

B of the Bang

B of the Bang is/ was the giant sculpture designed by Thomas Heatherwick to celebrate the 2002 Commonwealth Games and the regeneration of East Manchester. Sadly, spikes soon began to fall from the sculpture and it has proved impossible to make the sculpture safe. Work has now begun on demolishing it.

Some might see it as a symbol of the regeneration process itself.

But this poem was written soon after the glorious sculpture's unveiling and captures something of the hopes and dreams for our community at that time. It also looks back and laments the obliteration of the terraces houses and community built around the colliery that historically stood on the site of the sculpture and the stadium. As such, it is unlikely that you will ever be able to 'contextualise' this poem to use in your context, but you may simply enjoy it for what it is and as an example of how we have attempted to reflect upon our story - we'd love to read your reflections on your own stories via the blog.

Shards of starlight
explode onto the cityscape
a ball of raw
un-containable matter
splintering the night sky
into filtered alchemic hues
of neon green, cobalt blue
and sophisticated indigo
"B of the Bang"
yells my three year old
without fail each time we drive by
and the goose bumps
send a shiver of excitement
down my spine.

B of the Bang
and the athletes burst from the blocks
an explosion of energy
honed and refined
for this snapshot of time
the crowd roars
faces resembling you and me
for just a fiver
or a tenner for the good seats
the chance of a lifetime
to revel in the underdog's success
a rare moment of heads held high pride
for a community
of multiple deprivation.

Half an hour spent
attempting a simple 5 min walk
from Asda to the stadium
barred by iron railings
8 feet high vandal proof fences
and numerous sprawling lanes of traffic
not resident friendly
but designed for VIP's

and the inevitable property developers
the aqua blue Games cheeriness
daubed to hide boarded up houses
now peeling
exposing the cracks
in the Commonwealth façade.

If you stand on the corner
and listen
behind the din of traffic
and awe of B of the Bang
you can hear men's voices
as they arrive with flask and lunchbox
helmets and lamps at the ready
for their shift down the pit
stories of everyday families' terraced lives
stories of births, deaths and disasters
laughter lines on coal smudged faces
the grinding machinery of the pit
tolling away the years
fuelling the machinery of industrial revolution.

Look into the shadows
under the shards of starlight
hear the beat of the Eastfeast carnival drums
see the swirl of rainbow coloured fabrics
sequined to the hilt,
masked dancers moving to the beat
faces of passers by painted
rain splashed parties in green spaces
children designing rubbish bins and railings
large scale xylophones and whistles
built into play parks
community gardens flourishing in back alleys
youths renovating peace sculptures
the heartbeat of community art is not silent.

Where today the baby born?
SportCity sophistication
or two a penny terraced house?
Where today the triumphal entry?
Lord Mayor's procession
or Mardi Gras carnival?
Where today, the cross outside the city?
Suburban fenced-off nature reserve
or city scrap yard?
Where today the rising of the Easter dawn?
Shards of public starlight
or back yard community garden?
Where today do we hear God's voice
Public articulation or the sighs of community?

B of the Bang
or the gentle, inevitable
rising of the Easter dawn?
Shattered confidence
and low morale
turned to disbelief and amazement
He is risen,
not with fanfares and royal proclamation
but with women whose stories were not trusted
with trades folk and loan sharks
among housing estates and supermarkets
canals and scrap yards
inconspicuous yet unstoppable,
incarnate, God with us.

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