

The Colony of the Dead

Tony Birch

a colonial jewel of the southern sea
this playground all columns and quarried stone
its fix seeped in veins of gold
leaves a taste on the tongue and a nagging scratch

beneath the foundation stone of the city
(‘this is the place for a village’)
lies the hushed consecration of blood and skin
bones and hair and bodies —

500 tongues sounded the sky
when the civilised ‘cometh’
armed with bible tracts and treasury ledgers
warning bells hung with skulls
the dead swayed from tree-tops
and the preachers rejoiced ‘Amen’

now the colony unravels in a daze
this Victorian city tripping out on plastic chips
and a vertigo red-black red-black marble-ball rave
slipping into fits of strobe desperation
the coloniser rests in a catatonic dribble

in *your* city of dead night
when the quiet thinks of sleep
the river snakes to life
a thunder-clap heartbeat speaks back
to a neon mess of global waste
and the ‘washed away’ wait and wait
to come forward in the deluge