



**DIVIDE AND RULE**

**WALID BITAR**

## DIGGING A HOLE

Heavily censored, how tunnellers live:  
as we please, around here, an elite –  
in the majority, persons of interest  
cultivating for rices and beans.

I jump beautifully out of the way  
before a backlash our lower classes  
consider a right: holding the noble man's  
feet to a fire he carelessly sets.

Dance, my eldest shall study abroad.  
Rather than institutions of higher  
learning, I chose water muddied  
by my dirty shoes, peered into depths

and started digging a hole, first step  
toward destabilizing the planet,  
its orbit difficult to disturb,  
its hot core solid, or I'd fan the flames.

## AN IMMIGRANT

They're good judges, or they wouldn't have risen  
slowly so far. I wasn't their pilot;  
I was presiding. Did they obey orders?  
Didn't give any. Clinging to power,

I paid for services, expected miracles  
and am waiting around with the patience  
of a besieger, thus can't surrender.  
I'll see the light, allow that it's faint,

suppress a narrow range of emotions  
you assumed extinct till informed exotic  
jungles they're from survive in a foreign,  
partially peeled banana republic

whose dictator disgusts me personally,  
though he and I are both larger than life,  
and terrified of death. What does that leave?  
I am in a position to compromise,

will spare you grammar in your harsh sentences,  
if you solve this puzzle: a mulatto  
won't accept our lovable greenbacks  
as proper payment for his petroleum,

demands from us illegal rain checks,  
his drought-stricken godforsaken country  
mine for crying out loud. I was born there.  
Should I, like any immigrant, save my skin?

If you concentrate, pleasure and pain  
rise to the levels of happiness  
and suffering. I once shovelled manure by day –  
by night, this sight for sore eyes: bullshit,

the pure kind, inhuman, not animal,  
I'd find a better way to describe,  
if that were in my interest. It isn't.  
You'll never tame me. I was never wild.

## SCORCHED EARTH POLICY

I can't beat your ignorance senseless –  
it's an idea, unaware it's for real,  
like wisdom actually. Grant me this much:  
I never found the golden mean tempting,

my dates with destiny, marriage arranged,  
years bragging about rights to bear arms  
ending in some kind of engagement with  
loggers turning roots into a living –

beneath the dignity of our autochthonous  
factotums a devious Druid trained  
to tread water they couldn't hop on.  
Their whistle-stop we napalmed boomed,

our main chance jumped at, ground hit running.  
You'll never see the forest, for the trees  
your points of view excluded don't exist now,  
on account of the scorched earth policy.

## GRAVE ROBBERS

It was during my penultimate escape  
attempt I determined I was a prisoner  
of no beliefs, denied a fair trial,  
since I could play either victim or thug,

each working wonders out of his failure  
to do the right thing – there's always the wrong.  
Child of the Enlightenment, I let off steam  
after confirming the air's cold enough,

your loudest disciple, hearing voices,  
none yours – the thousands you've heard  
weren't either. The proof I'm loyal:  
I can't trace where mine come from,

except on rare occasions singers  
whose graves we rob return in styles  
that whipped both of us into a frenzy  
when we were young, and they were lionized,

paid precious metals. Sell their stones.  
Hail the virtuosity we'd put behind us.  
Hoist their human remains on our shoulders  
for this last stage of the decaying process.

## SHOCK AND AWE

We despise your subtropical accent,  
although it's roughly the same as ours.  
Man isn't rational, boy – boys are.  
Coincidentally, eternal youth's

our final offer. You'll owe, in return,  
shrugs of the shoulders. Won't teach you manners  
I've never quite gotten the hang of,  
torn from the womb mature, aging badly,

not raised like you were, or as you,  
stating the obvious rarely worthwhile,  
a second front opening in the war  
I've been waging against a false friend,

a correct one demanding the floor,  
convinced, when tanked up, years spent researching  
the forgettable weren't a waste – he discovered  
peasants in a medieval cathedral

for the first time channelled shock and awe  
more fluently than either good or evil.  
Unrecorded, their dialogue,  
as you wish your speechlessness were.

