

21. OF THE WELL-MADE POT

THAN which nothing more precisely
 adumbrates the hand
 in all its shapely
 digital melody,

for here are the pressure of heel
 and guidance of palm,
 pinch of opposed palps
 with the dint of knuckle

that the whirled retentive clay holds,
 turned to stone by flame,
 in fluent sequence,
 till like a hand itself

it winds the light around itself,
 flexing foot, neck and
 shoulder in thin air,
 makes space dance to its tune.

22. OF WHALES

I

BY whose making the Lord above all
 adverted prostrate Job of his might,
 whose eyes are like the eyes of morning,
 who make their path shine; the royal fish
 with whose mysterious cranial oil
 Europe's crowned heads were annointed and
 by whose light her books have been written;

but who, unlike any kings, found peace
 in power, until creation's crown
 himself required their bodies' riches;
 who will yet befriend the bandit, man.

II

Would nature's St Peter's of pleasure
 be the great cetacean's clitoris?
 Despite their barnacled and flinty-
 looking skin, they tenderly grapple
 towards an ocean-shaking coupling
 with mild caresses. Down in the dim
 gelid brine they know every nuzzling,
 sidle and rub conducting friendship.
 The violence of subpolar weathers
 is sport to them, who breach howling seas,
 surf the tide-race through wrecking narrows.

III

Humpbacks a hundred feet down, hanging
 motionless, intone the latest tune
 in their ancient unearthly sequence,
 bouncing their profoundest lovers' moans
 Puck-like in a girdle round the globe,
 pelagic arias resounding
 the hydrosphere. What hymns do the din-
 riddled continents compare with these?
 Titanic heads are hunting, sounding
 down the lightless depths the plumed, crusted
 ruins of our liner monument.

23. OF LAKELAND

THE pens and abandoned byres collapse
and the drovers' road is smothered in bracken.
The fells, in the shapes that intense, fragmenting
frost and abrading ice have left them,
crumble and persist redundantly.

Apart from the chainsaws' whine,
the shepherd's curt whistle to the dog
that follows the straggling long-faced sheep,
the language of livelihoods
in which they were woven fails.

Miners and weavers,
most of the slaters, wallers,
the charcoal-burners have left
to be reflected
as their only task.

The fanned heaps
of scree and talus
that buttress the cloud-
sporting crags
challenge words.

Write,
they command
the poet,
our
truth.

Some few
ancestral thwaites
may keep their ways,
and new
ones rise.

One tenth per cent
of the crowd, if it balks
at vacuous pursuits,
may take themselves
another way

and unfamiliar hands
take up the still-warm tools the old
let fall, and vital skills survive
the monstrous isotopes
that Sellafield bequeathes,

whose half-lives are only moments
to the broad dome of igneous mountains
where some, by a voice in their breasts, may come
into possession of the earth
to lead there their following lives.

24. OF PLUTO

WHOM the Greeks were loth to name,
striking the ground when they did:

not the bright antagonist,
subtle malefic agent,

but the eerie and needful
god underlying the grave

whose throne set in sightless halls
is ringed with water's echoes.

Murmuring, we undergo
the loss of our upward way.

Threads of gold and iron twist
us together, tormented

by weight. Mortal presences
crowd the chambers of the heart.

From which unilluminable
pressure, restored to the world

of the cloud and the crocus,
between blind stones we rise up

healing, with unearthed power.

25. OF A GUITAR

WHOSE much-depicted outline still in
wood honours a gourd-built ancestor,
worldwide, unstandard shape: what hundreds
of songs have you grown today?

Harmonic abacus whose taut strings
lift in wit or plangently those use-
worn words, like "love", a chorus pitches
to shine again on their plane.

Sudden, florid, sanguine as a queen
of Barbary in Spain, resounding
pine and rosewood, crowned with thorny hands,
palms and nails, sing from the gut.

Moorish garden paths of nacre grow
round the back and the sound-hole. Well-bred laps
cradled you and with gentle pluckings
coloured the evening ballads,

till, armed with metal and reinforced,
long African fingers overseas
wrung from you the voice of their absence,
which elided Europe's scales.

Taking you up in place of the lute
or harp in these intricate islands,
by history like the air that feeds you
my hands are weighted again.

