

A CARNIVAL WITHOUT SOUND

1

it is strange to see the young so afraid of death
walking badly dressed in emptied-out streets.
at first, they were not supposed to care much
or to be looking for cheap flights and hotels;
but fear foreruns virus and dragnets foil escape.
no one is quite the same anymore, body or mind,
all succumbing to the ghostliness of the hour.
the bottom has fallen out of the usual charade.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

2

laughter, disbelief, and conspiracies are dustbinned.
moods shift, heavy-bellied with unnamed feeling.
hair lengthens to brute, even women look feral
in a funereal atmosphere where nothing is normal.
we process along paths as pilgrims to Mecca (maybe
Islam was onto something with face coverings?)
or like a fancy dress party where everyone shows up
as the invisible man in sunglasses, bandages, hats.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

3

fear is in the equinoctial weather. the primal war
between winter and spring is in its endgame
so that March would have discombobulated anyway.
fear is even in the sun that registers win-win
by flaming through a status quo of negation
to glow so warmly and brilliantly and sanely
polishing the infrastructural surfaces we share.
the sun! it may be the last some of us ever feel.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

4

people have lost their poise, their bravado
as malaise takes hold of their understandings.
the young Indian in the cornershop is terrified
of his customers' quasi-fatal notes and coins.
his eyes roll and dart about his youthful skull
as if about to shoot out with a sudden pop.
I felt I was murdering him just by perceiving him.
other shopkeepers wobble on the frontline too.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

5

in the midst of no man's land, outcasts regroup.
it's a 'boon time' for criminals who are yet discernible
– though everyone's masked, gloved and hooded now –

by their Cain-like gait and cloven hoppings to and fro
from dealers to users and back, stopping momentarily
to look about shiftily, and then gob on the flagstones.
etiquette of the demimonde? territorial markings?
they are staking a claim in the fresh dispensation.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

6

the spectacle is of a land with no grail. Avalon's
stupefied queues forage for basic provisions,
two metres between wrapped hangdog forms.
on one high street, only Tesco and the undertakers
are trading. pasta, alcohol, soap and toilet rolls
are the commonweal of the atomised-by-law,
some talking into wires like madmen, fiendish;
others vacant, half-afloat on shuttered parades.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

7

ambulances dance via christmas-cake mansions
and brutalist blocks of two-nations architecture
with sirens switching from long wails to short
whoop-whoops along tree-lined, traffic-free lanes.
one house is entered, a ton of chattels piled up
on the grass outside, eerie eviction. another flat
is sellotaped-off. a trio in hazmat safety suits
hovers about the foyer as noiseless as astronauts.

a carnival without music, a carnival without sound

8

freezers ordered, freezers delivered, freezers stocked
in a political landscape like a pop-up morgue.
the older and wiser look down toward the ground
who knew death might come soon, but not this soon.
they too have shopping bags and thinned-out newspapers,
standing under a natural white blossom umbrella
grateful to insert a key into their own front doors.
they know the rhythms of spring better than anyone.

Niall McDevitt