



when they came/ for you
elegies/ of resistance

CHRISTOPHER BARNETT

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For my brothers & sisters in struggle;
above all for my collaborators of these last two decades

Thomas Harlan & Stephane Anizon

FOREWORD

I met Christopher Barnett once or twice at various performances during the 1980s, once I believe at Montsalvat in Melbourne and another at the Performance Space in Sydney. I think I may have told him that I admired his work. Robert Kenny's *Rigmarole of the Hours* had just published *last days of th world and other texts for theatre* and I was somewhat in awe of him.

At the time I was the arts and reviews writer for *Tribune*, the Communist Party of Australia's weekly newspaper. I was also editing a poetry magazine (*P76*) and was active in the NSW Branch of the Poets Union. I was trying to find a way to combine poetry and socialism and I was hitting a lot of brick walls in the poetry establishment. Socialism and poetry it seemed, were uneasy bedfellows. That is not to say there wasn't some interesting work being produced and some interesting groups being formed. In Sydney a number of feminist writing groups and collectives were meeting and publishing, the Poets Union was aiming to function like a proper (labour) union (and distinguish itself from the plethora of amateur "poetry societies") and there was a writing group associated with the weekly *Behind Enemy Lines* venue which saw bands and performances in the courtyard of the Communist Party offices in Dixon Street.

But Christopher Barnett's work, especially *ulrike meinhof sings*, blazed like a comet on my poetic horizon. I had never read/heard lines like:

.....we have a story about martin schleyer.....
this mass murderer turn labour expert was going to
australia..... to teach their rich.....about industrial
democracy.....well we plucked schleyer out & we left him in
th back of th boot of a car.....we wanted to show australian
workers how to teach their rich.....that is an interesting
dialectic even for marx

This was not just political writing/political poetry – this was writing with a rod of political steel at its core, each word, each space a

demand, a statement, a political stance. But it was also incredibly good poetry in the context of what was being produced in Australia at the time. And though *Ulrike Meinhof sings* is a text for theatre, to read it out loud one quickly becomes aware of the internal rhythms – the patterns, the sounds – which drive the text forward, making the mouth and mind hungry for the next line, the next page.

Writing and politics are at the core of Barnett's being. His revolutionary approach to both poetry and politics drives his critique of the late capitalist society we are living through and shapes how he reacts and rages to change that society in his writing. His identification with the poor and dispossessed and his political reaction to their struggle can perhaps be traced back to his childhood. In an interview with Ruth Skilbeck, Barnett spoke of the poverty of his own upbringing in Adelaide:

The primary impact of my childhood and adolescence was poverty. Profound poverty. I witnessed in a rich country the vast inequalities of opportunity in housing, health and education – these affected me quite literally. My father was in a tuberculosis sanatorium except for the last nine months of his 44 years. The youngest boys were placed in a orphanage for a short time because my mother could not sustain our care for a moment. This abandonment, even short, was enough to seek another family. That family was the Worker Student Alliance – W.S.A – and then to the Communist Party of Australia, (Marxist-Leninist) a clandestine organisation which involved both clandestine activity and voyages in the seven years I was in it.¹

At the same time he began writing. His first poems were published in a school magazine when he was 14 and subsequent publication followed rapidly. Barnett, however, was not embraced by the Australian poetry scene at the time. While on the surface the 1970s and 80s were a period of upheaval in Australian writing, with John Tranter's so called "generation of 68" suggesting at least an affinity with the radical political movements of the late 60s. In reality, one

orthodoxy was simply replacing another. While Barnett read a number of the “new” Australian poets – he has mentioned being “touched” by the work of Michael Dransfield and Charles Buckmaster and having great respect for a number of other poets such as Kris Hemmensley, Jenny Boulton, Bruce Beaver and Tim Thorne – he has written “it was a world I felt little kinship with”.²

Rather than Australian poets, Barnett was drawn to revolutionary poets such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Nazim Hikmet. He saw himself “continuing a tradition of Mayakovsky and Hikmet to read to people publicly – to confront people more than to console them”.³ More importantly Barnett started working in experimental theatre in 1980 with Nick Tsoutas and Peggy Wallach. Here his influences were writers and directors such as Meyerhold, Piscator, Brecht and Artaud. This led to the texts for theatre such as *selling ourselves for dinner*, *basket weaving for amateurs*, *the last days of the world* and *Ulrike Meinhof sings* which, at least in Australia were, until recently the work for which he was most well known.