26. OF A CHOCOLATE CROISSANT

THOU flaky fruit of bakers' fertile skill,
Which hideth in thy heart a dark delight –
In penury I haste to purchase still
Thy golden form that makes the morning bright,
This first black coffee's perfect paramour.

In despite of the envious eyes' purview,
And other tongues, embittered as my lips,
My sweet, do close on thine, renew
Each day for me thy glorious eclipse –
Thy crescent swell my belly evermore!

27. OF E.T.

WHOSE puppet masters, making the head that tapers
from broad hydroptic eyes to a shrunken mouth,
the scaly arms and distended midriff,
made their image of a magical
creature, nearer to God than our-
selves, with reference to the child
starved of the strength to cry.

28. OF ROBERT JOHNSON

IN the musty ruck of blankets
 would be a little hunger left
 to sour your love-nests sooner
 not later.

Satan sent them one at a time
 with a note tucked into their drawers
 saying, There's ten thousand more
 where she's from.

Mississippi rolls and tumbles
 the way that they did over you
 and under. Arms bend like roads
 in the moon.

Remember how you whimpered
 to be forgiven when Mama
 whipped you and Jesus didn't
 love you enough...

The glass neck slams down on the frets
 and they twist their mamas' dresses
 higher up their legs. You take
 to the wide road.

You knew the missions of lust
 paid in dust, bust springs and stones.
 The needle comes down in your
 unmarked grave.

Robert child, the bare lightbulb
 throws your small shadow on the floor,
 but Mr Law's horned gizmo's thrown it
 over time.

29. OF BOB DYLAN

MOON blowing away like a dandelion;
 Radio wavers, bounced off Orion with codes
 Of its own. The song says there's roads
 In this hole, where a hound sounds like iron.

Bowlegged old men carry in the bone
 The suffering children from Chi-town to Rome
 To Biloxi – pellagra and rickets and lice.
 The toll of their hardships got caught in your
 backwoods voice.

Across the fields you point out
 The burnt shell of your father's house.

Silence, rain, the road not going nowhere, going
 away,
 Blackbird singing on the Red Wing wall.
 Two lanes of 61, St Paul to Thunder Bay,
 Mercury glints on grass, lightning's eastbound
 scrawl...

30. OF FIRE

MOST picturing, of all things physical,
 the spirit, fire draws – like inimical
 brother water, mobile mind's reflection –
 draws us near as surely as convection
 draws the air that body's built on, that leaps
 and aspires. As the meek liquid seeps
 and trickles, is torn with roars, stilly poured,
 but intending perpetually downward,
 teaches the greatness of humility;

so this, ascending undeterredly,
 with lozenges of brightness, from even
 the lowest crown of flame, loosed to heaven,
 takes for text the persistence of ardour,
 the light of the world as self-surrender.

31. OF THE SHOES

OF the poet, the dauntless brogues,
 that find their own way home.
 At the word of command,
 an encouraging cluck,
 they're off like two fine chestnut mares.
 Also, sleek as the pair of ducks
 I watched in egoless
 race dart down the canal
 a foot from the water
 then take the bridge in a single
 synchronised parabolic hop
 to land with arrowy
 grace in twin plumes of spray,
 my footwear takes the kerb
 and puddled gutter in its stride.
 These, if the pavements were a grey,
 broken stretch of Channel,
 would be stout Thames barges,
 first one then the other
 catching the best of a stiff breeze
 as they beat up the strait for home.
 You won't see me exchange
 for Trojan-panicking
 Achilles' chariot
 my Czechoslovakian shoes.

32. OF A NAME

A name whose few feminine syllables
 R unknown to the lexicon and yet
 M brace and stand for home, whose bright arch shines
 O ver all the dusty plain of mean and
 R gumentative words in black and white,
 E voking like a scent some elusive
 L emental moment of encounter.

33. OF SLEEP

TAKE this waking, restless mind
 I cannot keep, without your
 interruptive rule, intact.
 You dreamed up revolution.
 Oligarchic reason falls
 to the unheard multitude,
 long-rejected. What can be
 imagined reigns, if briefly.

I'm further from naming you
 now, the nearer I approach.
 That you are called blessed I know
 and that you are kin to death.
 Show me the missing persons,
 restore my abandoned home,
 receive and teach me the rest.