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**Opening Extract from...**

# Phantom Noise

Written by Brian Turner

Published by Bloodaxe Books

Publisher website - http://www.bloodaxebooks.com/

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# BRIAN TURNER

# PHANTOM NOISE




BLOODAXE BOOKS

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ISBN: 978 1 85224 876 5

This edition first published 2010 by
Bloodaxe Books Ltd,
Highgreen,
Tarset,
Northumberland NE48 1RP.

**www.bloodaxebooks.com**
For further information about Bloodaxe titles
please visit our website or write to
the above address for a catalogue.

Original US edition first published 2010
by Alice James Books, Farmington, Maine
www.alicejamesbooks.org

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Cover design: Neil Astley & Pamela Robertson-Pearce.

Printed in Great Britain by
Bell & Bain Limited, Glasgow, Scotland.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Phantom Noise* was first published in the US in 2010 by Alice James Books. This first UK edition reprints the contents of that book, with the addition of one poem not included in the original American edition, 'On the Surgeon's Table', along with some minor amendments.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following journals and anthologies in which these poems appeared, sometimes in slightly different forms: *Alehouse Press*: 'Study of the Nudes by Candlelight'; *The Alhambra Poetry Calendar* (2010): 'Dar as-Salam'; *Between Water and Song: New Poets for the Twenty-First Century* (White Pine Press): 'Wading Out' and 'Guarding the Bomber'; *The Columbia Poetry Review*: 'Jundee Ameriki'; *The Cortland Review*: 'Homemade Napalm'; *The Georgia Review*: 'Wading Out'; Literary Witnesses: 'Lucky Money'; *The New York Times online*: 'Guarding the Bomber'; *The Northwest Review*: 'Stopping the American Infantry Patrol Near the Prophet Yunus Mosque in Mosul, Abu Ali Shows Them the Cloth in His Pocket', 'Mohammed Trains for the Beijing Olympics, 2008'; *The Portland Review*: '.22 Caliber'; *Southword* (Ireland): 'Eucalyptus', 'To My Unnamed Daughter', 'A Lullaby for Bullets'; *The Stinging Fly* (Ireland): 'American Internal'; Stone Canoe: 'At Lowe's Home Improvement Center'; *The Virginia Quarterly Review*: 'Unearthed by Wind', 'Perimeter Watch', 'VA Hospital Confessional', 'On the Flight to Alamosa, Colorado', 'The Discothèque', 'Ajal'.

My deepest gratitude to the following: Dan Albergotti, Donald Anderson, Doug Anderson, Siah Armajani, Stephen Barile, Aliki Barnstone, Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone, Sarah Barr, Paul Bellowar, Tom Bosch, Laure-Anne Bosselaar, Kevin Bowen, Kurt Brown, Kim Buchheit, Rosanne Cahn, Matt Cashion, Cyrus Cassells, Peter Catapano, Jo Chapman, Russell Conrad, Patrick Cotter, Tim Crowley, Martín Espada, Tony Fiorillo, Patsy Garoupa, Ted Genoways, Paul Guest, James Haba, Corrinne Clegg Hales, Charles Hanzlicek, James Hathaway, Lee Herrick, Garrett Hongo, Doug and Tristan Humble, T.R. Hummer, David Jackowski, Martha Jessup, Haider Al-Kabi, Marion Kelly, Maura Kennedy, Dorianne Laux, Suzie Lechtenberg, Kwang Ho

Lee, Philip Levine, Soheil Najm, Anne Marie Macari, Adrian Matejka, Khaled Mattawa, Declan Meade, Col. Tom McGuire, Sadek Mohammed, LTC John A. Nagl, Oliver de la Paz, Mike Robinson, Summer Rodman, Patricia Smith, R. Southerland, Tim Skeen, Gerald Stern, Ernesto Trejo, Charles Trimbach, Bill Tuell, Jessica Valls, Dan Veach, Bruce Weigl, Barry Wexler, Sholeh Wolpe and Steve Yarbrough.