Then around 1990, Barnett disappeared. Along with many others, I had no idea what had happened to him until I came across him on Facebook in 2010. Barnett’s decision to leave Australia and enter a “self imposed exile” in France grew from both a profound disillusionment with Australian society and culture and a feeling of being “more welcomed” within a radical European cultural tradition. Barnett speaks of his sense of disgust at what happened in Australia after what he refers to as the “coup” of 1975 – “I thought Australia had been given a rare historical opportunity and that it surrendered in a way like Chile to a soft and to my sense more depraved level of governance”. Ongoing events during the 1980s “made Australia a place I no longer wanted to live”.⁴

While Barnett’s work was being widely performed in Europe by the end of the 1990s, his major activity over the last 20 years has been working with the forgotten people in homeless shelters, prisons, hospitals, cultural centres through the Le Dernier Spectateur Theatre in Nantes, France.

I became aware of Barnett’s most recent work through his posts

on Facebook where I first saw the poems that are now collected in this book. It was the first time I had seen poems published at length in a Facebook status – the poems run down the page like a scroll, often in French and then English. They constitute an extended elegy for Furkan Dogan, the Turkish/US national murdered by Israeli commandos when they attacked the ill-fated Gaza aid flotilla in May 2010. Angry, emotional, deeply moving and beautifully written, the work is composed of stunning images and carefully measured words. As in Barnett’s theatre texts there is also a compelling internal rhythm to these poems which often found me reading them out loud as I sat in front of my computer.

The decision to use Facebook to “publish” the work was an interesting one. Barnett explained it to me as a way of allowing colleagues around the world (“South East Asia, Africa, Latin America, Scandinavia, Australia & North America”) to read and respond to his new work. Beyond the power of the poems themselves, there is something paradoxical about a monolithic social networking site such as Facebook being the original vehicle for the creation and distribution of such a beautiful and subversive epic poem.

But having read fragments of *when they came/ for you elegies/ of resistance* on Facebook I was unprepared for the impact of seeing the poem in its entirety. The current version of the poem you are holding in this book is epic in every sense of the word. It is an elegy for the murdered Furkan Dogan, but within the first few lines Dogan becomes a symbol for all the other heroes/victims of oppression and imperialism:

when they came
for furkan
waves wept
for such a sailor
does not come
often enough
this night
i imagine

four holes in furkan's head
& weep
not only
for him
& the other
heroes the other
naturally the other
is multiple
& resistant the other
always the other
juin 10

At the core of this poem is a sense of collective memory – a call to remember the sacrifices, to remember the struggle, and to remind us of what has been and is currently being done to us and our colleagues, friends and comrades. We-the-people (the poor, the working class, the dispossessed, the forgotten) are not in control of the information – what is seen, read or remembered – and for Barnett, memory is central to the struggle to resist the imposition of ignorance on the collective consciousness.

they think we
remember nothing
remember nothing
remember nothing
but we remember
everything
juin 10

And Barnett's memory is encyclopedic. Dogan's death triggers a conversation between the poet and the dead boy/man and though him, Barnett remembers his own passionate engagement with the world, his influences, political and cultural – names such as Paul Robson, the Irish Martyrs from January 1972 and a long list of writers and poets

when i write
night

i remember
chawki abdelamir
when i write
sleep
i remember
taha muhammad ali
when i write poem
i remember
faddhil al-azzawi
when i write
tenderness
i remember
abdewahab al-bayyati ...

when they came/ for you elegies/ of resistance demands multiple close readings in order to extract its essence. At the same time, it can also be dipped into as most of the poems stand by themselves. The work's strident voice reminds us of the battles that have been fought for us, and to remember the history that those "who rule/ from roll/ of dollars" want us to forget; stories of those who fought in Spain against the fascists, against the war in Vietnam, the brave young people who marched in the streets and defied their government to end conscription and the war, those who disrupted the apartheid rugby tours, and those who today are prepared to do more than liking a cause on Facebook by standing up for the rights of the asylum seekers against the insular and racist state and muzzled media and those who refuse to be silenced and demand justice for the Palestinians who have spent decades displaced and attacked.

