

Blake's Ghost

V.Q.

2013

On August 7 2011, cops shot dead an unarmed black man in London, one of countless murders by the police. The murder of Mark Duggan, together with widespread fury at the social conditions of many people as the poor get poorer and the rich get richer, fuelled five days of rioting across England.

it was the usual situation
Blake had been here before
when he had watched the fiery coition
lick wordlessly at Newgate's door
now it was carpet shops, clothes outlets and the odd electrical store
broken glass, cardboard boxes and anti-theft tags on the floor
Blake sang with pride and joy
feeling that ferocious feral feeling he had felt before
all those centuries ago when, almost still a boy,
he had joined the long-awaited insurrection of the poor
he was dead now, of course, but as 'progress' turned about-face
his ghost became sandwiched in the narrowing of time
and he was sucked rudely out of sleep
by the dream of wanton plunder at the core
still stilling the conscience of the sheep
that let the rich and vicious destroy their own and nature's store
Blake found himself drawn forth by recollection,
the wheels of history turning always in the same mud,
giving merely the impression of movement
Blake loved the August flames
as he had once loved those that battered Newgate's shore
his ghostly hand lit fires from Salford to the Thames
and he cried out, with the others, for more, O more!
And no more too. No more poverty, politicians, bankers,
no more cops
let's just press on until the thing itself collapses, til it stops

Blake felt right at home
as he pulled Nike trainers on over ancient leather shoe
noting that the style was different, the accents strange in tone
and round black robots in the sky watched your every move
but the people still sang strong their loss of innocence,
their songs of experience
and they had not, he saw, forgotten how to set fires at the enemy

four months later, Newgate is full once more
the herd clamouring for morality in hell
when there is none in heaven
and the poor are plundered yet again in the Autumn speech,
a month before
the bankers collect their Christmas reward
for pious observation of the Seven
Blake turns in for the night, but he keeps one ear cocked and hoping
because he knows that riots like to dream out in the open

[ed. - William Blake was a visionary libertarian poet in Britain, fiercely anti-racist and anti-slavery. During the Gordon Riots of 1780, led by African-Americans at the time of the war between Britain and rebel colonists there and during which rioters systematically destroyed every prison in London, he took part in the burning of the newly-completed Newgate Jail (a mob attacked the prison gates with shovels and pickaxes, set the building ablaze, and released the 300 prisoners inside. Blake was reportedly in the front rank during this attack). He also wrote against wars and the blighting effects of the industrial revolution.]

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