I would like to thank the Lannan Foundation, Alison Granucci at Blue Flower Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences, Matt O'Donnell at From the Fishouse, Dan at Grolier Poetry Bookshop, Tim Crowley at the Marfa Bookstore, and the Kerouac Project of Orlando, Florida for their kind and generous support of my work (and for all they do to support artists).

Many thanks to Neil Astley, Julia Bouwsma, Todd Davis, Patrick Hicks, Ilya Kaminsky, Dunya Mikhail, Joe Millar, Ahmed Nussaif, April Ossmann, Carey Salerno, Lacy Simons and Ellen Doré Watson, for their guidance, insight and kind support of this work. Love and thanks to my family and friends, with special thanks to Stacey Lynn Brown, Brian Voight, and – of course – to Ilyse.

## Viking 1

*Viking Lander 1 made its final transmission to Earth*
NOVEMBER 11, 1982

On approach to Mars, dune fields in the distance,
the spacecraft descends within a storm of dust
before landing on the Golden Plain, Chryse Planitia,
which is a vast and stony desert, a graveyard
of shadows cast sanguine in their repose.

Cameras click in shuttered housings. The landscape
a pornographic scene caught in apertures
opened wide: sand tables in their martial aspect,
compass points, barchan dunes, the far horizon's body line
in rocky silhouette, where Earth is a small, warm light
rising zenith blue beyond the dusk, where I am still a boy,
barefoot on the wet grass of the San Joaquin valley,
the millions of miles between made closer by opposition.

In the old days, they say the desert Arabs hung lanterns
high in the date palms, a guide for friends and strangers
traveling by night. And maybe that's what I'm doing
as I search for lamps in the night's vast amphitheater,
even if I don't know how to put it into words –
I'm searching for the face on Mars, so much like our own,
made from dust and to dust returning, the wind's erosion
calling into the void with that brutal instrument, pain.
And like so many before me, I listen.
I want to hear how the great questions posed by ruin
are given the elegant response of stone.

How we, like Aphrodite, are seduced.

## Phantom Noise

There is this ringing hum  this
bullet-borne language  ringing
shell-fall and static  this late-night
ringing of threadwork and carpet  ringing
hiss and steam  this wing-beat
of rotors and tanks  broken
bodies ringing in steel  humming these
voices of dust  these years ringing
rifles in Babylon  rifles in Sumer
ringing these children their gravestones
and candy  their limbs gone missing  their
static-borne television  their ringing
this eardrum  this rifled symphonic  this
ringing of midnight in gunpowder and oil  this
brake pad gone useless  this muzzle-flash singing  this
threading of bullets in muscle and bone  this ringing
hum  this ringing hum  this
*ringing*

## Lucky Money

It is 1971.
At Willie Lum's Hong Kong Restaurant
I am four years old and this is my very first job:
carry the steaming tea by the bamboo handle,
deliver it to Willie Lum's ancient mother.
It is much more difficult than a simple balancing
of heat over distance. There's the back kitchen, gleaming
in chrome, knives, the crackling of fluorescent lights.
There's the old man at the sink strangling the dishes,
the dead look he has for children, that bang
of pots in the slosh of the tub, and the back door,
how to squeeze past its riveted metal sheets
to the most difficult of all,
the bridge, the plank –
that weathered twelve-foot board which spans
the ledge of the restaurant's back door
to the porch of his mother's trailer and below that,
seven feet down, chained on a leash of stainless steel –
the bullmastiff, gnashing its teeth, its larynx
growling from the deep pit of midnight,
the nerves of my skin aware of the bats
skimming the oak trees, walnuts
forming in cerebral shells – and I walked out
into the universe, the frightening unknown beauty of it,
my hair turned electric. This is where I learned to walk the line
over bristling fur, the rough lungs of a language
calling up from the depths below, all I must ignore
if I want to cross over, a boy of four with a pot of tea
for an old woman buried in afghans, lit by Chinese lanterns,
an ancient one who gives me red and gold envelopes,
who says *Lucky money. No spendee. Lucky money.*