

*On The Badlands  
Of New Times*



*poems*

Paul Bamberger



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for  
Altagracia, Deidra and Vanessa

it's winter now  
snow has covered precision-like  
all that wasted summer

Bob Ellis

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*On The Badlands Of New Times*



*Boy With BB Gun*

so much lost in the killing of a sparrow

## *Collateral Damage*

### 1 *mothers and daughters*

they struck him down hard early in life  
he slaps me around plenty  
i cannot leave  
my daughter never cries

to feed my daughter  
i'll take on the whole lot of you  
the young men howl

i am a young mother in a time of famine  
my daughter dying at my breast  
my husband wanting a son

my daughter is a love child  
a family secret  
a wedding to make it right

they have a one child policy here  
he took my daughter  
sold her to the americans

as a child they mutilated me  
for fear i might become the woman i have become  
they will never get to my daughter

my daughter pregnant with first child  
the shift supervisor tells her child or work you decide  
but mamma we need the money

to hide my beauty from the others  
he makes me wear the burqa  
my daughter so very beautiful

2 *oaxaca*

each day she sits against a wall in oaxaca mexico  
child asleep in her lap hand outstretched  
eyes fixed on the eyes of the visitor to oaxaca mexico  
para mi hijo para mi hijo por favor  
but the visitor to oaxaca mexico in passing sees in her eyes only the eyes of  
    a peddler's daughter  
and squeezes by  
disturbed  
ten thousand years in the eyes of a beggar sitting against a wall in oaxaca  
    mexico  
child asleep in her lap hand outstretched  
in oaxaca mexico when a beggar dreams a leaf falls

3 *shadow girl*

shadow among many faceless shadows  
bent to machine this girl  
this shadow girl  
prudent men at sundown pull fedoras low and head home

4 *Gülderen Baran*

tonight in istanbul Gülderen Baran blindfolded dragged into police headquarters  
stripped naked  
    raped strung up to die  
refuses to die

5 *Farmer in bell*

(Frances Elena Farmer at steilacoom may 1945 - march 1950)

said to be dangerous  
a man calls you out  
vocal lover silenced  
stripped by men of ragged intimacies

long burn down expose of legs thrown apart  
careless starved men take you down into the dirt  
money passed around  
hands of dark insanities  
grope the furies  
papers signed  
give the right  
needle one  
needle two  
needle three  
needles  
all the way down

## *Preludes To The Past*

caught in the last improbable light of the pretty hour  
nerve endings of paradox hum destiny's long shot  
tomorrow's brilliant rational truth's sharp tongue  
swing of axe shadowing its own to and fro as desert  
traveler crosses the slow red decay of dying sun and  
small lie howls there is always something in it for  
you but we who harvest wildflowers on the dark side  
of the moon have our own brothers to keep  
what studies we are slow steppers looking for cau-  
tion sign dreamers of lilies in shock time blind to  
evening's tomorrow no more than what meets the  
eye no walk arm-in-arm dream lowered into the  
dark what could have been  
what are we thinking this no rags to riches story  
no home sweet home let's go home baby no sweet  
dreams we got it made baby nonsense and the long  
haul's what brought us to this street multitudes  
scavenging among the well-fed dogs old men pac-  
ing cluttered rooms running out of time losing their  
timing making no sense of it joyless hearts riding  
their shadows down to where the rattled bones are  
laughing door left ajar  
and from the unlucky we steal long shots to pay off  
the junkyard dog bone has its use

*And Me Thinking All The While Tim McCoy Envisioned  
The Ghost Dance*

the damage swift across the catalogued night sky the slack-jawed dark deaths  
they held hands circled to the left that no harm would come to them  
and me thinking all the while tim mccoey envisioned the ghost dance

and the young warriors war-cried the blood and tears of the dying the whiskey  
wars a drunkard's path  
they held hands circled to the left that no harm would come to them  
and me thinking all the while tim mccoey envisioned the ghost dance

hunger shadowed the path the rats at their pleasure no trick to it at all  
they held hands circled to the left that no harm would come to them  
and me thinking all the while tim mccoey envisioned the ghost dance

let the dead serve notice they are close by and think nothing of it  
old men will tell of a time when the people held hands circled to  
the left that no harm would ever come to them  
and me thinking all the while tim mccoey envisioned the ghost dance

bird fly your lunacy wisely the glory of morning's abide

## *The Poor Are Poor Because We Cheat Them*

nothing so compelling as the winds of social injustice sweeping across the  
grasslands of give nothing away  
the poor are poor because we cheat them ten thousand years cheat them  
the wretched three billion the two dollar a day twelve hour shift shadow girls  
the abort the child to keep the job to keep the family fed shadow girls  
and by god get the boy to feel like a loser you can sell the man any  
proposition to ease his pain awhile  
the poor are poor because we cheat them ten thousand years cheat them  
their courage their vigilance bear the mark to each his bone  
get the other guy to work the street  
ten thousand years a man works the poverty shakes the hand of half truths  
tells his children everything will be OK soon becomes that poverty  
ten thousand years the sons of the poor sent to war  
blood flow poverty boys paid the greed wages of war  
and no matter what the talkers say know it is their brothers they kill  
ten thousand years poverty's lovers love in the shadow of a dream that can never be  
could it have been otherwise  
what's going on here in these it no longer matters times  
these cold sweat fall flat on your face times  
one grows suspicious  
no amount of singing can change that

## *Citizens By Night*

day ends sky pales evening fades hard against the chaos  
the crowd gathered to watch their city rise to the sun is gone  
figures bent to shadows make their way along broad avenues  
the homeless nod to passersby ask nothing of them  
boys on street corners make their jokes rifle-shot of laughter  
in their rooms young women turn to mirrors  
find there less than they are rumored to be  
what is whispered about the city in its swift give and take swallows up  
river pitches its green warning  
pigeons keep to window ledges  
down alleys neon looks to take a life  
moon on the rise  
dog on the prowl  
and yet for a few bucks the sweet promise of things going one's way  
and hawkers come to the street looking to sell just the one thing  
old men squat in doorway shadows listening to what the street has to say  
women huddled to coats hurry by  
young men lean against walls smoking thinking why not anyway  
workers out of the factories caught in the crosshairs of river light hurry home  
boys born to the street climb the back fences into the long season of the lie  
looking for clarity where clarity is sought after after hours  
find there is always the catch always the thing unproposed  
in the joints the pale women dance the evenings out on what the boys  
    who have nothing to say say  
can't they talk these boys  
each answering to the absurdity of his own question  
their talk backing the pale women against walls  
where hands that know their thighs slap the years beneath their skirts  
flesh where bone shows its wound  
but the pale women know not to let these boys down  
in dance timing is everything  
with first light the petty criminals jack it all in for some low rent memory  
hurry home  
cart men come to the street telling their one joke  
a young woman walks a bridge  
morning burns through the night

## *A Country Of Long Winters*

a black man once came to teach us how to dance and all hell broke out  
where winter tracks of mother and father and child fall away into deep  
forest shadows the promise of a new nation  
where dark figures dance against winter's hard fires to keep fear at bay all  
of a wilderness in which to wander  
we chose to run the Indians up the pemigewasset into the coos  
dogging them into a season of starvation  
got liquored up in the high country  
the cool easing down into savagery  
a time of stray dogs and lean wolves  
feared our shadows on the wall  
knew only where we did not want to be  
grew restless  
traveled west beyond the towns beyond kentucky outposts farther out  
traveled up rivers where shadows shadow a man  
where all gain is loss  
the raw awareness of death  
children deep into their fear  
nowhere to go but up river  
nothing to do but say nothing  
keep moving

we came a long way on the pocket change of what he said  
naked before the dream  
eager to dance the watery circles that don't easily give up their speculations  
wanting only to sing among the yellow reeds  
bowed to the aesthete of the dry well  
crossed a cold land where rabbits circled back set snares against  
the long short of our days  
where shadowy birds swept low along the horizon  
we thought often of home  
of sweet things carefully chosen to please  
watched for clouds

we were told the land was ours for the taking one dare call it gift  
told we would under god be a people a nation to be reckoned with  
in back rooms give them their nation we will always have their tongues  
soon swift on the wing of carrier pigeon word came down

the land taken  
a nation born

1861 the Navajo massacred at fort wingate  
1864 the Cheyenne massacred at sand creek  
1864 the Navajo massacred at canyon de chelly  
1867 the Cheyenne the Sioux the Arapaho massacred at hayfield  
1868 the Cheyenne massacred at washita  
1869 the Cheyenne massacred at beecher island  
1869 the Cheyenne the Sioux massacred at summit springs  
1869 the only good Indian i ever saw was dead- general philip sheridan  
1872 the Modoc massacred at lava beds  
1877 the Nez Perce massacred at big hole  
1879 frederick w pitkin governor of colorado referring to the Utes Indians  
my idea is that unless removed by the government they must necessarily  
be exterminated  
1883 the u.s. supreme court decides the american Indian is an alien by birth  
1886 -give-me-your-tired-your-poor-your-huddled-masses-yearning-to-breathe-free  
1890 the Lakota massacred at wounded knee

