

How To Build A City

TOM CHIVERS was born in London in 1983. A writer, editor and promoter, he is Director of Penned in the Margins, Co-Director of London Word Festival and Associate Editor of *Tears in the Fence*. He was Poet in Residence at The Bishopsgate Institute, London. A limited edition sequence entitled *The Terrors* is published by Nine Arches Press in 2009. *How To Build A City* is his first full collection.

Also by Tom Chivers

POETRY

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Generation Txt (Penned in the Margins, 2006)

How To Build A City

TOM CHIVERS



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In memory of my mother

Contents

PART I

Tube	3
This is yogic	4
Citizen	5
Rush Hour	7
Tina is a Rottweiler	13
Seven Varieties of Knot	14
Stopping Doctor Syntax	18
Queer Things in Egypt	19
The Coder	20
Your Name Has Been Randomly Selected	22
Big Skies over Docklands	23
The Trial of Margery	25
Shaikh and the Fruit Pickle	28
Invasion	29
A Tourist's Guide to the East End	30
Hasty Excise	31
Fifteen Days	33
How To Build A City	34

PART II

Snapshot	47
Iconic	48
Marpha	50
Newborn	51
Guthlac	52
The Voyages of Óttar and Wulfstan	54
On Kinder Scout	56
Shatton, Kinder	57

Working in Stone	58
Postmark Tullamore	59
Photographs	60
Paramnesiac	62
Thom, C and I	63

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Part I

Tube

A kind of lozenge, a pill. A kind
of bullet, ballistic-tipped to kill.
Cylindrical Tardis; horsebox, nave.
An altered telescope; a grave
(a kind of seaman's coffin).

An arch, multiplied: a trap.
A trick of lights and speed.
A fabric gunnel. The inside
of a sleeve. A sheaf rolled up
to swat a fly; a wave reversed;
a soundtracked sanctuary. A box.

This is yogic

She was found in a gully, Nordic features
and a beige ratatouille of sick in an arc.

This is yogic. Anorak in the hedge
(*or henge*) and the piss tang of celeriac.

He was a Whitechapel rake and she,
well, no vestal virgin nor blood donor.

Ergo, the site of furtive bayonets
and paving the colour of wet tongue.

Talk is loose when the fog comes down;
archaic argots, hybrid whispering.

Dangling from a silo, the cunt with the
pink ukulele can hone his ego on my fist.

Citizen

They say the city needs this
realignment, a cleansing fire.

I stand ten feet tall, steak-fed.
A rolling mass submerges

into Autumn haze. Today
the Tube spews well-kempt

émigrés; pack-hunters breach
the wall, spill out the other side,

surprised to find it like this.
I watch my flaxen neighbour

stealing in, cradling his package,
a steaming pay-load of haddock.

I strut between the undressed stalls.
The market's quiet; just two kids

smoking, braced against the girders.
There is always need for linen

and cheeseburgers. Some say
the fire has come too late, the game

already up. But glass compels;
we never really see it as it is,

cannot get perspective. Kate Moss
on rollerskates. The grey tower,

still edging the sky; a ship
pranged, tailed and shaken

of its cargo. Watch the last one fall.
Unstop the leak, the glossy wound.

Brick by brick, unbuild the wall
and take a high position somewhere

south. Frame another
panorama of the city, sparking flame.

Above the river, what looks like ticker-tape:
a billion notes airborne and alight.

Rush Hour

1.

It is hands that rush:
feet, fingers and eyes

before
one could speculate
but the way light is either
caught in or catching
smoke in the tunnel-dark

that it's there
at all

and we are just animals
but how he sat there
rational-looking and

that
makes you think

even an eardrum, burst, regenerates

there's something dirty
about words

now it's better to be silent

2.

Take me to the strand
and I will show you
the soft diplomacy of

rivers

they do not need
geometry

30 years on and we're here
again, cleaning body parts
off patterned upholstery

3.

All the city's past
was here

a scrambling of
voices in the black
earth

we rose through
clay, salt deposits,
ammonites

our digits
strained at marsh slip
and all the while
the world went on
through the pinhole
that was the bull's red
eye

a single silence masks
the creak and strain of steel
that was the quietening
of the thing itself,
that was the yielding

of the 'fruits of their
own choice':

72 virgins

52 bodies

4 bombers

1 god

4.

