

Ghost town by the sea

The road cuts straight into a distant point,
Vanishing into the dull grey mud that closes left and right.
No turn is needed through the grey flat fields,
Of mortar, level spread and sun blanched light.
Far off the steel still Bohai Sea is a narrow blade,
Paring the land from the broad bland sky of equal pale.
Into the windows of the bus, the colourless views
Are framed like war time prints of Passchendaele.

We pass nothing live. In this newly reclaimed land
Of salt and extremes of the seasons, weeds don't thrive.
In trenches, pools guard the remnants of the sea,
Filling and drying in memory of the now distant tide.
But birds don't wade along their white crusted edge,
Or float upon the rising heat. Their absence clearly signs,
As we charge across the empty no-man's land,
Of lost life and the passing of the once wild coastline.

Then a change; electric pylons first flash past,
Then billboards with impressions of the place it will become,
Growing from the wasted land, its past re-envisioned
And reconstructed into the new town of Li Yumen.

We stand down from the bus and saunter to the harbour,
A parade of pictures promise sleek white yachts at moor,
In front of restaurants where the well dressed
Look on, or dine and drink at tables set outdoor.
Before these future dreams, a single coast-guard boat
Anchors beyond the swell on khaki-coloured rocks,
Where a man, slowly, with stick and plastic bag combs,
Near gull-like bodies of bobbing styrene blocks.

The restaurant's style, part pillaged from Chinese tropes
Are stone, coloured wood, sweeping roofs where lanterns sway,
Hope to sell a make-believe of fish fresh landed here,
Not brought in from farms, frozen far back along the way.
Behind them, empty new built flats wait to welcome,
In landscaped grounds and planted roadsides. We explore
The roped off beach of imported sand being dumped
In a gold veneer over the dark and mucky shore.

We leave the lost and imagined lives and vacant homes,
And the phantom fishing ships setting out from the quay,
To dredge the shallow grave of the old beach that lurks
Beneath the sands, of the ghost town by the sea