

## Poems by JH Martin

### *An Ancient Song*

An ancient song  
howls across  
mad factory dawns  
of rundown yards  
covered by smoke and soot  
and flies in brawling through  
the common sympathy at night,

when  
the wife has left you,  
the kids are screwed up  
and the house has been repossessed  
by the bastards  
who have used you for years  
before they laid you off  
and now want nothing to do with you;  
sitting in bars alone,  
listening to an ancient song.

*Nothing & All*

I am you,  
I am me:  
the packer, the picker, the cleaner,  
the postman, the barman, the bin man,  
the unemployed and the dismissed.

I am the innocent, the guilty, the drugs and the drink.  
I am the repossessed staggering from one court date to the next.  
I am the bed-sit; peeling, damp and waiting.  
I am tomorrow's never-ending hungover, sweating shift in hell.

I am the crowded city  
of a million conversations  
nobody understands.

I am the mistake  
that breaks marriages, loses jobs  
and leaves you sleeping in the park.

I am  
the hope of something better, something true;  
something that never comes.

I am the shadow under the stairs.  
I am rags on bones spraying the sewers with broken dreams.  
I am eyes; red raw and tired, staring at retched insides.  
I am fingers; scratched and bleeding, pounding on backstreet walls.

I am 3.30 AM  
going insane  
under a full cherry moon.

All of this am I – nothing and all.

*Shadows of Dust*

The sun offers no illumination  
in the dusk-coloured brick dust of dawn  
swirling around a woman's figure  
tapping mortar off bricks,  
that last week  
used to house  
in their one room;  
a mother, father, grandmother,  
grandfather, son, daughter, two dogs and a cat.

Where did they go?  
I wonder, sitting, watching, eating steamed bread.

Do the idle bulldozers know?  
Did the tents in rows for the migrant workers see them leave?  
Did the lines of fluttering flags hear where they went?

Or was everybody too busy to notice?

The woman throws the cleaned brick on to the pile  
and picks up another one,  
pausing briefly  
to wave and shout hello  
to three approaching green shirts,  
who wave and shout back,  
then start sifting through the rubble heaps  
for lead pipes, tiles and fittings to sell on somewhere else.

Their shouts and conversation are soon drowned out  
by the claws of diggers,  
as they start up and begin to break up  
and remove the remains  
of a hundred demolished homes to build a hundred more.

In the din of metal on stone,  
the machines, huts, piles of bricks,  
hats and scavenging hands  
are swallowed whole  
by the incoming mist of enveloping dust,  
that turns the sun into a dim lit distant shadow.

Where did they go?  
I wonder,  
watching the steamed bread disappear in my hand.

*Drinking Alone*

Set back  
from the noise and bluster,  
money gone,  
I sit and drink alone,  
toasting my silhouette  
gazing up at busy feet.

I wonder  
where they're rushing to.

I wonder  
which turn they took  
that I forgot.

I wonder why  
some do not while others have.

I wonder  
who will be the next  
to sit where I sit now,  
drinking alone,  
money gone,  
watching passing soles.

*Zeit*

January  
turns to December,  
a little quicker  
every year.

Countryside  
turns to village,  
then to town and on to city.

Things that once were,  
no longer are.

Time  
has taken them back  
from these blue eyes that linger  
on their red lined reflection  
in the tagged bus window.

Not so young now,  
are you boy?  
Not so quick on our feet  
as you used to be.

Tell me son,  
what have you learned?  
Drunk and alone,  
who is your song for?

Caught between  
there and here,  
I have no idea and turn away.

All I feel,  
in the seat of this dusty heart,  
is longing, longing, longing.

*Holograms Are We*

Laughter bellows  
from my shadow  
as empty panes pass through my prism  
but pull in faces from far and wide  
with these holograms of freedom  
to stimulate the dream  
that feeds the city's dynamo.

Disconnected  
from this inattentive current  
flowing through the flux of avenues,  
my eyes roll up and gaze upon  
the mirror ball of dead diamond suns  
around which  
the black hole of our reason spins.

All these illusions;  
flashing between one and zero,  
are nothing but a trick of the eye  
refracted by time's rays of light  
into a world which will cease to turn  
when all this pointless information  
slips past the event horizon  
and the drone of this overcrowded sphere  
is replaced by the silent symphony above.

*Tell Them, Tell Them All*

Tell the moon.  
Tell the midnight.  
Tell the crumbling walls.

Tell the bare shelves  
covered in dust.  
Tell the balcony  
caked in exhaust fumes.  
Tell the empty bottle on the floor.

Tell the neighbours.  
Tell their too loud TV sets  
Tell the broken cuckoo clock.  
Tell the plastic crucifix.  
Tell the lines on the mirror  
cut with God knows what.

Tell the old man in the street  
counting out his change.  
Tell the bum sleeping in the park.  
Tell the drunk going through the bins.  
Tell the hooker sitting on the stoop.  
Tell her shaved head pimp and his angry mastiff.  
Tell her young son crying in the back room.

Tell them.  
Tell them all.

Tell them everything you've learned.  
Tell them what you think you know.

*Hasta La Primavera*

Ugly are the winter buildings covered in underwear.

Beneath, rats squeal and scurry  
by the roaches which line the sewer walls  
above shit filled water splashing over dams  
of rotted refuse, plastic planes and broken glass.

Here, at the end of the world  
is a gallery of spring painted in bright lines of blue.  
Their swirls of new life snake around the rusted pipes  
and ascend from the mountain tops of trash.  
They draw strength from the discarded and grow in the glow of darkness.

Here, buried in bacteria is *la primavera*.

One day it will seize and free the city  
and lead the people to the sun of summer.  
Its shoots will broaden the vision of the streets  
and shower gifts upon the forgotten.

Its blossom will flower in the squalid cracks  
and replace our tired aesthetics with the glorious concepts of the new.

*Hasta la primavera, para siempre.*