

City of Orphans

John Haines

past tense;
tone of reflection/
nostalgia

tone of detachment

How strange to think of those streets
and vacant lots, the sandhills

Imagery of childhood home
tricolon

where we played and dug our trenches;

— inclusive language suggests camaraderie

excluding the world/
protection

the forts we built, the enemies

— emotive language

war games /
imagined enemy

we conjured to aim our stick-guns at,

— child's play. Suggestion of violence from a young age.

and then went home at evening,

to victory, to safety and sleep.

— game over, return to safe haven of home.
— tricolon

Shift in tense + tone

And now the vast acres of rubble,

— imagery of the scale of waste. After a bomb or battle.

the pitched and roofless houses,

— no longer a place of safety, no refuge

imagery of disaster/
destruction

upended stonework and sunken bridges.

The dog-packs roaming, digging,

— hunting / scavengers

for the one still-unclaimed victim;

— loneliness / isolation. Victim = someone is to blame. Emotive.

alliteration

the stray sniper aiming at dusk,

— shrouded by low light.

and in the roadside fields,

contrasting imagery of
beauty and death / violence.

flowers that explode when picked.

— allusion to roadside bombs

imagery of
isolation.
unprotected

The children wandering from one

burned suburb to another,

— vastness of the destruction. Imagery

seeking that which no longer exists:

— futility

a neighborhood, a playing field,

a wading pool or a standing swing;

for a kite to fly, a ball to throw,

— cumulation of allusions to childhood, and life.

— direct reference to kite flying tradition in Afghanistan / Iraq

or just one pigeon to stone.

small act of violence overshadowed by large scale destruction.

imagery of the underground, the rubble of rich and poor.

And through all this haunted vacancy,

metaphor / imagery. Isolation caused by deaths.

from cellars and pits of sand,

come and go as on a fitful wind

personification

such whispers, taunts and pleadings:

tricolon

emotive metaphor

the scolding voices of dead parents,

the lessons of teachers no longer

standing, whose classrooms

are blown to ash and smoky air.

powerful, emotive imagery. Tone of anger / guilt / wistfulness

sensory images

contrast / safety

And far-off, unheard beyond the drone

futility

far away

onomatopoeia

of a single hovering aircraft -

emphasis of the singular

in Paris, Zurich, Prague, or London,

cumulation representing the safety of the western world.

the murmur of convening statesmen.

onomatopoeia

the politics / plural convening in safety.