

The Ghost Narrates



'The minstrel's lay [concerning events in the Trojan war] caused Odysseus to lift his purple mantle with his sturdy hands and draw it down over his head to hide his comely face, for he was ashamed to be caught weeping by the Phaeacians'. [from Book 8 of *The Odyssey*, Penguin edition.]

Reduced to a ghost - having fallen early - I did not take part in the greater dramas here narrated. Instead, the maker of worlds set me learned tasks - observing and recording all that befell the warriors (though I will call them athletes) of my stolid generation.

Insubstantial, light on the wind, I hover at the close of a long story. The ranks are all refreshed - but our dreams of siezing the glittering edifice recede by the day (a dream for others now). And the dream inspired our every purposed act - brutal, graceful or athletic.

Many have already passed over. Their blood-smeared regalia useless to them now - on the way to a different city - glory or ignomy apportioned by judicious scribes. They pass me non-plussed, for I wear the oldest uniform. Their sleep-infected eyes see but a youth.

My tenure almost over - I mingle these days with old soldiers, toothless, grey-bearded, shaky of hand. They direct the young - if worthy - more often, signing papers and organising rations. Why do they linger? Have they no wives and children to enjoy in their autumn years? The wind

does not answer my questions, and so I continue to listen and observe. An old friend - we were on the first ships together - bewails his fate, 'The siege' he whispers, though none are close to hear, 'devoured everything - became my only purpose, my legacy and my wife.'

So many campaigns to end where we began -
above us still, the white-washed walls and terracotta
roofing. Luxurious city - city of pungent spices
and royal treasures. City we dreamt of as a
woman - a prize and a threat. Where is she now -
that woman coveted by a long dead admiral?

For the 'Eighties Mafiosa' generation of New Zealand cricketers.

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