

*Perspectives
& Other Poems*

Sampler - The First Six

Norman Hadley

H₂O

Remember me? I'm the *other* molecule you all know
Two aitches straddling a single O

There are trillions like me
In the rivers and sea
A shimmering skin
Around a paperweight world

Yes, I've been through seven Londoners
Swilled around in Cromwell's wine
In vain I diluted the Christ man's vinegar
Rode the Jordan out of Palestine

I drifted north, linking arms
To crystallise in a spinning flake
Dozed a century in the glacier's creak
Calved in a splash from a spray-bound snout

I was ridden by bears across the salty swell
Shrinking in the drip melt till
The bears swam in me then I swam in them
I regretted the darkness of their lungs

Later I was exalted, to the rim of space
Gulped by engines of furious devising
Scribbled in staves across the blackboard sky
Loitering in droplets before the reckless rush
Back to gravelly headwaters,
A homecoming salmon, barren of spawn
To slither once more down the mountain's tilt

To an ocean already cold to my longing

How long must I journey on this ceaseless conveyor?

A belt-loop spliced without beginning or end

Feed me to a furnace stronger than the sun

Hammer-forge me into a helium haze

Let me bubble through the giggling throat of a child

Stretch the skin of a shiny balloon

Scale the vacant blue and never rain again

Retrospective

I was once in a gang
We'd hire a van
And thunder off
To mountainous lands

The vans were wrecks
With bench seat racks
But the best perch of all
Was the one at the back

By the window I'd sit
Staring back at the road
A necklace of cats eyes
That slithered and flowed

Such a giddy feeling
As the past slid behind
On a ribbon of tarmac
In a sinuous line

It seemed much more real
Than the vista in front
Where all was uncertain
And our vision was blunt

This scene comes so easy
Without effort of will
And I haven't changed much since
I'm looking back still

On Pendle Hill

There's a shark's fin moon over Pendle tonight
Scything through the clouds that menace Winter Hill
Diving into those foamy depths, lest the witches fly
Raining sulphur and scorn on its salty back

But, no; creak the history book flat. Rustle its tallow pages
To see those women, dabbling in arts they could ill command
Grinding fleabane and monkshood to ward off penury
Confessing to crimes they could scarce understand

On this night-bound summit, *all* pasts are present
Bronze Age men lug their kingly dead
Weeping hot tears of sweat on bracken-clad slopes
Hear the tocks as they stack up a tumulus of cobbles
An offering raised to an all-seeing sky
Watch them murmur a prayer to God-knows-what

And as they tumble down to the forest-choked plain
To slash and burn, let light fall anew up on the earth
I pause awhile, squinting through the inky dark
For the same clear vision George Fox had
To carve on this land a humbler cross
A faith of quiet and quaking calm

But as the galaxies idle their icy spokes
I fasten a jacket to zip in my heartbeat
Clip the pedals, slide into the sacred dark
Rock-clatter over my ancestors' bones.

Sodium spots sparkle on the rough-milled plain

The homely people are curtained in
A child squeaks breath from the frosted window
Peers up to see a silhouette slip along the ridge
For *I* am the witch, on an air sprung broomstick
An apostate healer, heading back to the world.

Intersection of A1, A57 and A614

I was on a quest for England's heart
Fumbling in the ribcage for pulsing muscle
It wasn't snug under the tidy thatches of Suffolk
Nor lowing in the broad-as-long Dales of York
But here, in Sherwood
Where the Great North Road
And Fossdyke chance to meet
A crossroads proclaiming peace to the patient sky
An arrow-form to pinpoint Locksley's seat

Yes, Robin hid here,
Dousing the fire at the shout of soldiers
Romans, too, piled Autumn-damp leaves
Making ionic columns of pale-blue smoke
To collonade their purposeful highways
Through forests morained by retreating glaciers
That stretched between shorelines, till medieval farmers
Torchted the trees in a quest for pasture
The woods retreating to this ghostly remnant

Men of Lincoln, marching west
Traded wool with Mansfield journeymen
Swaddled carters, lumbering North from London
Passed wax-sealed missives to the burghers of York
All converging here, where Robin's arrow fell

So here, in Sherwood, is England's heart.
England's Braveheart

Perspectives

If you were a Nautilus, which way would be up?
As you unwind another sleeping chamber
Slow as a galaxy
Your twisted quest to glimpse the stars
Would be thwarted anew
Your weight anchoring your vision to the ocean bed

If you were a starfish, which way would be North?
Your twisted symmetry spins in the swell
'til the moon's pull strands you in a probing huddle of children.
Under their Inquisition, you discard an arm as glibly as *they* would an unloved mitten.
A broken compass, responding to no magnet
You await the healing power of the next salt rinse.

If you were a Sidewinder, which way would be forwards?
You print sinuous ripples across the scathing sand
Rhythmic as a gymnast's ribbon
That twitch in the gravel ahead reflects in your every eye
Yet your forward charge bites hollow air
The desert rat perversely scampers - sideways!

If you were a Family Man, which way would be Home?
The inter-war semi where the woman who suckled you now creaks up the lonely stairs?
Where every bauble on the tree is a familiar Talisman.
Or this new-forged homestead? Where your bride, in ill-becoming apron
Coaches the turkey to accept it is food
Where your own flesh and blood, gaze up at the spruce
Hanging the tinsel on their own memories

If you were me, who would be next?
There I'd still be, clutching my paper like a crackling rosary.
Dry throated and expectorant.
Waiting for you, that is me, to finish.
If, as Dylan protests, a poem is a naked person,
I'd be catching your threadbare socks, in this striptease of the soul.

Magpies

Four magpies chattered through a Breughel canvas
Betokened a boy, a lone hunter in the snow
Scouting the wood for something shiny.
A shimmering treasure he would blush to name

Three Magpies, in some later instant
Strutted a wall in evening dress
A girl, newly shaped by some lovesick sculptor
A feast of convexity
Save the small of her back
Smooth as the hollow of a songbird's egg

And then two Magpies swam the air
Tuxedoed heralds of earthly Joy
Her name, an emblem of exaltation
A shout of delight at a child's arrival
He thrummed like a cello to rosined fingers
A sonorous diaphragm plenteous with melody

Was it time or distance rent those magpies?
To leave but one, its beak a shard of sorrow
An arrogant thief, gorged on carrion
A dark stain on the warbler's clutch

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