

1

5276 days you've been in prison Dawit Isaak
if you can write something do it you said
I must tell you terrible news

3rd October 2013
a boat carrying over 500 Eritreans & Somalis
foundered off Italian island of Lampedusa

2

turn off the news it's so depressing
nothing below baseline of a font or above x height
with for to you Dawit Isaak & any
thing feels insufficient but I'll go with hunches
what connects in a Kathleen Raine poem
New Year 1943:

Of men and women walking in their thought
Like ghosts in overcoats and uniforms,
Their bodies, grown invisible, scarcely felt,
Alone, or mated, in the London night.

3

not space compressed to a cell
not body reduced to its need to survive
how can I imagine that? how can I not?

a new society after 30 years of war
in exile in Sweden a playwright and a journalist

6

eveningly what am I thinking

no charges have been made no trial begun

small pieces of information we have obtained

say half Dawit Isaak's time in solitary confinement

he has been shackled

is he still sane? where does he get the strength

to persevere? No one

deserves this kind of treatment

7

draw two animals

going in different directions

bodies overlapping to emphasise

in a tangle of legs

both movement & a flattening on the page

8

energy clusters gnomonic scrawl

language a glyph microscripts thought to be a private

attempt at ballads turned

no better response than a dog twitching in its sleep
fury not broken by a voice says

9

child whether drawn from wood
or rock the face
 splattered rain or mist of breath
on window pane or seen
in a darkness
 reflects the room
in over heard conversations
 of passers by

10

due to the war for independence flees to Sweden in 1985
starts at a refugee camp
becomes a janitor of a church in Gothenberg
1992 becomes a Swedish citizen
1993 Eritrea gains its independence he returns to the capital
 marries & starts a family
writes book about war between Eritrea and Ethiopia
starts Setit, Eritrea's first independent newspaper
 2000 moves family to Gothenburg returns to Eritrea
 the following year
2001 politicians and ministers criticise how President Isaias
Afewerki is running the country
 later known as G-15 they write
 letters demand elections be held
 & proposed constitution be implemented
Dawit Isaak reports on these letters in his newspaper

two security officers come to his house on 23 Sept 2001
arrested &
along with many other members of the G-15
imprisoned without trial

11

Dilly Dally his 1997 one act play
perhaps shillyshally? drag feet
one's heels pro
crastinate stall loiter tarry trail
mark time
give an outline of the plot
feels longer than the play itself
a young man Tesfay
rents a room in on the outskirts of Asmara
Tirhas lives in another part of this house

12

animals surround the artist at work
this is no bird on a lead & a cat wide eyed
subject of the portrait hovering in black void

13

in 2005 Dawit Isaak is suddenly released the next day
seeking medical treatment for after effects
of torture re-arrested

14

sit in the reconstruction of his cell in darkness
for 15 minutes
not thinking for but thinking with

I navigate as suddenly as the laughing running
child is screaming having fallen

15

In the city after bomb blasts the people are like ghosts
touch of the and the
inflection of feeling is a shadow revealing
gentleness of touch one hand on another

16

four of the g-15 are known to have died in prison
in 2013 a former prison officer says you are “okay”

17

not right colour for a kingfisher
fast along middle of stream intelligent life?
I smiled at the screaming baby on the train
something empathic in the fug of thinking
had to be borrowed from a sense of humour
dark days
to try ing enter the full ness more:

Pope Francis arrived on the island of Lampedusa July 8
 2013 cast a wreath on the water
 celebrated mass on the sports field used
 as a migrant reception centre
 stood at altar constructed from an old fishing boat
 Where is your brother?
 he said Who is responsible for this blood?

said: globalisation of indifference
 makes us all unnamed
 responsible yet nameless and faceless

368 people drowned as the boat sank
 those who knew they wouldn't make it
 called out their names & those of their villages
 so news of their death could be carried ashore
 many plaques in Lampedusa's cemetery
 say: UNIDENTIFIED MIGRANT

Rilke looked away from a night sky full of stars & found
 in a face the same law blossoming
 same magnitude depth inexhaustibility to thought
 Is Triginya included in google translator? Copy
 small extracts of your 2 novels translated into Swedish
 I open my eyes see your black & white headshot
 there is a moment of disorientation when the lost the
 imprisoned & murdered are still not with us but
 the world of senses is one in which they are assumed

must convey news of her mother's death

23

even in the darkest of times there is a right to expect some
illumination (Hannah Arendt said &:)

whether light was the light of a candle or that

of a blazing sun

I don't who knows who knows I don't

don't I know who knows who I don't

single turning? a coil of apple peel made in a smooth

& towel after bath made eight feet tall turban of hair

talcum powder

the breath of

24

no answers to our questions have been received

the company of young acrobats

25

in early 2013 UN Special Rapporteur on situation
of human rights in Eritrea asked Eritrean authorities

2014 UN resolution on the situation in Eritrea
called on the authorities

As of march 2015 Eritrean government refusing
to cooperate with the UN mandated Commission of

Enquiry

26

- Tesfay [Comes back] Let me taste your coffee today.
Tirhas You may think I am flattering myself, but I am sure this will be the best coffee you have ever tasted.
- Tesfay The best thing about the coffee ceremony is not the coffee but the long discussions you can have.
- Tirhas Also there are good songs.
- Tesfay [Stands up] So let's have music. Discussions are better with music.
[Sits down on the sofa which seats 2-3 persons]
- Tirhas No problem. Do you prefer Tigrinya songs or....

27

proud-pied? daisy-pied?

pied dappled two-coloured part-coloured two souled
proud-pied April
daisies pied *and* violets-blue when delight

28

off the shore of Lampedusa
clung to bodies
of dead companions
off the shore of Lampedusa & who
began a poem at high C so only

descent or plateau is possible

Tesfay: "I am always confused by your mix
of jokes & seriousness" not now
5303 days your parents ran a small Italian deli

hold the high C
or your equivalent as long as the breath
go higher

29

for those on other boats
put back borders checkpoints fences searchlights

dilly shally dally shilly ?

"But I have chosen friendship rather than money"

"Am I late? Is that why you are waiting for me by the gate?"

30

sun is one foot wide
tiny figurines are of people standing a long way away

far out in space (assuming our senses of time & space &
scale & definition & everything scrambled)

it happens like this: