Berlin, in Germany Reunified

Berlin, 1991

I

There’s a city over the city,
It flies to us in airwaves that unite Red Square and the mayor of
   Leningrad
with the crumbling balconies of Prenzlauer Berg,
where scaffolding and pastel paint
rain down upon coal-dusted facades care-worn in the traffic-
   choked turnings
past heaving chunks of stucco jettisoned from political ramparts
that once set shipbuilders at techno-cruisers,
then abandoned to drift the masted wrecks
of programs begun under other governments.
II

Flag-draped coffins pass from hand to hand,
no passing mourned but sung, rejoiced in Church Slavonic,
and wafted in the scents of myrrh
packed in from sister cities sweating in Africa,
their sharp-faced mothers wrapped in shawls so very white,
landing in airplanes chartered for freight
diverted from intended landing sites.

We hover, looking up for bearings over the rubble mountains
met by none, greeted by all
staggering along the corridors
passage directed by yellow-stained circles in the armpits of
Bombay businessmen
not lost as we in this bazaar of snarling ancient trade routes,
the memories of sharp-faced mothers
marking passageways to a past we never learned.
III

There’s a city over the city.
We heave and sweat,
our writing obsolete before the pen can cross a page;
we struggle to recognize paved, grassed-over traces
of clearer lines that marked the city’s boundaries before we
began our ascent,
helicopters outpaced by bankrupt airlines,
their lumbering jumbo jets no match in speed
for the news each night of singing republics,
passed from hand to hand.

Our hands unite.
Instead of courage drunk on barricades,
the righteous sing a mass in praise of a history that should have
been,
when glass never rained in sparkling shards
amid the dust of balconies cascading down onto the heads of
passersby.
IV

We say to ourselves our love was right
and look out across each square that once echoed in parade-field lines,
now softened by the whispers of departing soldiers who sing
and cry—
incomprehensible the polar circle they’ll follow home
landing in a place they’ve never seen—
we’ve never been—
where lines are babbled in the airwaves
food stalls, shop queues, and parliaments
bubbled, rippled, shaken, snapped
like shawls fluttering in the breeze
pinned to laundry lines for tightrope walkers
who dance above the scaffolding,
skipping across the antennas that march black in lines across
the sky
high above the flaming arcs of Molotovs
that follow tracers left by carpet bombs
laid down in times now erased by the vapor trails of cities in
the air
that freely trade economic miracles past those gutted cells
burned to their load-bearing walls
and looted to post-war charred wallpaper.

Plastered over
  hidden
  covered
  never spoken of
until flaming arcs light up the night
as signal flares marking memories never handed down—
dead thoughts buried, sullen below the leaden sky,
hatred flickering like a memory across the backs of refugees
burned alive in the shells of their final refuge,
hate’s hot white breath steaming through the oily clouds,
the crisp white breath of frozen memory
inhaled in one communal draw.
V

There’s a city over the city.
Construction cranes pick at the rubble of backstreet courts
wading through the lapping graffiti tide
where all that should be electrified
waits for lightening rods to earth the tensions
ionized along steaming compost fumes rising from ruined
cellars
where bodies piled and disavowed
lay rotting low these many years
no one left to remember
how explosive gasses are manufactured into fertilizer
no one left to remember
the flutter of other mothers’ shawls.