

combe yonder days

It's a myth that flies
have cleaner feet in the country;
lichen will grow on telegraph wires though
if you wait long enough.
Organic chard snuggles up to the spam
tins in the village shop and
tin tacks are on special offer.
Over there on the green
our biennial tic-tac-toe trial
is under way,
the Reverend Wiley always wins.
Three more divorces were celebrated
in the fresh air vestry last spring
just after the river burst its banks,
washing away lambs and chapel
built on shale, though the pub next door
where the landlord is his own best customer
still stands its ground
lodged fortuitously on a lonely pre-cambrian rock.

Down at the wheelless mill,
last chaff long since blown,
plans are afoot for a Times Past Centre;
old Mrs. Loamsprat, last of the Loamsprat line,
according to the terms of the Loamsprat bequest,
is promising a sepia print
of the sedge pleaters' final convention.
Among other donations are
a horse's brass overshoe
with a screw clamp fitting from the forties
and a couple of thirties' pebbles
to jog the memories of the over-fifties.
For the under twenties there will be a pile
of seventies' forty fives to spin on the

chrome and cream plastic juke box
 dave dee dozy beaky micky and titch an' tha',
 warmly cosy memories to ward off the past's chill.
 But planning permission is being delayed
 until after the palm-greasing ritual is over.

A couple sits in an Escort hatchback windows up
 smoking admiring the view in between
 the sun and the mirror past the maggot farm
 through the elm stumps to the horizontal supermart.
 Behind the dog-guard Mozart paces the boot
 choking dying for a shake 'n leak 'n walk.
 Latest in-thing amongst the young on the lane
 is snorting dust from dried otter spraints
 behind the ancient yew of an evening;
 apparently the micro-shards of fishbone
 give quite a charge although
 night nurses at the cottage hospital
 are working overtime to cope with the fall out.

Don't get me wrong though, it's not
 all dwm and glwm
 doon in the cwm.

If you go past the high bank's drenched toadflax,
 squeezing through the wicker gate into the walled garden
 you may find the mixture as before.
 Become your own homeopath:
 take it in small draughts
 lest waves of vittell-dissolving euphoria
 strand you forever on the farther shore
 to one side of all ferrymen.
 Nestling in the moss you will feel
 the spurge surge and see goldfinch clouds
 tumble-flutter down to their precarious stalk seed feed
 perching with a confidence borne of
 fifty million years, I'm guessing here,
 of stalking practice.
 Don't stare too long at the liriodendron's crazed leaf,
 one glance can drive you delirial.
 High above, the wheeling buzzard's plaintive summons

draws you into its skybound thermal tunnel.

Whistle softly when you're ready
and our mist taxi will transport you
over the walls and the crumbling edge fence
to a way beyond the local jury's diction
where planning regulations no longer apply
and names can be changed daily to protect the jilted.
In that vale of constant subtraction
arché-habits of inwit
ingested at the feet of the schoolmasters of More Moor
will discharge themselves in a giving way
from all debts to set theory
and the touring floor-show's production values
in their placing to one side (but which?)
of all those familiar cubby holes
where crumbs of comfort lie in neat rows
as fall-back rations for all emergencies.
You should come across invisible pockets
of lessness stitched into little rents
in the vertical cloth of uncertainty.
It is essential that you turn into a ball
and roll through this slit with all haste
before the night patrol's last trawl
dragnets you back to the shallows
below the weir at Headsilt Pond.
Once through the hole you can make up time
by using your one good laser eye to clear a path
through the blue mists of decreasing not-much
whose fold upon fold perennially enwrap
and withhold the few remaining shards
of the very least
spinning tumultuously
and always away from each other
in that eccentric zone of pure volatility
where it will not be a matter of grasping
an anything which might matter
for these little nothings came and went
come and go will come and will go
before mattering gets under way
and just to one side of that spot

matter sets up as it starts to matter.

You must wait for a swirling tincture
 which, in passing right through you without a trace
 will attract a hint of your imprint
 to itself and, so suffused, hurl
 this you-fractal beyond your you-bounds
 to career immiscible within the tumult
 in an onrushing doubling as a waiting
 on the off chance of passing through
 another you standing at the edge.

After that it's a relief to join the chippy queue
 and watch the bacteria swarming under the bridge.
 Notice the way some always twist to the left
 while others seem equally determined
 to rise and fall at random.
 I blame it on their parents
 and the emergence of an uncertain laxity
 after the cessation of all rationing
 led to a general devil-may-care degumtioning.
 You can see it nowadays at the races
 where it's commonplace for the favourite
 to refuse at the first fence
 until a jockey feeds it a fist of crushed rusks
 raising equine blood sugar to danger levels;
 then it's hell bent for the post with
 coked up jockies, ears back, mouths foaming,
 whipping themselves to distraction;
 several are put down after internal inquiries.
 Calls to ban our grand national
 or at least the Village All-Comers Stakes
 are heard more frequently in the local press
 from the lunatic fringe of soft-liners,
 but since our region's first city state
 was founded on gambler's luck,
 wisdom suspension and housey-housey,
 they get short shrift from a populace
 forever regathering itself around the virtues
 of chance effects and long odds.

Destiny and will were put on ice
 some time ago when our hi-technicians
 began measuring the knock-on effects
 of the chasm opened up
 between hoping for and getting
 after the last round of need-expansion tests.
 Results published in The Notional Inquirer showed
 our new machinery's limitless capacity
 for transmuting universal start-up conditions,
 especially the unboundaried openness
 of that deliciously vague *lebenslust*
 suffusing all our earliest moves,
 into infinite rows of vacuum sealed
 cuboid needs ready for distribution
 in no time at all to
 nearby branches of Satis, latest
 of the new generation of fast-breeder hypermarkets
 obliterating indefinite balances between giving and taking.

Emergent biopolitical blanket production lines,
 with their wipe-out set-up process,
 take taking into new dimensions
 of absorption and head-pervasion.
 Many Thank You Banks have gone to the wall
 through insufficient investment in generating futures,
 and a failure to heed the scribbled warning
 on the hoarding behind Old Market Square:
 'Meany, Meany, Take All Apart Soon'.
 Our graffiti artists slide out of their bunkers
 at dead of night to turn lampless streets
 into an indelible museum of free texts
 for tomorrow, incomprehensible except to those
 partially cured of other-blindness
 by prosthetic doubling lenses on prescription
 from the laughing optometrists of Anna Key House.
 Numerous attempted erasures by direct labour squads
 endlessly summoned from outlying estates
 by piercing blasts on Mayor Drover's whistle
 merely seem to scratch the surface of these postscripts
 to a half-envisaged yet unbidden life

already sidling round the nearest corner.
Traces of their ur-poxy reason remain fixed
in the slag gray bricks of Norm Street's speechless walls,
echoes of messages hovering subliminally
beyond the threshold where eye and mind
intersect and simultaneously deny each other.

Our country's leading graph eaters,
led in and egged on by their voice chancellor,
dressed in traditional protective gear
of leather blinkers and horse hair boiler suits,
graze, with the mournfully intense neutrality
of long-sidelined obsessives whose
opinions, making good copy for the late night finals,
disappear traceless before first light,
on the texts whose intransigence
in the face of interpretant and detergent alike
is legendary in a region where the heart
of the matter is decided by referring
insolubles to decisive arbitration
by the good clean readers of yesterday.