## OUTER SPACE

Given more choice, I'd certainly take it.  
Instead, let's conclude I'm indecisive –  
better that than the ignoble admission  
I'm awaiting orders from above,

immediate superiors polytheists  
offing requires divine intervention  
tricky under the circumstances;  
the gladiators who speak in tongues

are outside my circle I drew freehand.  
Insiders lost, ages ago,  
a sportsmanship they had, or faked,  
when our game was serious. It's still no joke,

and you're winning, relaxed. The nerve –  
you beam, inculcated with grace  
I deserve. Unjust, my sentence,  
commuted from inner to outer space,

trains of thought laid tracks at a loss –  
no paying passengers on board,  
man of the people, standing ground  
I, their absentee landlord, own.

## HABEAS CORPUS

I've caught traumatic memories experienced  
enough to dodge human consciousness  
the prime years I was right about everything,  
me forgotten now as my predictions

that came true – your media reported  
my instincts were down, base, then kicked,  
man's warmest contribution his corpse's,  
if the last heartbeat comes from the right place.

The dead can't plead ignorance: we record  
what happens next even when blows are fatal –  
my throat slit during a siesta,  
I awoke refreshed in this new world,

captaining ships, pulling strings,  
the sailing clear. I'm out of rope,  
wasn't numbered among the prophets  
our special ops left swinging back home.

We issued licences to kill or live,  
though the ones you've applied for, to die  
under mysterious circumstances,  
the late admiral hasn't signed yet,

time passing quickly, slowly as well,  
depending on the mood he is in,  
sharing it with us a dramatic effort  
in which it's every man for himself.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Run along into oblivion, or  
I will bump you off in the limelight  
before your heldentenor imposes  
restrictions on the music in my head,

the tunes less globalized than they could be  
in various money-spinning ventures  
vulgar to the aristocrat in me.  
He's equally vulgar – born a peasant,

I celebrated any holidays  
we could get, flexibility a sign  
from heaven we were on the fast track,  
though that interpretation is mine,

mine the glory, and if it turns out  
I am wrong, I deserve applause  
for essaying the impossible.  
Who else around here takes the trouble,

the majority of our population  
bowing and scraping as if outnumbered?  
I was calculating the ratios  
when I received a generous offer

from courtiers hardly worth bringing up,  
but we've drifted onto the subject:  
I suggest a moment of silence,  
more than sufficient – they're alive and well,

each disguised as none of the others.  
When he's himself, he improvises,  
occasionally speaks his mind, the idiot –  
not a mother tongue like you, and I'd

happily leak almost anything  
if I were you, as I wouldn't care  
about unintended consequences.  
I'd only be you temporarily,

the weight of the past unbearable –  
a fraction lighter, though, than the present.  
By the time it makes me gasp,  
I have had a chance to rehearse.

## MARGIN OF ERROR

If you deliver belief in a saviour,  
you'll receive my life savings, a sum  
almost equal to its margin of error,  
price of a holiday in the sun,

where the rich disappear, suffer less  
than us voyeurs left behind in limbo,  
name we give an introspection  
we are constitutionally unfit for,

shuttering windows when tempted to shake  
their transparent surfaces for the hell  
whose views I'm certain a crash wouldn't change,  
plus we'd be left X-raying hands,

vastly preferring the luck of a draw  
to either the winners or the losers  
sharing our salient character flaws,  
why we try to outsmart one another,

help entry-level staff, learn to love  
watching ourselves wipe mirrors, such romance  
irresistible – we're so repulsive  
on the inside we can't look half as bad,

desires burning with no objects in sight.  
I advise blaming an arsonist,  
and wouldn't bother feigning surprise,  
should it emerge you were him all along.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Walid Bitar was born in Beirut in 1961 and immigrated to Canada in 1969. His previous poetry collections are *Maps with Moving Parts* (Brick Books, 1988), *2 Guys on Holy Land* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993), *Bastardi Puri* (The Porcupine's Quill, 2005) and *The Empire's Missing Links* (Véhicule Press/Signal Editions, 2008). He lives in Toronto.