Armed only with words, Barnett marshals his considerable command of language and imagery to bear witness to the unfolding demise of capitalism and the threatening rise of global fascism.

each poet
an army
août 10

Mark Roberts May 2013

NOTES

- 1 Christopher Barnett. Interview with Ruth Skilbeck (<http://artsfeatures.com/2013/02/01/ruth-skilbeck-inconversation-with-christopher-barnett>).
- 2 Christopher Barnett/Mark Roberts – facebook conversation.
- 3 Christopher Barnett. Interview with Ruth Skilbeck (<http://artsfeatures.com/2013/02/01/ruth-skilbeck-in-conversation-with-christopher-barnett>
- 4 Christopher Barnett/Mark Roberts – facebook conversation

Mark Roberts is a Sydney based writer and critic. He is currently the editor of *Rochford Street Review* (<http://rochfordstreetreview.com>) and has edited *P76 Magazine* since 1982. During the 1980s he was the arts writer for the Communist Party of Australia's weekly newspaper *Tribune*, and was secretary of the NSW Branch of the Poets Union.

text set in double columns

when they came
for furkan
waves wept
for such a sailor
does not come
often enough
this night
i imagine
four holes
in furkan's head
& weep
not only
for him
& the other
heroes the other
naturally the other
is multiple
& resistant the other
always the other
watching waves
& winds
i imagine
you that night
watching waves
when they came
for you
furkan
they were
going after
what they were
not any longer
fighters from
warsaw ghetto
but were pale
imitations of icons
of another time
they were

no longer
escaping sobibor
defending leningrad
but holding
siege to city
where
you will
always be furkan
always be furkan
always be
furkan

juin 10

& when
they came
for you
furkan
they didn't know
what was lost
in that
moment memory
mingles already
with memory being
lost to all
out to sea
is expression
i cannot use
tonight i teach
myself memories
that cameras
cannot configure
but of boy
about to be
man he became
five israeli bullets
took too much
already too many
nablus jenin

sabra chatilla
worlds
we will
never know
& be
known
to any
other than you
furkan i think
you knew
all that
earlier
than imagined
world ehud barak
poisoned with promises
of victory
that shall
not be
& have
no right
to be

furkan
you entered
the nakba
so you shall
never be forgotten
& the nakba
should never be
forgotten

(& that is
first step
to peace
know nakba
like your own
history whole
or nothing)

furkan four
holes history
will have
to find
it/self through
or be never
ending

juin 10

i've slept
as you
haven't furkan right
to sail seas
in search
of other
he knew
as he
watched waves wander
sea that stole
him stolen
five israeli bullets
certain of trajectory
young boy becoming
man on ship
taken down
as they say
language so crude
commentators crawl
around news desks
denying this
death & many
others 1400
for example
gaza cast lead
lead of some
sort staining
lives of so
many too many

losing lives led
complex & tender
as any
you can name
in chicago athens
lyon sheffield sydney
ankara tel aviv
though their
names holy
evidently they are
able to run
their course furkan
not yours
you will become symbol
human
in your burning
to become just
another man just
another man
just a man
a just man

juin 10

it is
said today
one of
family said
you wanted
to become
doctor furkan dogan
witnesses sd
you were
bending to ground
to aid other
when
four israeli bullets
battered & blew
yr beautiful head

apart from this
another to heart
to make sure
this innocent innocent
who has made
our nights poor
of this star
cette seule étoile
dans la nuit pauvre
désolée
you are dead
dr furkan dogan
to be
you aided others
while waves wept
& soldiers shot & shot
& shot again
to be certain
you were innocent

juin 10

furkan i
don't know
why your murder
touches me
so deeply
it does
& that
is all
i need
to know
you knew nakba
& wouldn't forget
families everywhere
your family
you refused
to forget
what others cannot

remember deir yassin
for example
amongst others
key left
in door
for time
to come
back they
never came
back to future
generations living
if it can
be called that
in camps
for 60 years
now nakba
you were just
19
when bullets broke
you apart
from learning
there can
only be
justice
or it is
all worthless
not you
young comrade
doctor to be
you are worth
all our struggles
for breath

juin 10

when they came
for you
they came
with force

that has become
their only
truth told
over & over
again & again
the same shots
the same shots
went through
your head
furkan dogan
they went
through your head
& some unknown
light left
leaving only branches
you held out
while waves wept
& skies fell
in on
themselves
skies fell
like sheets
on all
of us
who are left
poorer than night
defending sad museums
of grief
for you
young doctor (tonight
i witness ways
they begin
to demonise
you as martyr
to make less
of human flesh
of head blown
apart from this
one to heart

