

## AN EVENT HAPPENS AND

It is a bright morning when the call comes. Everything becomes brighter: like a vision of a nuclear blast in a film. It is as if everything solid has broken into pieces. As if the world has cracked. It is a shivering, an unshakeable sickness. It feels like concrete in the stomach. Shattered and stark as ice on deep water, struck with a blade. Like being held under, lungs filling. Sorrow deep enough to drown in. And this is a failed attempt to say: it feels like being locked in a dark room, screaming. Alone and falling. The repetitive rhythm is not a *glitch*, it is an artefact of pain repeating. It feels like being constantly watched. It is an assault: it is a wailing. It is being forced into a nightmare without being allowed to sleep. It is everywhere, as if all the masks have dropped. It is living in the real and it is the remembered real. This is a shattering. A "Textbook version" of trauma as an extreme cliché. The silence after an echo of a stone, pounding. It is begging: no one hearing. Like losing a mind while breathing and smiling. Like a hand around the throat. Forced deeper into the wreck of it. A rage. Like raging. This is the core of the atro-city. The outside world turned inwards.

*There is so much violence.* It is mainlining butterflies. It is swallowing nails. It is being hollowed. Scraped out. As if saturated with a secret that must only pour from eyes. The wind exists

only as pine trees, moving. Trust, the elixir, seeps from our bodies. Always too far away to feel. We cannot stand. There is just skin and hair and fragile bone. It is like being stabbed from the inside. Being held under: struggling, still. Not wanting to move. Holding out a hand, finding nothing. Losing any grip. Being interrogated by buildings, by streets, by your absence, the air. Standing in silence. What is left? It is a heart, broken.

There is no syntax or simile to do justice to this. No metaphor.  
As if to speak would be more violence.

It was as if I had lost language / been forced / to the outer edge  
of words

Left with a body that even Antigone  
would refuse to hold in her arms

It is the immediate aftermath. *I am living / at the centre / of a wound still fresh.*<sup>1</sup> Inside only silence. I have lost all sense of countable time and all respect for aesthetics, which, Audre Lorde writes, *pertains to things perceptible to the senses, which pertains to things material, as opposed to things thinkable,*<sup>2</sup> the unthinkable has happened: it is here. I can only bear this body, these words heavy, in plea to others' words as the I is not only mine it belongs to many

Ocean Vuong writes that *metaphor in the mouths of survivors becomes a way to innovate around pain.*<sup>3</sup> But language locks in my throat. It is wrong to innovate around *this* pain. My limbs are frozen. Is it futile to dig for the roots of violence? I have nothing to dig with but my fingers, these primitive keys as words the only way in. Metaphor belongs to the Eurocentric sublime:

it has no place in this brown skin (which has only ever been understood *in relation to*, as shadow is to light).

An event happens and happens and happens: this is a definition of trauma. Splintering trust in language. This is horror, and horror is piercing. This is terror, and it floods the synapses, freezing all response. Break to gesture. And the gesture of horror is hand over mouth. And the gesture of terror is the blade. And the gesture of trauma is hand over eyes. And the gesture of pain is head in hands. Do not see, do not speak, do not hear. There are acts of such vicious duplicity and damage they turn solid bodies into molten grief.

In moments of deep loss we become as children, trained to seek comfort in the old fairy tales: the fundamental good versus the fundamental evil. We crave the redemptive hope of *the hero's journey* in the old tradition of linear story from when we are born we are immersed in this the dominant mythic; we wait for someone to deliver us

But my skin and tongue are dark. My mind made multitudes by history. Memory as *pani* water as anagram of *pain*. I experience love through a porous border. I apprehend faith as the lack of it. Trust only as its loss. The body is grief, the body is guilt, the body is doubt, the body is the state I must write it. I cannot skin myself. I am shattered: cannot put the pieces down. Cannot speak, cannot ask you to listen. It would be too much to hope for as the event has happened, and when *hearing is a form of feeling*.<sup>4</sup>

Is it easier to write fiction, to represent?

An event happens and happens and happens, as wave after wave, breaking us. My blood turns on itself. I have always known whiteness / as splitting. I was schooled to know brownness as shame. The world as experienced keeps turning. I know that the quiet ones are inside us, waiting, ferocious and bound to harm.

Something has happened: I no longer believe in the potential of words to *resist*, to heal or to sing the horizon.

This is the heart of the country of radical doubt: the atro-city called home.

Its rules were written *in the beginning*. The ivory towers stare straight ahead. Their dizzying heights demand we do not look down. To the unsurvivable depths. Power covers its pale stone red as the autumn ivy cultivated to hide the crumbling bricks. Its delighted beauty rises from these foundations: the organising fictions of gender and race. A class system: education, literature as structural harm. Cracking and breaking: law and order, cement of the atro-city walls. Some of its subjects are citizens, and all of us are its subjects.

