the cement gut smash
body on water.

The night cold cramped
deep into the joints of my fingers
hung there, hooked in the sinews,
like thin metal.

The Eleventh Floor

The Hypocrites

Mother, in these our last
times together, your skin
is crumpling into angry lines

you, who gave me so much
and whispered moments of
fantasies that I in turn will tell,

are growing old, and I upset you.
Our moment was ephemeral, our shared
cup is running dry. When small

you let me be your life and
we were one, my arms, fused
about your neck and my smile echoed in your own.

In these sadder days, you
regret our time, aware that your
time is fading, and you gave the fill

to me. I cannot give you back those hours
I unknowingly took, when you taught me
wide-eyed secrets beneath the golden cyprus

and I weep at your sorrow that I
have caused. Now there is nothing ahead
but night, and my memories are

haunted by the heavy mantle
of your grief, that I, like you,
mistakenly conceived.

The Twelfth Floor

The Thieves

2 am traffic noises and ugly menwomen chestbreasts puffed proudly
vinyled hips too large, unseemly in the catcall swaying-
terrifying street too dangerous I'm lying low
wary, cautious, and contained, all bases covered- but I sense
scufflings-
snuggled in the greasepaper and soiled takeout trays. I hear his fat pinkgrey
tail plop off the cartons, a hundred eyeless babies crawling under a stained playboy-
terrifying kitchen can't enter anymore the stench thickens in my throat and sends me
reeling I'm keeping the door locked.
but in the night
creeping upsideup claws click across the ceiling
and the oily worm tail that nuzzles up beside me yellow jaws kissing my mouth
telling me yes that I'm with him now a loverbrother of vermin
and he points to our yellow eyes, veiny and suppurating sleep
and he curls back his mouth into a lipless grin at my
writhing haunches flopping uselessly
in my own trap

The Thirteenth Floor

Sowers of Discord

As the stale day leapt skywards,
a white pressed doll, straightjacketed
in lace and flowers, and cords
of pearls, eased her skirts aside and fled.
Contortion, scarce to be imagined in that blush brushed
face, gauzed by a shrouding veil, crushed

her mouth into a gaping gap.

I saw her features buckle, porcelain cheek,
glass eyes, eaten into the teeth, teeth capped
and pristine and shrieking in the creak
of hollow bones. Her knuckles slit into the webbing strands
blood greased the ivory grain, our skin our hands

washed with true colour. Her face and mine collapsed.

Clinging oystertight to the slippery sense
of memories to long submerged in those traps
of courting, the grafted dress became a tense
silhouette of what hand once been alive
now creaking whalebone joints of a cutout wife.

The Fourteenth Floor

The Falsifiers

It's begun again.

The grating of the hardwood, scoring
the floor and my ceiling
heavy tread and the glancing blow
of a saucepan on granite.

Vicarious, this living
through the sounds of others.
The woman's pores widen in the summer,
bags under her arms and her eyes from too many children
upraised voices and the odour of pre-frozen fish.

Sometimes I stay awake to hear the night time noises
subtle gasps and groans,
and the hacking emphysema cough
of overexertion and too many cigarettes. I imagine his purple
puffing face and suffocate a laugh in a pillow.

My mother gently rolls me over,
cleaning out the bedpan. She's thinning, the strain
arching her features into hard planes. She tries to speak but
I tell her to be quiet. I want to hear the knives scraping across the plates.
I want to hear them eat.

She creeps out silently. I block out her night noises,
they upset me. Above me the children exalt in
the carnage of their living room. I can see it, paper strewn
across the floor, bulging dishes and vegemite warpaint,
an effusive chaos. My crisp sheets are neatly pressed but
they don't hide the urine smell.