to make less
of this
of young man
they don't know
an inch
of you comrade)
who heals
in being
just in being
just

juin 10

we shall
all have to
become little
furkan dogan
we are
obliged to
become little
of you
brave sailor
who wanted
to become
healing doctor
but was cut
down five israeli
bullets shot
within few pace
you never took
it seems
you gave
you gave
& got five israeli bullets
in yr head
& heart
at least
you were formidable
my frightened sailor

who wanted
to become
doctor you didn't
imagine five bullets
from israeli guns
would stop
that healing
in less
than 30 seconds
in less
than 30 seconds
they took
from us
this glorious youth
while waves wept
& are still
weeping

juin 10

furkan dogan
the five israeli
bullets hit you
from 43 cm israeli
bullets hit you
in the back
as with all
our comrades
hit in back
& they will
be surprised
when people
hit back

juin 10

when they came
to take
you down

on deck
four israeli bullets
in your head
one
in your heart
& i am
obliged
to remember
shoah by bullets
in east
bullet in neck
when
soldiers not drunk
which was
mostly
not case
summary executions
ravine to ravine
but here
on deck
summary executions
of nine men
to add
to endless list
you have learnt
when
death was german
gentleman now
israeli commando death
in any language
dead or living
you were
clearly great
heart (one bullet)
furkan dogan
it is evident
in your glance
& i hope
i am not

out of line
to tell you
your eyes glint
as poet
nazim hikmet's did
i imagine
that world
far from you
but it isn't
never has
a poet
been
so clear
about justice
having spent
most of life
in jail
or exile
he had eyes
as you had
eyes of tenderness
& force
a little mischief
mostly heart
pumping
we would say
here where heart
not pumping
in way
i'd want
to remember you
furkan dogan
as waves do
when they weep

juin 10

furkan dogan
lost

to us
who have
gone
to grids
& lines
missing mostly
sea you became
missing
sea
you became
with five israeli bullets
in your head
& heart
whole
with each
injustice we
become less
so much
less than we
thought impossible
a 19 year old
turkish teenager
became just
man before us
despite drapes
netanyahu's murderers
have placed
over screen
& sky
for moment
or two
but in this
time tales told
do not last
so long
& lies
even less
(& to be polemical
for a moment

i am astonished
at indecency
state of israel
styles
into its
survival they
have become
race killers
every bit
as hateful
as heydrich) so much
less much less
history has
way of hollowing
itself out
& then
in its manner
moving humanity
to change
circumstances they
themselves
do not control
karl marx
sd in 18th
brumaire
of louis bonaparte
& i
believe him

juin 10

furkan dogan
not yet
one week
since you were
taken from us
in an act
of common murder
that was

called summary execution
on eastern front
jews gypsies communist
took bullet
in head
& heart
shot in back
standard operating procedure
for criminals
back then
it is
now so present
resonant
how other
is eliminated
from being
present
in this world
furkan dogan
is no longer
present
he has
become future
you always
have to
contend
with that configuration
future
you understood
knowing nakba
not forever
you were
called to prayer
that worlds wonder
when going wrong
to higher level
fred hampton demanded
in some street
in chicago

he told us
not to be
forced by fear
into not being
alive as
furkan dogan
who is now
wandering streets
of our resistance

juin 10

when they came for you fugue 2

fugue 2
it is now
so they say
time though
feels
as if
centuries
pass
from you
to us
today injustice
bhopal union carbide
whomever
they've become
freed in courts
& countries
they own
down
to last minister
holding out hand
in this
moment
i want
to hold
your hand

furkan dogon
for you
never
to be forgotten
as another
fact you are
you are
for me
19 year old
teenager with heart
& head
five israeli bullets
finished for israelis
but beginning
for me
& waves of others
who weep
& from those tears
construct configuration
of which
you
are part
furkan dogon
more
than that
history is hollow
without you
certainly
catastrophe
dans mon coeur
for someone
so young
seeking justice
moves me
more
than these
crude attempts
at loving
what it is

possible to be
even in world
gone wrong
gone terribly
wrong as world
can be
possibility
furkan dogon
created on deck
of boat
in mediterranean
(i will be
vulgar for moment
hearing of this
bhopal verdict
i am reminded
yet again
the principal responsibility
of capital
is to blame
the victim
& you were
only too
familiar
with that i
cannot tell
you how
disgusted i am
at lies
they tell
to cover crimes
worse
they damage
hear
all our heart
tearing away
at it
tearing away
until it