And its fairy tale goes that violence is born in some bodies, it lies innately within. The ontological categories are: human, *not quite* human, *non* human That we hide our nature until we choose We must be forfeit from feeling: from our feeling. We must be punished and banished. Made and remade and

nurtured to obey, or reveal ourselves in our *monstrosity* and  
when one case *proves the rule*

To create such categorical myths requires, in fact, a novelist's  
skill. And your suspension of disbelief. The endgame is a child's  
life and mind. Maybe one day even ours

What does the atro-city fear above all? *The dissolving of distinc-  
tions that would separate the inside from the outside; the collapse of  
the fantasy of sovereignty*<sup>5</sup>

Extreme power is a drug; beckoning solace with the prom-  
ise of community / tantalising the shine of individual glory /  
demanding obedience whilst it peddles death.

The distance from words to violence is infinite, unmeasurable,  
and intimate and infinitesimal, and felt as relentless until. Inside  
the gates of the atro-city the threat level is *extreme*

This body is heavy as words they are *unbearable*. Carry them  
now through this pale, flat land, the page. To fact / to lie, to grief  
/ to shame. To daring to speak. There is no safety here.

*When we speak, no wonder: it can feel like everything shatters.  
We can become the point from which things cannot be reassembled.*<sup>6</sup>

Turn an imperfect circle: seeking solace in familiar forms now  
splintered by violence into radical doubt: school, stories, poetry,  
theory, stories, politics, stories, police and return: to prison,  
which at most we only apprehend through the hammering

*fictions* of the reading room, written, they say, for *empathy* –  
heavy, heavy my arms reach out, palms open, fingers splayed –  
but they cannot find yours.

*This is a lament for many. Who will gather and hold these fragments?  
Who will, O who will?*

## ORDER, ORDER

‘INQUESTS INTO THE DEATHS ARISING  
FROM THE FISHMONGERS’ HALL AND LONDON BRIDGE  
TERROR ATTACK CASE MANAGEMENT’<sup>7</sup>

with asides, insertions, questions  
and other patterns repeating

*Begin with the facts:* A convicted *terrorist* attacked and killed Saskia Jones and Jack Merritt at Fishmongers’ Hall on 29 November, 2019. The attacker [ . . . ] was shot dead by police officers on London Bridge.

No: again.

A *terrorist* incarcerated in a high-security prison appeals his *indeterminate sentence* He will now be released *automatically*, in a fixed number of years, without parole board assessment

December 2018. He is released. He is living halfway and then alone under myriad restrictions. He had *counter-terrorism* mentors the government contract abruptly ended. Months pass. No train stations, no trains no internet access, no trips to London, no level of *security* stops what happens next. The oversight of Multi Agency Public Protection

Arrangements (Mappa) probation, police, counter-terrorism, Prevent, Special Branch, MI5 who read *creative writing*, who read *Cambridge University* programme (there was none, post release) and with bare discussion, and the risk downgraded from *very high* to *high* and no one exactly gives permission no one exactly assesses the risks

he takes the train to London for one day. 29 November, 2019.

Arrives at London Bridge to celebrate five years of Learning Together, a prison education programme.<sup>8</sup> Taking university students into prisons to learn alongside incarcerated people. In minimum, medium and maximum facilities (call it high-security, Category A), learning Plato in Philosophy, the laws of probability, and *creative writing*.

The Justice asked the prison governor: *did you consider the risks of putting people who were potentially violent, manipulative and predatory directly alongside potentially young students in a learning environment* yes and the course began

No physical harm came to them there. The deep violence of the prison apparently held outside the writing room. The meeting of *writing together* considered *low risk* the violence of the prison where he was known as *emir*. The concentration on him and his masks the violence of the prison, the breaking the drug abuse, the harm the many serving long and life there the violence of the prison only seen in reflection the *emphasis* on counter-narrative on hope

He took part. He was enthusiastic, did more learning, became a mentor on the probability course he was released. He was welcomed / encouraged / writing / allowed to keep close to the education programme, it was considered a *protective factor* (there were no others) the only thing he had apart from the gym.

He sits through the morning. After the break, he straps knives to his hands, wears a fake bomb vest he made and murders two people at the event. He injures more. He is apprehended by *citizens* He is shot twenty times by police on London Bridge.

No: again.