The Fifteenth Floor

Traitors to their Kindred

Miranda, remember sweet,
the tree, softly daubed with flower,
dusting the lush green

Beneath the blossom,
thick brown tumours pulse and grow,
suck deep from the tree

I hacked at the roots, my sweet,
sticky and wick
yet the blossom lingered still

it was a week before it died, my sweet,
shriveling to seed
snapping ashen quick over thriving leaves

I hacked at the roots, Miranda my sweet-
and yet your blossom fades so quickly
fades to blue

The Roof

Earth's Centre

and I hear you I hear you
you slide into my senses
feel the instinct motions of the lub
dub muscles of the heart

lonely notes quite separate from the silence and
mournful as a lost grave among the thistles
writhing gristle grey moments suspended
in starcut darkness, caught and held
yes that is my message that is
my
song

Reflection Statement

Through my English Extension II major work, I have attempted to use the medium of poetry to express the isolation that we as humanity suffer as a result of our common flaws. Through grafting Dante's perception of Hell in "Inferno" to a modern apartment setting, I examine the universal nature of human weakness, and the resulting dissociation felt despite our analogous lives. By paralleling each level of the apartment building with the appropriate level of Hell in "Inferno", the faults of my characters grow to encompass the greater flaws of humanity as a whole. This connotative intertextuality, in a modern setting, questions notions of development within modern society, suggesting that the archetypal metropolis of "The City" is not a paradise, but rather the Dark Wood in which Dante initially loses his way.

Through developing the weaknesses and desires of humanity via a suite of dramatic monologues, I have created a sense both of the common nature of our flaws and the consequences within the individual. I aimed to extend the analysis of poetry developed in Advanced English to the creation of my own original work. The regret at having lived a grey existence felt within "The Foyer" examines the human response to missed opportunities, while as the hell descends, the more severe "sins of fraud" accentuate these emotions and the bitterness that accompanies them. Through the use of metaphor and recurring imagery, I have attempted to create a connotative response to the poetry, using the term "baobab" in "The Third Floor" to allude to the poisonous growth of what Dante refers to as "The three sparks of hell", Avarice, Envy, and Pride, within the individual. Similarly the classical allusion of Aegeus' suicide acts to emphasise the nature of the protagonist's act in "The Sixth Floor".

The intended audience of my poetry is a literate adult audience with some knowledge of Dante's ideas and concepts. While the poems can be read in isolation, I have created links between Dante's images and my own within the work, to reinforce the universal nature of the themes, and to strengthen the ideas from the audience's perspective. Through imagery and characterisation, I allude to Dante's perception of hell, reflecting each poem's corresponding level of hell through metaphor and symbolism. The use of water imagery within "The doorman", alludes to the River Acheron, while in "The Fourteenth Floor", I use the suffering of sickness in Dante's description of the Falsifiers to characterise the protagonist. The allusions within my work would have greater significance for an audience familiar with Dante's work. The characters within the poetry, however, span socio-economic class and background to establish the wide reaching nature of human flaws, allowing them to be read by a wider audience.

The development of the concept of my major work has involved a change in medium, from script to poetry. My initial intention of creating a script, in which each character was isolated within their elevated society, transformed itself into a suite of poems, as I became aware of the need to express the inner nature of the individual rather than the perception society held of the characters. Through my investigation and redrafting, I have refined the concept of my major work to concentrate on the isolation and flaws of a variety of characters, from varying backgrounds, using my research to further my knowledge both of poetic structure and the themes developed.

My independent investigation in achieving my composition has had three major foci - an examination of the medium of poetry and poetic forms, an analysis of Dante's text,

and the creation of character profiles for my dramatic monologues. Through an investigation of the medium of poetry, I have used various structures and styles in order to create unique voices for each individual character. Through exploring poetic forms, and examining the varying techniques of free flowing poets such as Allen Ginsberg and T.S. Eliot, and the spartan wording of Sylvia Plath, I have expanded my use of structures to characterise the individual. The stoic nature of the protagonist of “The Seventh Floor” is suggested through the frugal language, while strict ABACC rhyming structure of “The Thirteenth Floor”, examines the protagonist’s feelings of suffocation in her role as a bride. The use of concrete imagery and internal rhyme attempts to enhance the character, and reveal their personality through structure as well as language. Through my research I have developed the use of these techniques to accentuate my characterizations, and reinforce the tone and connotations of the poems.

