

SAMPLER

There Will Be Singing

Also by Aidan Semmens

A Stone Dog

The Book of Isaac

Uncertain Measures

Life Has Become More Cheerful

SAMPLER

Aidan Semmens

*There Will
Be Singing*

SAMPLE

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In memory of Hilary Semmens, née Rainbow, 1921-2016

and for Maria Stadnicka

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*In den finsternen Zeiten
Wird da auch gesungen werden?
Da wird auch gesungen werden.
Von den finsternen Zeiten.
—Bertolt Brecht*

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Wonders of the Age

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Wonders of the Age

anticipate what you will this edifice
will not disappoint you
certain localities like certain people
please us at first sight

at once you are transported
back to the days of the patriarchs
throng of elegant vehicles pass
and re-pass every afternoon

you are a nomad, a voyager
on a petrified ocean
with rolling waves of sand
close by a ruined fountain

at which combatants would wash
after the conflict, patted and admired
by soft white hands
patting brawny musculature

some vegetation covers
this apparently barren rock
and frequently the mouth of a cannon
protrudes from a bed of flowers

to a certain extent all seaside places
resemble one another
the pleasure-seekers depart
with the first cold autumnal storm

they nevertheless preserve unchanged
their forefathers' primitive habits of dress
their costumes exceedingly odd and amusing
their lives toilsome and cheerless

lined with quaint and picturesque
mediaeval buildings and that fatal field
where the modern mingles
with ancient gaiety, splendour and woe

before the rude cabins
rise frequently tall foul posts
carved from top to bottom
into grotesque resemblances

with their unintelligible decorations
letterings and mysterious rooms
the combination of monosyllables
slip from the memory like drops of water

the entire audience smokes
and the performance goes on amid hideous
beating of drums and gongs
the gambling dens and opium cellars

should be visited in company
of a policeman and pilgrim troops
in tenement houses of men dozing
in half-drugged sleep

in this paradise inhabited by devils
it is clatteringly difficult to imagine
how a photographer ever contrived
to represent the street as tranquil

for civilisation is immeasurably
to be preferred to despotism
and here the hallowed waters are lined
with temples and booths where idols are sold

the science of the ascent has now
been reduced to a system –
with fine weather and suitable precaution
there is no very serious danger

grip the thread or wire well
between your thumb and middle finger
and pull gently but firmly
until the mechanism releases

do not attempt to imagine
what consequences your action may have

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Dancers and Architects

on warm windless nights
the old termite mounds sparkle
with eerie green light
flashed by click-beetle larvae
living in the outer layers

you may be struck by the contrast
between the leaf's cool blue
and the glow of the fire
seeping through the wound

shifting winds make flames of the dancing sand
lightning lacerates the sky, lava lighting
the swelling smoke
a breeze pushes the animals along
like tiny boats

elegant swimmers, they will glide
right into you, gently nudging
you out of their way, she says

waterlilies stretch up to sunlight
through a green layer of mist
in a once sacred sinkhole

low cloud covers the meadow
and apollo's shelter among the grasses

the male pauses
in his pre-dawn display
tail and wings fanned and fluffed
against the backdrop of the forest
then turns his back on her
brushes her face with his wire plumes

the massive gorgonian coral shelters
by day a shoal of tiny cardinal fish

a geological event, extreme heat deep
within the continental crust
gave rise to the crystal formation

an almond tree where fireflies gather
patterns of light moving constantly
on the surface of a forest pool

planktonic animals nightdiving in deep water
contrasts in movement and texture
patterned fish sheltering among swaying tentacles

tangled silvery threads, the rivers
and deltas change from day to day
a firework display in slow motion
a giant puffball frantic with activity

tendrils coiled like steps
on a musical stove

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The People's Welfare Typewriter

calls upon you to
imagine Sisyphus happy
imagine tulips
codfish
coffee
imagine the fervour
of the early typists

“thoughts travel the roads
that writing makes”
or so they say

it's said that language limits thought
words and signs unreadable
in an incompatible country

begin then by studying railways
or the keys that shine with use:
emigrant
far away
urgent
longing
hardship
dream

typists more than anyone
must follow the times

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In a Holy Place

the ruin is uninhabited
except by a seemingly ancient
wooden statue of the virgin

odd visions of maybe familiar
people on an unfamiliar street
an altar to the unknown goddess

illustrations of bewildering plants
charts of impossible heavens
female figures in a heavy hand

their postures and activities
having no parallel
in words or their erasure

the agents of conformity
pound highway and byway, not all
their weaponry metaphorical

in this brick structure great families
holy men and mystics meet
women with the saintliest of looks

Brueghel and Dürer study alchemy and law
clocks and musical instruments
in neat but unreadable glyphs

penned into tight cryptographic circles
the manuscript sold at a humiliating price
now available online, alien

fighter pilots and tank commanders
need to focus quickly
on all this corrugated dereliction

coming from an urban neighbourhood
places you in a higher category of risk
where it's not wealth that counts, but change

no one ever launched a war for numbers
and logic won't do it
we need a story, a moral decocted

from the most limited evidence
simple words in a half-formed language
sinister analysis of ritual codes

or perhaps, satirically, vice versa
musicians and enthusiasts, ghosts
at the soft edges of consciousness

mission creep and collateral damage
sipped from exotic, esoteric glasses
in bunkers that may not be secure

beneath their breath, hands holding
red and black cards, the ace of wands
gently waving in a breeze

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