



from the mid-pennine area 1973-4

midpen

an anthology of poetry and prose from the mid-Pennine area 1973-4 selected by
Adrian Mitchell
and
Ian Watson

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This collection of poetry and prose has come together as a result of an open invitation from the Mid-Pennine Association for the Arts to writers living in North East Lancashire and West Yorkshire. The floods of manuscripts which reached the MPAA offices showed clearly how many individuals spent their time writing. The selection here is just the tip of the iceberg, and represents those pieces of the highest standard chosen by Adrian Mitchell and Ian Watson. MPAA is greatly indebted to the selectors, who have spent so much time and devoted so much thought to the selection that follows.

The first poem, and the first story, were selected as individually outstanding, and have received awards from MPAA and from the *Burnley Express*. Tina Morris's poem pinpoints a theme which recurs again and again throughout the collection — the environment and man's ability to improve or destroy it. From reading the work here it is obvious that for writers at least, surroundings are of enormous importance, and the recent upsurge of interest in the environment is no passing phase but a force to be reckoned with. And though Barbi Wilson's story is not set in the area, most of the prose work also has strongly discernible local origins.

Thanks are due not only to the selectors, but to the contributors, without whose work there would be no anthology, and to my co-editor, Kenneth Nightingale, Chairman of the MPAA's Written and Spoken Word Panel.

Jennifer Wilson.

They didn't tell us
what it would be like
without trees.

Nobody imagined
that the whispering of leaves
would grow silent
or the vibrant jade of spring
pale to grey death.

And now we pile
rubbish on rubbish
in this dusty landscape—
struggling to create
a tree

but though the shape is right
and the nailed branches
lean upon the wind
and plastic leaves
lend colour to the twigs

we wait in vain
for the slow unfurling of buds
and no amount of loving
can stir our weary tree
to singing

TINA MORRIS,
Blackburn.

THREE WINTER NIGHTS

Dag en.—All night snow came. I sat beside Anders' bed, the lamp turned low and away from his white thin eyelids. The veins showed a little now. The flesh seemed stretched so tightly. It hurt so much to look at him now, but my eyes would not see the book I had upon my lap. The morningtime came and the nightdark, winterstill daytime began to pass slowly. Still Anders slept. I chopped wood despite the freezing air that pulled at my arms as the axe rose and fell. Torno was white and smooth-shining in the midday darkness. I laid the wood upon the resting fire. New, almost soft now, gentle limbs of tree upon the whitening edges of old and ice-hard now dead branches. Trees were vegetable giants. The good trees. But they had to be burned for Anders had to be kept warm. The trees were few so far North. Soon I would have to have more. The day after tomorrow. I ate no meals now. If Anders would eat, then I would eat. But Anders was so quiet. In the afternoon, I filled the lamp with fresh oil and Anders began to move just a little. I knelt by the cot, lifted the duvet from his thin chest. "Moder," he whispered. "Moder." Over and over. "Moder." He did not hear my voice. He did not see me. I do not think he felt my warm hand on his cold, cold face. He looked right through me now and I was suddenly so afraid. I began to get colder, sitting now by the fire, now by Anders, first in the burning log's heat, then my burning cold skin on Anders' icy forehead. I yearned for light, for Var to come, for warmth and love, and most of all for life. I yearned and ached for Anders' face in my memory, as he leapt and slid and stamped around in the snow of last wintertime. I longed to see his eyes shine once more in the late winter darkness. But those memories would not show themselves within my crying mind. By four or five, Anders was still and quiet once again. I took a last look at Torno before closing the curtains. As they moved to meet, the right drape caught upon the corner of the cupboard and knocked off Anders' bear, letting it fall upon the rag rug. I think I sat down there, holding Bear for a long time. Long into the silent evening, and a little into the next lonely night. At first, I looked at Bear, played with him and talked to him as Anders had done, and then I was quiet. Mikel had bought Bear for me, when he first came. Mikel. Mikel. Mikel with the shining pale eyes of his son. Mikel with the ringing voice that was Anders when he sang and played. Mikel, why did you leave? Mikel, I wished you had known Anders, just once. Just even once. Mikel, we need you now, but I know we will not ever see you again. I realised I was almost shouting. Mikel. Mikel. But Anders did not move, he did not hear. Later, I sewed a little. It was a soft white shirt for Anders. I had begun to make it before he had become so badly ill. I could not stop and just hide it away now. He would wear it yet. I built up the fire again, and I think I read some more. I cannot remember what I read. I cannot remember if I actually did read. The movements I made were so habitually calm and quiet, though I knew Anders would not awake. The wind arose as midnight approached. It blew the hard, icy snowflakes against the caked windows. It beat so hard, relentless in its energy. My eyes grew heavy and, perhaps in the haze of doing so much and nothing, I slept for a while. But I do not know. I remember it was shortly after midnight when my tired and aching eyes looked once again at the old clock.

