

MARTIN BENNETT

## Aid Worker on Independence Day

A not-quite-tourist, questionably elite,  
He stares from hotel louvres as two worlds meet  
And, street by shantied street, wear each other down:  
In a field empty of cattle, men excrete;  
Close by, droves of green and yellow taxis  
Nose go-slows, the potholed ways to town.

After luxuries of porcelain,  
Aftershave, toothpaste soap, he goes down to eat—  
Pocketing invitation, sunshades,  
Conscience, is then limousined through the heat  
To where Independence Day parades  
Hyper-military pomp and splendour:

Imported tanks storing barren ordnance;  
Boots galore, cargoless low-flying planes.  
Speeches over, a colony of sorts remains:  
Caviar for the generals, et cetera;  
Sidewalks outside outside commandeered by beggars;  
Future heaving like a lion at its chains.

Rebel, accomplice, or helpless helper?  
Uncertain as to which tag quite fits,  
Awkwardly he consults his pockets—  
Fumbling on only a few mint coins,  
Flings his donation alongside the rest,  
Held by the things that make him most complain:

History's long arm, its cunning fingers;  
Gulfs in interest stretched across oceans,  
Desktops, rattled bowls; that row of posters  
Proclaiming "National Austerity Campaign"—  
Big Mannism's latest euphemism  
For debts, thefts, the hinterlands of gain.