

Walking All Night with Borges in Buenos Aires

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Bombs are drum music of the night. Profiles
Of buildings change daily depending where
The bombs explode. Are we back in London

During the Blitz? Often the night horizon
Seems like fire stars have settled on Earth,
But the source of flame is not enemy planes

But the Dirty War bombers. They protest
La Presidenta Isabelita, la Loca, the Crazy,
Who often screams over the national radio

Into homes and booms into major squares.
She is widow of Fascist dictator Juan Perón.
A fifth-grade drop-out from school, she beds

With fellow astrologer, López Rega, a fan
Of Italian Fascists and brutal commander
Of the notorious Triple-A death squads.

They erase political opponents, low and high,
Hauling their victims to their Athletic Clubs,
Code name for torture and death chambers.

From my college at el 25 de Mayo, I tread back
To my digs, loaded with books, my head elsewhere.
I stop on a still-bright side street. Some twenty

Of us watch seven students, six fellows and
A woman, facing the wall, their hands overhead.
The Triple-A gangster thugs are laughing

As they point weapons at them. In high boots,
They resemble leaves of malignant plants
As they search them, kick and thump them.

iA los coches! "To the cars!" None of us
Can do anything. I feel guilty about our
Impotence. Shouting would mean nothing.

Once in police hands, they are as good as
Dead. The woman is last. Plainclothesmen
Open a trunk door, hurl her screaming inside.

She is a tiger fighting back. It takes three thugs
To force her back and slam the lid on her. Even
When it is closed, she is howling. The caravan

Of hearses speeds off into jammed traffic.
An archaic black serpent emerges over
The globe. The killers are drunk with pleasure.

They will reach one of six torture-and-murder
Buildings where the thousands disappear.
Days and nights of Dirty War. Death awaits

Those who have been seized. Yet in deadly days
The arts survive, a habit of totalitarian regimes.
I go to many outdoor parties of young artists.

The opponents trust me. They would smell a hyena.
They're not afraid to be normal in bad times.
My students despise the Fascist Perónistas

Who venerate Benito Mussolini. "Wolf down
Fat steak and fuck off!" One evening in my class
On American poetry at our good university

On la Plaza de Mayo, in uniforms & arm bands,
Teenagers pound on our class door, ordering
Us down into the court to shout *¡Viva Perón!*

The class chases *them* down the stairway.
At my next meeting with my wonderful kids,
I cart in a basket of Salta Negra dark beer.

They understand Emily Dickinson's erudition
And cunning play with off-rhymes better than me.
When I read them Gerard Manley Hopkins'

Crescendo in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden
Echo": "Despair, despair, despair, despair.
Spare!" we all leap up. They possess the spirit of

Rebel ee cummings, love wild concrete poetry
And his Infinite word play. The equally esoteric
Hart Crane's "Brooklyn Bridge" floats them away.

I teach a week in Uruguay, also a dictatorship.
The students are fine but passive. I can't wait
To be back with my noisy Argentine classes.

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