

*Rachel Weekes*

**The Diary of a Superfluous Man**

His ancient gaze raised to settle finally  
upon himself, nursing memory where  
it is willing, only to find most of his life  
forgotten as if he had whistled it from his ears  
as steam and he hadn't noticed, or cared perhaps,  
why should he have cared? God knows,

he knows the value of his wisdom  
these days, late – yes - he lifts an eyebrow  
to resurrect surprise, nods to himself at times  
or sometimes at the birds who disperse  
like omens into the trees, not that it matters,  
why should it matter? We all breathe it

out wheezily when we say, 'if I had  
known then', if he had been able  
to overcome the fatalism and presumption  
of nothingness, the uneventful, those days  
populated by silent eyed mockery,  
but those faces have passed, who looks at him now?

As insignificant today under the lime trees  
as he had ever imagined himself to be,  
to discover hubris in making no mark  
almost with intent, some fate this was – no –  
not even a footprint for the sand, and demand of time  
upon him was not reflection: how can you reflect upon a myth?

## **In South Vietnam**

In South Vietnam, it was hot rain,  
the kind of rain that assuages  
very little, it delivers only itself  
and no relief, thick steam surges  
primped off the puddled dirt,  
we ate noodles and watched  
the side street from a window,  
an old fan noisily shunting just  
more hot air in our faces,  
yours, boiling over with sweat  
whilst I explained all about  
my foreboding sense of déjà vu  
and the rain, the pervasiveness  
of damp like placing cold hands  
in wet pockets, the sound of tyre  
ripping and ploughing through water,  
mopeds and rickshaws here, rain  
thrusting down chopped up  
by headlights and windscreen  
wipers. In the museum we stood  
staring at photographs of war,  
Napalm, Agent Orange, records  
as though they were orphanages  
for suffering. We bought chewing gum  
from the man who had no legs  
perched on a skateboard and postcards  
of the Mekong Delta that stretches  
out from a giant, muddied arm  
with fingers reaching from a hand,  
and washes them as tangled webs  
in the ocean, boats that carried us  
down it were no more than  
cradles for wide eyed babies  
who have seen nothing yet,  
waving to women waving back  
as they scrubbed soup bowls squatting  
on the banks of the river, and as I said

over noodles, gesticulating with a chopstick,  
things seem to be rinsed away like by monsoon  
torrents across pavements, but somewhere,  
somehow the memory remains, retelling  
or reminding, a bit like the dirt when it rains.

## Chrome Man

He had made his mark, that's for certain,  
indeed, he often almost swoons  
under the weight of his own arrogance,  
he leans back in his life –  
he likes to recline,  
launch and clamp his hands behind his head,  
let his elbows spear the air  
as he desk plots advancement,  
he has mastered pointless tasks  
to aggrieve his minions with a sneer;  
the smear of secret smirks fleet  
as if they were waves, rhythmic  
on the shoreline of his domination  
as they do his bidding,  
though each day he plans for  
some final satisfaction, and yet -

and yet the boil of aggression still rises;  
a pustule so violent that at times  
it surprises even him, he breathes in rot,  
he accepts his lot, 'Hold it in',  
he mutters, 'Keep it in'.  
Last night he had one of these creaks  
of conscience, who let this self doubt gargoyle in?  
no matter – in the morning he will forget.

- He might go to the Maldives,  
have massages in low lit splendour  
by pretty girls who smile and ponder  
the degree to which he is a cock,  
and he will eat in beachside restaurants  
and slur demands at subservient waiters  
who mumble 'cock' as they take his order -

he's not a cock of course, but to be  
considered one by the lower orders  
neatly demonstrates their proper envy.  
He will look skywards from a bed of warm sand  
and in the morning he will forget  
this tug of sentimental against his ego.

He couldn't remember the last time  
he'd cried, for example, and this thought  
seemed to gape like a chasm  
at midnight and the cotton sheets  
began to strain, pulled tight, razed  
his skin as though he was trying to sleep  
on barbed wire - oh yes, he wept then  
didn't he? Phew, he's human after all,

or was it Sarah Jackson crying? Damn,

but she looked good in her death hat and tears,  
that's right - and the church pews hurt  
his arse; this was a feeling, but not the one  
he'd been mentally scouring out,  
made him finger his receding hairline  
with nerves like hot lumps of coal,  
but in the morning he will forget.

Sarah Jackson wanted him to look at trees  
and listen to the birds, she wanted  
his soul to be a log fire not this chrome -  
chrome man, a tower, this toppling Pisa man  
scaffolded only by tin cans and shine,  
talks-about-himself-in-the-third-person man,  
but he will await the salve of daybreak  
because in the morning he will forget.