The New Light

The light that I have so long loved turns
its gaze grudgingly from the old view
of islands, from enfolding valleys
waking from their sleep, dew
dangling at each morning’s edge, testing
the gravity of calyx, leaf and stem;
turns from villages at night cupping
their candles in procession down a mountain,
a girl’s giggle muffled in the forest’s throat;
turns from the benediction of the ocean which absolves
even as it embraces, washing colonial guilt
like seaweed from unrepentant beaches.

Now the dream is draining from the shadows
in the valleys, edges hardening
in disgust as the light grows
into a harsh, uncompromising glare.
The sun is turning cynical, taking
its morning tally in the tarnished air
like a complacent prison warder twisting
an ochre thumbprint into Kingston’s face.
The light cannot erase its new reflection—
at dawn an albino hawk circling
a feeding tree, wing tipped with gold,
the glint of a grin from the muzzle of a gun
as a black Clint Eastwood surveys the killing field
and runs that fable through another version.
This is the light that scars the earth, 
a scrutiny that whithers myth 
and cauterizes pain. Wordsworth 
could not survive a squint at it. Pan 
has swapped his flute for an amplifier 
blasting fifteen hundred watts but after 
all the questions a rumour lingers. 
In the city's bursting funeral parlours 
the corpses glow at night, nimbus of blue 
acetylene burning the darkness under the roof, 
lighting up the windows, crunch of gristle, bone and sinew 
as a foot curls into a cloven hoof.

To keep the secret they are buried in their boots 
but under the leather the light still glows, even 
as coarse, wet hair begins to sprout 
over the ankles and along the shin.

RALPH THOMPSON