

ATOMIC WITNESS

I by myself astonished
Being alive as persistently as I will be dead as those others are dead
Let no one suggest Dante's shadows where literary allusions only damn us for our evasions

You don't need courage to survive
You need luck, the unexplainable which falls on you as other shadows fall on you with black rain and white light

The numbers are against you but somehow you survive: you have been redeemed into life but condemned to ever look backwards

There are no clear marks between past and present?
Wrong.
White light says your past is alive, black rain says it is your future

You remember what you want to forget
The dead live on in the half dead.

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August 6th

Hell's welder was busy making the world his furnace but we mistook the siren for his ritual blowing of the horn and so were deceived.

When the air burns you have nothing to breathe
You breathe flame and death and the terrible totality of a white nothingness
Then a yellow turned scarlet coloured candle fire death-kissed by black smoke
Houses levitating then falling then crushed
And a white wave coming in from the sea
Hell had never enjoyed itself like this before
The floor of the world fell from under me
Then a wall of dust, I was frozen; it was as if the blast was repeating itself
Hell had taken over heaven's power and twisted it to flame
Or was acting on its behalf so that even the survivors are its victims

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August 8th

The living lived on in their burning
Without this there was nothing to identify them
The skin of the young resembled the skin of the old
The sky could not control itself
The black rain was everywhere
The living checked the dead to see if they recognised them
Not even our illusions were granted mercy that might have given comforted us
The soldiers were busy stacking the landing crafts with bodies
Even now I cannot think of this without being threatened by it

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And now the claim is that we live in a peaceful world
But I don't accept that. There are limits to what I'm willing to believe.
The frozen moment thawed but the thawing water is cold.

And the river was cold as I came back to it day after day for eight days
Nor can I say now why I did it when all there was to be seen
Was twisted iron for even the rats had been vaporized

Not to be dead –is that what it means to be alive?
The tourists pause at the peace-bell on their way to the local McDonalds.

Martin Burke, Lappersfort Poets Society