A British youth, *who all the teachers liked*, is *bullied at school* though *tried to fit in*. He is involved in racist incidents, and in violence turns *recluse*<sup>9</sup> and is done with the place by age 14. At 15, as his sister's house is raided by police, they find *jihadi* leaflets, and so on he faces local news cameras to say he *aint no terrorist*, that everyone around knows him. He goes to Pakistan for time and returns to gangs he never goes back to school *and no one can corroborate* those lost years whether he was excluded / expelled / just didn't show up no one can state the details now ask *how is it that*

He is *radicalised* into violent ideology by known hate preachers who emphasise *education*, (you know the *immigrant drug*). He becomes part of a group wants to

prove      calls what he does *just fundraising*, or simply spread-  
ing the word. They plan to bomb the London Stock Exchange /  
under the guise of *education*      found a *jihadi training camp* in  
Pakistan some say Kashmir      the difference interchangeable  
in the press/ is *redacted*. He is 19

And sent to high-security prison. Spends eight years      some  
of it (accounts vary how much) deep inside *the prison within a  
prison* / some of it (though less than he claimed) in solitary / in  
proximity to violence / the killer of Fusilier Lee Rigby / Anwar  
al-Awlaki      wanting to *impress*      he begins to radicalise  
others / is dispersed / is dispersed / is a bully / is violent /  
hates *criticism* / denies harm or any *culpability* / wants *learning*  
/ never finished school / takes a distance learning course/ *cre-  
ative writing* / is dispersed to HMP Whitemoor / maximum /  
high / security.<sup>10</sup>      Built under the blades of a wind farm in  
a flat, waterlogged place called East Anglia. A one-hour drive  
from Cambridge University where some bright students gain  
admission to life in the once-drowned world      where waves  
of land mirror the long-receded sea      and those who taught  
him face to face      were not informed      he was categorised  
A: the highest risk possible in a Category A prison: among  
the most high-risk men in the country      inside the heart of  
violence there is a cell

Here is a question from the jagged edge: how far must we go  
back to find a beginning? We cannot ask why (the answer will  
break us), but only, hearts broken, ask *how*. He was released.  
No one agency gave him permission to go to London. No one  
denied it either. He said he enjoyed *creative writing*      this

was given as evidence of hope. The only speech possible  
is lament

*Who will gather and hold these fragments? Who will, O who will?*

*Deradicalisation* system untested / *desistance* as difficult as staying off spice / or crack no parole board assessment / the *forensic psychologist* warned and warned that *compliance* was a danger sign / that isolation was a danger sign / that lack of employment / or a gang was a danger sign / he was *presenting* positive behaviour the *probation officer* said, towards the end of his sentence / in the prison classroom / he was released

Straight into a town / no de-categorisation from A to B to C to open prison D / no slow acclimatisation / no re-socialisation / just some education courses while inside starting with *creative writing* it / coincided with a change/ He had a sense of self-importance / he told the gym he went to about his offence / he could not use the library computers when his mentors disappeared / could not search for a job / could not get one / would be on licence for 30 years.

I can write that the body can never be laid down. I can write the fact of its *knives as hands*, as I now suffer them in dreams. Its crimes are its legacy, its only title. Call it liar / reader / murderer/ monster / call it *terrorism*. (Now imagine – the first freedom of fiction – that *terrorist* as a body. What body do you see?) The question of what lies under the skin: silent, electric, potential; call it life and the memory of listening, trying to learn

The forensic psychologist reported that *he showed no sense he had committed any crime*. No criticism ever allowed without resentment. He *got a kick from learning*, she said, *from being highly regarded*. That prison *had exacerbated his risk*. And the prison is a violent place/ that can be believed

He goes on to *who read her report and took it in?*

We wake to the thought every day: good people have been killed. We wake again and the dead cannot speak. Except through metaphor, memories, signifiers, sounds. All stories can be read as possible beginnings, as the event repeating

MI5 opens an investigation. This was not known to his probation. His category was downgraded from *very high risk*. They know he was known as an *emir* on the wing for inciting disruption writing violent poetry throwing himself on the nets between prison floors in 2013.

He was a British Pakistani youth *radicalised* young. In 2009 he is photographed with a well-known extremist<sup>21</sup> whose emphasis is on power and on *education*. Preying on the damage caused by Western political and military intervention. Playing on personal pride, the injuries of everyday racism. This was not known by his brother.

