

Strange Pleasures

The last time we had prolonged
 political disturbances (which
are regular as cyclones or,
 in happier lands, carnivals)
nobody knew anything
 beyond their own anger
or despair, shops were half-
 shuttered, buses ran half-way,
a half-hearted coup aborted,
 the isle of tranquilizers
went up, foreign exchange reserves
 went down, and nobody bothered
to keep count of bodies sent to morgues.

Mercifully, phones still worked,
 were kept busy with chat.
A friend rang to tell me
 how people still tried
to get on with life, indoors
 and out: one man wished,
to have his ear cleaned, another
 who made a living by satisfying
such wishes got down to work.
 The client sat on a stool
beside a pavement near a crossroads,
 eyes meditatively half-shut;
the other sighted like a marksman
 along a thin steel rod—

on his concentration depended
 pleasure and hygiene or pain and infection.
Not far away a few random shots were fired:
 one entered the sitting man's ear,
came out his other ear, entered
 the ear-cleaner's eye, ruining
for good his delicate concentration.

How the phones rang with our laughter:
 politics affords strange pleasures.
But I ought to add
 my informant was a poet
and poets, as everybody knows,
 are not to be entirely trusted.

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