the country was growing

as smoke trailed low toward the west out of the towns the need to distance  
ourselves from the unmarked graves  
the women in their silence understood  
questions cropped up  
some lost faith  
heads rolled of the people by the people for the people  
in the hollows night fires burned  
nightriders slumped drunk on swayback mounts  
their coarse women of hard intent dancing with their hair shaken out  
the night fires shadowing the hanged men

soon they came from everywhere  
for love of the nation took new names  
for love of the nation quarried the rock worked the factories fought the wars  
for love of the nation gave over sons and daughters  
the census scripted possibility  
but in the cities the unsaid had at them

the streets renamed after dark had at them  
the last bet laid down had at them  
and keeping one eye to their backs fearing the penalties severe they had at  
each other  
in the cities they grubbed for longevity and died unresolved  
died down alleys strung out along the deafness of an age  
died without benefit in the streets among the discard and the crowds  
died against the chatter of open windows untold stories spilling down  
window ledges  
died behind drawn shades screams going unheard into the cold sweat of  
night  
died facedown among the many faceless others  
died leaving little more than what they came with

the nation came of age in an age when men criminal in their intent small in  
aspect made promises they never intended to keep  
we needed their promises  
but let there be no mythology of plentitude no dogma of the unretracted  
or would you rather let it be see how the thing turns out slide on by  
it being after all so brief a time to the settling of the thing  
or is it simply a matter of having no luck at all as these men with their  
secret make themselves at home in our house of plenty  
one need not die to walk in the valley of shadows  
as do the children left behind walk in the shadow of  
who the hell brung ya here anyway

many left to go down after closing to where the homeless are at home  
down to where the beggar asks nothing of you  
down to where the drunk sees clearly  
down to where the shadow girls know they can never go home  
down to where you keep it slow and work the dog on the prowl  
down to where the unspoken spills into the dry space between each new  
insistence  
down to where in golden light flashes of the sullen ingenuity of the  
pure meticulous  
and rats on the move dream of tunnels opening to the sea

in a flash of we have figured out the thing it was gone  
only rumor at ease in our house of plenty

it has happened before  
dogs take to chasing their tails  
cats take to the alleys  
children turn mean  
and all that talk of bringing it all back home  
as though it were nothing more than a small indiscretion at the dinner table

but for want of a dream one became the nation's apologist its radical  
dressed to kill

for want of a dream one traveled the nation its heavy footed mimic its swill  
eater its fool repeater  
for want of a dream most became the nation's wasted disconnects the  
nobodies of its tomorrows  
and for want of a dream we let rise up amongst us the lords of disproportion  
the purveyors of gouge  
and they seized the day

now a long winter nears  
birds will fall screaming into blind  
he who once knew nothing of death will run cursing into the ease of death  
the mountains will roll call the names of the forgotten

we never learned how to dance

## *Dreams Of An Existentialist*

in a room all neon all shadow an existentialist dreams  
shepherd whistles traveler sings sculptor shapes stone  
into bird bird flies off snake in beak to a place where  
forgotten men throw themselves down the long blue  
slide of laughing sky bodies without rags tumbling for-  
ever in a room all neon all shadow where an existencial-  
ist dreams a young woman nails the terms of her love  
to a door opening to a room all neon all shadow where  
an existentialist dreams zebras run with spring rains and  
wonders how it is zebras know to wear stripes against  
the lion's eye in a room all neon all shadow where an  
existencialist dreams men of no luck at all crammed and  
crannied full with ideas bend the mule deer's ear with  
half-truths that like oil on water shine in a room all  
neon all shadow where an existentialist dreams a man  
caught in the theater lights of what is about to hap-  
pen hears distant click of boot heels in a room all neon  
all shadow nothing so loud as the unsaid brushing up  
against the need to get away in a room all neon all shad-  
ow where an existentialist dreams hard against the wak-  
ing truth david edenfield and son sodomized six year  
old Christopher mother looked on masturbated father  
choked the boy stuffed the body into garbage bag to  
be buried alongside a country road winding through a  
room all neon all shadow where an existentialist dreams  
of no's suicide says good-bye to what's up doc a man no  
use to talk to no more a man who never did ask is some-  
thing gained dreaming in a room all neon all shadow  
when dream tinkers here and there on the outskirts of  
things such as they are in a room all neon all shadow  
where come on baby who hasn't spoken in years is all  
grown up come on baby tell him what you can do to his  
ya know what i mean