He preaches in public he boasts on a market stall and under surveillance is caught speaking about funding and establishing a *jihadi training camp* in Pakistan-administered / Azad Kashmir – he is the son of a retired taxi driver – *who told him his life after prison was not harder than his was when*

he first came to the UK – he the second youngest of seven – out of home / with a friend / in a gang / his sister – after *leaving* school at 14. He was married to a woman he never lived with or *knew*. He wants to be *known*. He says he wants to *write* – he has planned – is held in segregation sometimes in isolation in prison he says he is an avid reader of novels in prison rife with abuses, narratives, violent gangs, bullying, all the intensity of outside distilled to cells kudos for recognition, praise, to be a leader, radicalising others where more and more might succumb

He is violent as radical form – it is a way of gang life in the prison.<sup>12</sup> He says he is mocked for watching pop music videos – he meets more violence inside – he attends the government’s deradicalisation programme<sup>13</sup> – *to make the choice every day, as an addict must want to abstain, must not choose harm or to harm – the harm is always latent – and can only be prevented* – he says he is celled next to ‘Britain’s most dangerous’ offender – a man named Charles Bronson whose own life has been made into a film<sup>14</sup> who tells him *just do it* or something like that – by which he means attack. He is still *forcing others to convert* as he excels in the education programme he is in he is made a mentor a prolific *writer*

These details are not for juxtaposition or titillation or to pathologise prison or people but real. His prison is a divided place. His mind – doubled locked – a hall of dark mirrors reflecting the bias of whoever he was speaking to back to them now again under decades of splitting the pressure to be *someone* he chooses

Probation visits him for eight minutes and registers nothing of concern. He takes cash out, goes to the market and buys knives. He takes apart his Xbox and makes a fake bomb vest out of a slimming belt. And kills two people at a celebration of education, the creative writing seminar / the poetry workshop he kills two people and hurts more he knew he always pushed to be downgraded to a lower risk

We cannot ask why no one knew what they say they didn't know. He was calm / pleasant / blank faced / always polite his handlers said though he had been written up as *deceptively compliant* We cannot think anymore: *When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time*<sup>15</sup> We cannot ask why this happened, but only, hearts raging, ask *how* He came to be

He was 19 when he was convicted a *terrorist*. He went to prison for eight years. Entered the *subculture* (the legal term for uncivilised, for not like us) the spice. Glorifying high risk, *terrorists* and their crimes. He nurtured these histories political excluding what he would not admit became, it seemed, towards his release a model man. Some saw good change, extremism always present underneath. He came out into a world that responded to his *stories*, to probation and Prevent officers lacking enough experience a world that had been, in the interim, carefully cultivated to become a full decade more hostile than the one he left.

He has forfeited the right to a full backstory, the fiction writer's gas and air.

In 2013 he was found in prison stockpiling chemicals for a bomb. They found a loose razor blade taped to the underside of his locker in 2017 and the address of a prison governor he took part in the government's Healthy Identity Intervention (HII) deradicalisation scheme while influencing inmates to kill and harm others and Intelligence records, (though this was never seen) that he *was playing the system*, his tactic was *false compliance* in reports inside on the wing. Some of this was known but never passed to his teachers who had young students in a high-security room for hours with others and with him.

Living alone, tagged by the state. Wearing new clothes. On-brand boots. Under many counter-terror restrictions he barely knows about. Alone. In a post-industrial town. He never hides his index offence is perfectly compliant raises warnings when he might breach licence conditions unwittingly for example he was given an internet-capable mobile phone he reported it his mentors all underestimated him little state help ego demanding ideology constant, playing Xbox all day and walking around town

The counter-terrorist probation guy *was concerned that there was a celebration that a terrorist offender had* changed his life he didn't want him to take on the identity of an ex-terrorist (*speaking / writing* and so on) He was reassured when he was made aware of the *creative writing aspect*. As if that was a symbol of something and thought *not many with his background are fortunate to get into universities such*

as Cambridge that this would be potentially positive for his sense of belonging to society.

Scant community support: the gym owner, the job centre, were kind. He was not allowed to go on a dump truck licence course. *Creative writing* was considered a sign of hope Those who should not have *come into contact* with him will never be the same again. After years of routine, inside, split between praise and denigration, and the violence of it, no longer in the classes where one could prove something to oneself, feel the respect of peers, and this is true. Experts around him hearing only his stories his theological mentor called him a *compelling storyteller* but did not know (because he was not officially told) his offending history preying on hope goes *two ways* the horror is in the depth of intention, the intimate violence the failures to read the signs O my heart

In the heart of the citadel his image was featured as a story of achievement, the face of the prisoner education programme. He was far from it *writing a play* about a knife attack MI5 considered it simply *rehabilitative* (the rest will be redacted) *as no one admits that in retrospect anything could have been different*

Language doubles and folds as a witness remembers him saying, minutes before he went to prepare, something like, *he had been involved with a group of people who had been leading him down the wrong path, and he was essentially turning another way, or a different way it was words to that effect*<sup>16</sup>