it is
a rag
or a flag
blow head apart
until
we cannot
tell truth from tale
but in this
hour
your breath
breathes on me
washing away
winds washing away
words
becoming breath
breath becoming

juin 10

i refuse
to allow
others
to forget
other i refuse
to forget
you furkan dogan
other i
know i
as you
or any other
who breathes
& in breathing
resists
whatever it is
they call present
you are presence
appearing
& disappearing
throughout this

you are
here & there
that is
certainty i collude
with visions carefully
constructed conversation
about another
poem by nazim
hikmet he
still here
pounding his poem
to paul robeson
giant & giant
who would not
being what
you became
as teenager
that is
permitting power
to pass
though you
as if
nothing at all
to write home
about to father
who now cries
for his beloved
son whom
he expected
to come back
with sand
from beach
in gaza
& an amulet
to keep
as memory
you are living
at this hour
i see you

speaking so slowly
to another comrade
on deck
telling him
how
you wanted
to be
doctor
you were
bending down
to him
after he hit
you were hit
four times
israeli bullets
in yr head
one israeli bullet
in your heart
& you became
eternal comrade
with other
who fell
we all fell
we will
all fall
if we forget
you furkan dogan

juin 10

& now
furkan
they want
to prepare
us
for war
with iran
if that
is at all

possible
but it is
necessary
to be
blind
to what
happened
last week
furkan
they think we
remember nothing
remember nothing
remember nothing
but we remember
everything
& if that
is all
my art is
remembering
relentlessly remembering
who you are
who we were
last week
i remember
details
dread & dumb
terror
at what
they will do
to hold on
to lies
& lies
which make up
in this world
& that
reason for being
so they say
clash of civilisation
conquest or caliphate

whatever it is
that
they are saying
over & over
again & again
& demand
belief
when they
are words
injust in creation
& terrible
in intent
once i had
duty to horror
to live
within it
but today
elite enunciate
common catastrophes
venal
in way
to vanquish
is venerated
only by oracles
who have nothing
to whisper
always shouting
always
stuffing studies
from think tanks
that don't
think
into
silence
of your
breath breathing
furkan
you breath breathing
cutting contours

in this
silence so
i can see
i can
see

juin 10

you are
precious to people
who breathe

juin 10

it is
clear to me
you were going
to be
gallant man
old word
to use
in this
slaughterhouse
where they reward
sin so sordid
there is
little difference
between crime
& celebrity no
difference at all
so your act
untranslatable unless
you struggle
day to day
to breath
in this way
out that way

juin 10

furkan
i am
listening
to wires
being
pulled
straight from heart
because murderers
eat our sadness
so it is sung
by bodies
so broken
i believe
everything
they enunciate
they cannot
tell lies
except with ephemera
they transform
into magic
object of this
to say
to you
furkan dogan
that we
are all
wire & string
& power
cannot break that
thread of threnody
i assume
here & now
night in nantes
talking to you
knowing you
are there
& here
disappearing
& appearing
to me

clearly so clearly
as in all
songs ghosts
make melodies
we wrap
around ourselves
in time
of tragedy
& your murder
furkan dogan
is tragedy
the song
of the goat
tragoidia
we hear
through you
our song
of not
wanting
this world
gone wrong
gone
so
wrong
i love you

juin 10

& i love you
furkan dogan
in way
i used
to love
paul robeson
when i was
child he held
hand in heart
i remember
this black giant
who was

the first
man who taught
me courage
who taught
me tenderness
in force
he gave concert
to building workers
when he was
broken into bits
by those
who rule
from roll
of dollars
they broke
this beautiful
man down
man down
my whole heart
knew he was
more so
much more
so he held
humanity in his
hands so beautiful
voice that vanquished
all we became
when baritone
rang like bells
in empty city
it is empty
tonight this city
i would have
liked to walk
with you
taken café
& told you
histories of how
slaves built

this city
i am alone
thinking of you
furkan dogan
how many nights
you deserved
to walk
in this
& that
city to find
its heart
& you would
have i am
so sure
thinking of how
you bent down
to aid another
when you were
shot five times
by israeli bullets
how everything
becomes whole
when becoming
man you
would have become
all of that
you would have
synthesised so
they say
but bullet
put end
to that
& for that
they are
my enemy
steals sadness
placing power
above all
things & things