By investigating the language and forms of poets such as Robert Lowell and Dorothy Porter, I have utilized linguistic techniques to express my concepts through a poetic structure. Alliteration and assonance within my poetry is utilized to establish the tone of the piece, the extended syllables of “The Foyer” emphasising the protagonist’s lingering sense of the ephemeral, while the alliteration of t’s in “The Fourth Floor” exemplifies the curt nature of the individual within the poetry. The repetition of “I” in “The Doorman” works as a pun on his position within the apartment building, the all seeing eye that is aware of the people that forget his presence.

Through research and refinement I have developed sustained strains of imagery throughout my work to accentuate a sense of human weakness. The use of recurring

themes strengthens the notion of connection between the individuals within the suite, despite their separation. The concept of time passing is explored through the seasons, examining the ephemeral quality of existence through paralleling life with the “reddish season” and the “forgotten spring”. A focus on the human body, using images of sinews, metatarsals, fingers, toes, and scarflesh, reinforces this sense of mortality, and emphasises our limitations. The inclusion of references to obfuscation and mist throughout the suite further suggests the lack of insight we have as to our condition. Through these themes I have strengthened the concepts of my Major Work, developing parallels within the imagery to highlight the intention of my suite.

Through my research into “Inferno”, I realised the necessity of confining the scope of my suite to exploring the concepts of the sins described by Dante, rather than a further examination of the allegory of a man moving towards God that Dante expresses. By limiting my examination to the principal description of Inferno itself, I allowed myself scope to extend the concepts within the Hell to encompass unique characters that stand in their own right, without being securely tied to Dante’s initial creation.

By analysing Dante’s work, I have developed my imagery to correspond with the concepts raised on each level of hell, while simultaneously establishing unique images that draw from the essence of the punishment rather than Dante’s description thereof. My depiction of the sin of Lust, in “The Second Floor” uses Dante’s image of the punishment of a hollow wind - the sin itself, without illusion - to establish the image of a woman hollowing herself through her actions, metaphorically eating her own soul.

Similarly, the punishment of the loss of precise form and shape-shifting, suffered by “The Thieves” in “Inferno”, is developed on “the Twelfth Floor” through the merging of the rat and the protagonist. Such imagery has been furthered in my creation of “The Hypocrites”, as the leaden cloak worn by Dante’s wraiths is represented as the “heavy mantle” of an undeserved grief. Through focusing on the fundamental punishment and development of sin, I have reconciled my desire to create unique images, and the necessity of including motifs and symbolism from Dante’s cantos.

The characters within each poem have been drawn from the observations of the idiosyncrasies of those around me. The development of characters that were not drawn from personal experience required investigation into varied fields. “The dreaming”, on the Ninth Floor, required research into Aboriginal culture, in order to sustain integrity within the tone of the poem, while the Humanists on the first floor, which parallel the humanists on the first level of Dante’s hell, required a study into existential literature and Plato’s Symposium. In the derivation of characters from life, I have refined the aspects of personality that relate to the relative sin in order to characterise the individual through their weakness. This process led me to attempt to reflect the traits of the respective characters through the setting of the poem. The symbolism within “The Fourth Floor”, the Spendthrifts and Hoarders, is an example of this technique, in which the characters are defined by their possessions. The line

sleek boards...stretch unhindered

aware

of their superiority

highlights not only the extent to which Samantha is defined by her assets, but that the her very emotions are expressed by her surroundings.

Through the development of poetic techniques and investigation of a variety of poetic structures, I have created a suite of poems linked by their division. The unique structure and tone of each individual poem highlights the isolation of each character from their neighbours. By enhancing my understanding of both the nature of human weakness as examined within Dante's work, and developing skills to express the consequences of our integral flaws, I have created a suite which examines the scope of our own faults, revealing the characters as subject to what is essentially nothing more than human nature.