

## Atocha 2004

The Caliph at Córdoba had a dizzying pool—  
quicksilver from his mines at Almadén  
sent glints and highlights wavering through the air  
and set his guests and courtiers' heads to whirl.  
It's ruined now—the palace's grand halls  
unroofed and broken open to the sky.

On the all-night train from Lisbon to Madrid,  
rumbling through the outskirts in the early dawn,  
still gloomy, so the braziers flare bright  
in trackside encampments and wrecking yards,  
I think of commuters who check the time and yawn,  
who'll be blown apart at the station up ahead.

There's a story that the bombs were to avenge  
the last destruction of al-Andalus  
which the Catholic Monarchs launched from Córdoba,  
wresting Granada lovely from the Moors  
five hundred years ago—itsself revenge  
for Arab conquest, eight hundred years before.

When they bombed Atocha we were safe at home  
but preparing our first Spanish trip,  
and our friends asked us if we'd 'cut and run'—  
crude words which mimicked the Australian Right  
still glorying in the capture of Baghdad.  
But not to go would feel like giving in.

At Barcelona there's a mercury fountain:  
quicksilver ripples out across the bowl,  
in memory of the miners of Almadén  
who rebelled from despair in '34,  
who Franco, soon a rebel, came to crush.  
This shimmering device revenges them.

Now we're at Atocha six months beyond the blast.  
Angry tourists wave their tickets in the air,

urgent to board the fast train to Barcelona:  
as if there's no call for the guard and his gun,  
as if six months ago those travellers didn't die,  
as if bombers didn't die their murderous death.

We've run to see Guernica, ate our paella,  
rushed to send emails home to our kids,  
eager—Catalonia and France lie ahead—  
but surrounded by all Spain's silent dead.

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