Residual self-image states:

I enjoy double-espresso,
nuzzle in foam colloid
and do not concern myself
with the destination of shit.
I guess terror cells must be
like prison cells. I guess they
are equipped with toilet, basin
and bunk beds. I guess
they are like a monk's cell.
I guess there is much silence
and its occupants are hooded
or *hoodied* and tonsured.
But this is a free world
and I have choices to make:
how to hem, check, embank
and incarcerate water.

5.

Nothing has made me
more proud, so proud

I have seen
I have been

in the absence of any
other transportation

the first bomb went off
and the lights went out
and the square marked
area in the centre as if
the wiring was burning

I knew	we were told
as I walked	because I
could not bear	two views
	of a short moment

*Don't trip Lorraine,
whatever you do don't trip*

The call was registered
as reported how or how
they don't deserve because
that is my routine and
I just didn't know you'll
be on your own and
into the footage

I was one

we had no idea if the rails
on the intercom
when I woke and that is what
saved us all when the
tunnel lights came on
and out of the end
towards the station
my heart
goes out

6.

This is the break of another day, the slew
and the still point. A rush hour of children.

The bull's red eye, his sopping undercarriage,
his burning smell up the walls of the tunnel,
between the carriages. The stink of sour gas
enough for you to trip in the dark before the
word is out. Are you as certain now? Was
that road there all this time, behind the glitz
of bars and trading floors?

The bull's red eye sees more than CCTV,
sees right through you, *into you*.

The bull *is* London.

Gang drones sharpen knives on his horns.
Currency traders stash winnings in his open
belly. The carriage doors clenched open.

7.

The ringing in my ears was the buzz of machinery.
The buzz of machinery became the sputter of lights.
The sputter of lights gave way to the strain of fabric.
The strain of fabric was the fall of footsteps.
The fall of footsteps was a nursery rhyme and
the nursery rhyme was a voice down the tunnel.

The voice was a prayer caught in the dust.
A prayer is a storm of sheet metal.
Sheet metal was the ringing in my ears.
The ringing in my ears was the buzz of machinery.
The ringing in my ears was the buzz of machinery.

Tina is a Rottweiler

I set the bathroom tap to run.
It stinks of soil; soil and turf,
coiled spiders in the pipes.

Fenchurch to Moorgate to Broadgate,
attire is navy blue, black, ash-grey;
display is a flash of pinstripe, weave, lining.

The tie is pure liquid jazz.

Other choices to make. At which
of three adjacent, similarly-priced
coffee shops to hold the investment
planning meeting.

I am soil, frappé sipper.

Tina is a Rottweiler. Her bum
fits snug in a black skirt.
Tina is synergy and results.
I am the spider in the pipes.

Seven Varieties of Knot

Beware slippage where the wall
disappears, distant legato
of phosphorescence. Two lines
meet here. I look across, see myself
surrounded by darkness, drifting
from one station to the next.

[The reef knot]

Not quite a blood knot.
Moon-driven, stag-woman
caught in woods. Bloodhounds
froth, on tenterhooks, sidecar
pans in.

Seventy plaques from Kensington
to Hyde to Green to James's, rich
with hay-fever and Bulimia Nervosa.

Pan may not drum his hooves here.

[The figure-of-eight]

Bold as brass, the site triangulated
to a traffic island, bylaws' lung rot.
Too many uses for a tree. Hogarth's
Idle 'Prentice waits for the long-drop,
the thirteen coils behind his left ear.

John Austin was last to swing from
the 'three legged mare'; his corpse is
a shirt suspended from a rotary line.

[The slipknot
or hangman's knot]

First, open up the ends, revealing
each strand. A confluence of paving;
steps, a wall, then a garden. Rampant
squash overrun the vegetable plot.
Beetroot, cabbage, deadly nightshade.
Charmaine protects the tubers; she
weaves them six feet deep. A field splits.

Vaults, once overcrowded, house
shears, mower and gardening gloves.

Lean a headstone by the wall, just there.

[The shroud knot]

This is now perfect Vox Pop. St Nick
territory. There is no horse meat here.
Take up a sticking knife, a skinning knife,
a boning knife, steel, cleaver, bell scrapers,
meat saw, meat hooks. The diagram above
shows the principle of proper sticking.

Scald the head first while the hind legs
are dry. Then reverse the hog and place
the hook in the lower jaw and scald the
hind quarters. The heart is trimmed up,
washed and chilled. Leave the carcass,
a fretboard of cartilage. If marrow has