

The Slave, The Sea, The Static, The Silence

A full wall projection of the sea – at first tranquil and meditative. After thirty seconds static starts to periodically interrupt the sea scape. Audience members are sat on the ground.

I see your bones
Markings
Lesions
This honeycomb skull

Huh?

No, brittle snap skull

Come again?

No, concrete sponge skull

No, just a skull

I grip it

Waiting for answers

That won't come

*And now here they come
These same pesky folk
Shaking up the dust of the past
Banging with their knuckles*

I

Consider

Doing something a bit bonkers

Whispering questions

Into this vacant bowl of bone

***looks over at me disbelievingly**
They keep going
Won't hush up
They're eating me
My skull rattles
Shakes and splinters with it*

Is it quivering slightly in my hands?

I am going crazy.

Hearing things

Feeling tremors where there are none

Or is this history, telling me something?

*Nothing to say,
Nothing that make sense
To someone who
Didn't feel the sun bake their skin
The constant swing of the arm
Up, round and down
To gather up the crop, wrench it out the soil
Wrench these bones out their sockets
Wrench our souls from these cages*

Wrench?

Is wrench the right word?

Or are the least wrong words

The most I can hope for?

*I have worms in my bowels
Tight tight feeling in the knee and the hip
The times I come slowly down to my knees
Dreamed that death come upon me
Merciful and sweet*

Is this right? Is this true?
Truth and fiction walk shoulder to shoulder
Scheming to tear each other's hair out
Interrogating each other
Interrupting each other
Fiction asks truth a question
And truth responds
With yet another question

*Why these people
Asking me these questions
In a language (I?) me don't know
Can't you see here,
I'm resting
Don't I get no rest, even now?
Just let me rest, ya hear
I didn't die to be a slave to no more
Demands
Even in my own grave*

Now I map my fingers around it/him
It/him?
This feels shockingly intimate
Like walking in on someone naked
Their flesh defenceless
To the excavation of your terrified stare
I'm a pervert.

Oh God.

Oh God.
I have no permission.
Mute and audacious
Marooned in silence
I'm so tired of silence
And how big a mouth it has
How widely it swallows things.

*These are tired bones here
Used to be fight in this marrow
But now all I want
Is to rest these bones*

Bones should never outlive stories

All I want is to rest these bones

Bones should never outlive voices

All I wish is to rest these bones

Bones should never outlive truth

All I wish is to rest these bones

I see your bones
And I, you, history, the future
Is shaking in fear, in anger
I am sorry to rouse you
But we are still restless, you see
We are still restless

*

*They peer in at me
They dig and dig and dig but
No dignity in this*

I am a gravedigger
Atavistic Frankenstein
Trying to make a beautiful thing
From monstrous parts of history
Nothing slots into place, though
Pieces forced, slashed and bent at the corners
It should feel different

*Spose it make no difference
Since I bend and scrape
for the white man
They can piece it all together
Best they can
Hold it up to the world
Least then they know
Least then they know
And maybe then, I get to rest*

*

We study you in hallowed halls
Built from your toil
We study you with money
Minted from the grind of your teeth
Hyenas on the scavenging
Ground of high academia
This can never happen on your terms
This can never happen on our terms
Who wrote this contract?
Scribbled hastily in invisible ink
On the ghostly paper of scattered breath
I have learnt
That people born of this wheezing history
Can never breathe right

*

I have seen your teeth
Years of unspeakable lack
Etched out on a calender of enamel
I have seen your teeth
Reluctant shoots
Punching through gums
Like wilful weeds piercing through concrete
Grind and gnash grind and gnash
You sucked sugar cane and clay pipes
Leaving a tiny valley in the rugged

Landscape of your bite

*

You are 'Individual N52'
How many alien sounds
Have been attached to you
How many faithless noises
Have you had to answer to?
I do not know your name
What language belonged
To your tongue
Your voice I can only guess,
Only ape, only try to carve
From these endless unfurlings of silence
Silence older than chronology
Where is your voice
I cannot hear it
I can see the very bones of you
But I cannot hear your voice
Is that it? Can I hear you now
Can I hear you cough, splutter, scoff
As we desperately, arrogantly
Try and approximate you
Time is an ocean and we are salt
Invisible to the eye and inescapable to the tongue
We cannot swill this narrative from our mouths
Speak now. Speak from the soil, from the bones
From the tiny valley between your teeth
I am listening

*Hold on now, I hear the future calling
Speaking in some tongue I don't know
Somewhere beyond the sea
The sea make music and I like to hear it
They say that same sea betrayed us
Carried us to this place of work
That never stop and pain that never stop
Til the heart stop and the eye close
Maybe then the sea carry me back
And it beg forgiveness
For forsaking me and my people*

Did you have a watch, a calendar, a sense of the years
How they would drag like calloused feet
Across sun parched soil.
Listen to this language I'm using
Decadent, romantic
Do metaphors drape too delicately across this life
This hot, monotonous, muscle tearing slave life
There I go again
Trying to make this a beautiful thing
Tying bows in splintered switches
Poets are historians with gossamer eyes

We tug at timelines
Attach the skins of stories across them like washing lines
Hope we can rinse the dirt of revisionism away
But we rewrite history every time we cast our eyes back
The more elusive the past, the larger the gap for all
These jangling words to fall into

*

*Just as well, cant find no past for myself
Just want to lay these bones to rest
Some place where I don't have to squat
Sit on this mean air
But can rest myself on some solid thing
Ol teeth ache like*

Like what – what would his teeth ache like?

Like sunsets

No

Like fist fights

No, that's not right either

Like,

what?

*Like,
what? Like,*

what?

*Feels like a dream
Thinking of this place I was taken from
This place where I could come and go
Lay my head down where I please*

The past is losing its teeth
It opens up its mouth to tell the truth
And a million sugar rotted, rum corroded
Teeth fall out in breathless stacatto

*I am losing my teeth
I feel em dancing around in my mouth
When I go to eat my saltfish
I spit em out into my Guinea corn*

I cannot sink my teeth into this story
I am met with things that crumble
On contact

*Them used to talk about revolt
bout freedom
bout killin
bout seizin the land
dem restless folk used to whisper
mongst demselves
soundin like the buzz of flies
round a dead body
but I pay no mind to that
old and weary as dese muscles are
maybe when I was a
long tall boy with a head brushing the clouds*

*i'd have felt like two
sticks just learning they can make fire
they'd sweep me up in it
this cruel promise of freedom
i'd have shout and holler and snuck round
been shooting dagger at overseer's back
been planning the life of leisure I have
when i's finally free
be dreaming of the stools i'll sit my magar arse on
no one to tell me where I should be or when I should be there
no, I can sit, burn myself to a cinder in the hot hot sun
if I want to
be acloud of black ash
if I want to
all the sugar cane I will chew on, slow as I like
the plate of food I pile up high, high , high enough so's
I can't see nothing in front of my smilin face
be plannin to lay with any woman I like
to chew tobacco and count the blades of grass
no one to rush me, no one to hustle at me
every minute of every day
but its been too long now
and I don't know what freedom s'posed to mean
what it sound like, feel like, smell like
I know what I know
and too old to start knowing no more
I just want the pain to ease up slow
to die with a dignity that life deny me
to rest dese ol bones with a dignity
that life deny me*

*

Is that right?
This voice I have invented for you?
This thing I have stitched from films and books
Guesstimations, inaccurate grasps at the past
When we speak for others, we always, inevitably,
speak for ourselves, do we not?

*

This conversation is the sea
Each time it comes to rest on the shore
It is sent back on itself
Calling and responding to its own cries
For redemption.

