

THE COMMON GUILD

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COMMENTARIES

Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme 'May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth'

9 September – 9 October 2022



There's a wind in my ear that leaves a spiral deep past the canal. There's a shell that fills with whispers, and I lurch. I'm in a former school on the bank of a former goddess, river Clut, Clota, Clywed, the one who is heard, or the one who is hearing.

The space is empty for now, save for the work and seats and me, and I lurch. Pulled forward where I stand – the convulsion is tidal – in the impossible purple surround. I retreat to the walls, out of sight enough for a shiver to fall from each limb. *The skin hears the polyrhythmic shower as a creeping, writhing tactility.*¹ On the first day I trembled, the second day I lingered and today I am coughing. If gesture is speech, then there is a thistle in my throat and I am choking – *SING*.

She's singing in a language I've never spoken but it seeps in somewhere because I want to cry. The inner ear feeds the vestibular and proprioceptive systems, our sixth and seventh sense. They attune balance, rapid responsive movement and internal cues about where the body is in relation to space and gravity. The sun is down and he is swaying, my vision is flooded and the hills are everywhere. *BEING WHERE YOU SHOULD NOT BE*. Hypervigilance arrests mourning's impulse. There is another frequency waiting to take hold. And exile tunes hearing towards its break.

There is a sea in her ear that is dead and calling. There is an echo, buried and loud. If our blood is the ocean folded inwards over an eternity, and if there is enough blood in the soil to call it kin, who is calling and how do you reply?

*'O sea, O sea...' you will not have success in constructing an adequate appeal, but the letter hā trains the throat for the hoarseness of salt. 'O sea, O sea.' And you weep and a little of the salt which wells up in the eyes melts and the intention of the cry 'O sea, O sea!' becomes clear. Take me there.*²

They say they followed the wild fennel to the heart of a former village. *Shoumar* is the watcher. And this cannot be surveillance, it is only ever testimony. They saw the

ruin before it was ruin, they scented the air before the pine fires, *BELOVED YOU ARE WOUNDED*. The pine colludes! it too was conscripted into conquest, like the Clyde and its cotton routes.

The ghosts in her ear are in the wind, the unseeable is unsayable and it is twilight. This same wind in your hair laced the song of the long-dead and their mourners and their mourners. Together, there is a conspiracy to breathe. Tremble rises under the skin and they move in a way that is not dance but eruption. And so goes the enchantment. *THOSE WHO CHANT DO NOT DIE. Those who are dead are not ever gone.*³ The many-voiced witness is listening.

Time leaks in an ache that is chronic. They say the dispossessed are inflamed. But remember, thistles grow in disturbed soil and then decay into reclamation. There's something in the breach that widens and evades, *listen to your blood.*⁴ Maybe, in the end the ache is anticipation. Zahreddine says *"Why do we wish to access the house of the heart? To open the chasm?"*⁵ Underneath, over there, in the smallest pocket of this body it calls back.

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Capitalised texts are quotations from Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme, 'May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth: Only sounds that tremble through us' (2020–2022).

1 Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London, 1998.

2 Mahmoud Darwish, *Absent Presence*, London, 2010.

3 Birago Diop, 'Spirits', quoted in Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, 'South remembers: Those Who Are Dead Are Not Ever Gone' [online]. Available: <https://southasastateofmind.com/south-remembers-those-who-are-dead-are-not-ever-gone/>

4 Pauline Oliveros, *Quantum Listening*, London, 2022.

5 Barakunan, *The Case for Bara: THE MARTYRS*, Berlin, 2018.