Select Poems

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Select poems by Gregory O’Brien¹

CHILDHOOD OF CHRIST IN SANTIAGO¹

*for Nicanor Parra*

The gift of an upbringing. It was
all downhill

from there: the apartment
on Vicuña Mackenna

stray dogs and roaming pepper-grinders
of Bellavista. And Saint Joseph

¹ Born in Matamata, New Zealand, in 1961, Gregory O’Brien is a poet, essayist, visual artist and curator. He travelled to Santiago de Chile three times during 2012-13, while working on the ocean-related art project, 'Kermadec--Art Across the Pacific'. He curated the exhibition of that title which was shown at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Santiago. O’Brien has written extensively about visual art as well as literature, and his most recent publication, CITIZEN OF SANTIAGO, a collaboration with photographer Bruce Foster, appeared in 2013.
of the numberless light-bulbs, Mary’s hair
of many colours; the sky an empty cathedral

in which they would hold hands or pray dutifully
to the god of old bicycle parts, the daily melt; the boy

meanwhile, lost in the blue brightness of
his jacket. It was all downhill from there

as everywhere is
in the sloping city of Santiago. With its
uncontrolled intersections and dance floors,
the confluence of streets a boy might imagine as

the educated body of a woman, or
an education offered

therein; the barrio after an unseasonal
shower, the smooth surface

of a body as it might have
breathed once, or been breathed upon.
IN PARQUE FORESTAL, REMEMBERING A CHILEAN NAVAL VESSEL IN AUCKLAND HARBOUR, MID-1980s

Esmeralda, slender-waisted one, may the great tongue of the Pacific forever mispronounce your name.

Strolling down this bitter avenue of lemons and pisco

and fighter planes, O bony mistress of the dictatorship the nation’s poor will inherit your scattered body, your divided family. May the legless veteran begging

on Avenue Santa Maria his wheelchair marooned in six lanes of traffic

thrive and prosper like the good nation of Chile and never be run down.

\footnote{These poems were originally published in Citizen of Santiago, co-authored by Gregory O’Brien and photographer Bruce Foster.}