Dag tva.—The long green fingers were the only light in the dark room. Still the snow beat upon the house. I lit again the lamp and held it close to Anders for a moment. He was still peaceful, his skin almost transparent in the sharp light so near to his small face. I lifted up the duvet again and took out his cold little hand to hold within my own. A little time afterwards, he began again to moan just audibly. I leaned closer, whispered to him. He moaned for a long time, then sank into another deeper sleep. I began to be afraid once more; he seemed to be much worse. My little old clock said ten minutes past one. There was no telephone here in the house; I would have to go out to Sommer's farmhouse. It was about a short mile away. But a short mile would be such a long one in this blinding snowstorm. I pulled the fur that had been Mikel's around my trembling shoulders. Mikel was tall; it was far too big for me. Lifting the

short curtain at the tiny window beside the door, I saw almost nothing. The snow was heaped upon the sill, covering half the glass. Through the other half, all I could see was the omnipresent darkness and the silver lake of ice. With a last glance at peacefully, deep-breathing little Anders, I opened the door and stumbled down the snow that had built up against the oak door. The snow fell thick and heavy, lying, resting, sleeping, but never really melting upon my long hair. My boots lifted and tumbled through the deep, white snow, crashing on the frozen, sliding ground below. At last, I saw the golden lights of Mrs. Sommer's farmhouse. But it still took so long to reach them. Please let Anders sleep. Please let Anders sleep. I beat upon the kitchen door, calling Anna, Anna. I think I must almost have been screaming by the time Anna opened the door for me. "It is Kirstti," I shouted. "Anders is . . . dying." When I spoke the word, I had admitted at last to myself that he was. Anna rang for the doctor, who said the car would take quite a while to come through the bad drifts on the road from the town. Abisko was only three and a quarter miles from my house, but it seemed so terribly long before Doctor Kristoffersson arrived. Anna had driven me home. I fearfully had opened the door, but, almost with relief, had seen that my Anders was still asleep, still warm, still breathing, still alive. It must have been about another hour before the doctor came. I stayed all that time, with Anders' icy hand within mine. The doctor took Anders and me to the big hospital in Abisko. He died at ten minutes past nine that same morning. Still I held his hand. He stayed asleep, just stopped breathing, that is all. The doctor held his other hand. "Where is your husband, Kirstti?" he asked of me. "I am unmarried," I told him. "Anders is — was all that is my own." He gave me his condolences, covered Anders with the impersonal sheet and it was all over. I left the old hospital and took the bus as far as it went, which was not so very far. Then I walked and stumbled home through the fresh morning's fall of snow. My little house was buried at the back to about half the height of the building. The roof held the snow of all the previous week. There had been no thaw; I had had no time to sweep the black sheet that protected the wooden roof. Mrs. Sommer had asked me if I wanted to go stay with her for a while. No, I had told her that I would return to Stockholm to stay with dear friends while the long Swedish winter passed over us.

Dag tre.—The house was so cold. The fire of course had long since died away. The old tree-logs lay in a heap of branch-shaped white ash-arms. The room was large and empty. Upon Anders' bed was a pile of folded, bright blankets and sheets, left neatly for me by Mrs. Sommer. My head began to throb with cold and my eyes ached so hard from crying, since the bus had driven away, back to Abisko. I longed for Anders' voice and laugh. I longed for Mikel. Mikel whom I had not known for so long. Torno's ice-cover shone in hard, leaden light-of-more-snow-to-come. Mikel, I want you to know about Anders. It was so bad to watch him worsen, to see him slowly die away. Oh, Mikel, I would not have wanted you to have seen him die. Mikel, I can see you so well. Your eyes are shining like Torno's ice. Is it with love or with cold? Torno, Mikel, I must be with you. I opened the heavy door, and crunched out into the crisply set snow. Mikel, I can almost see your footprints beside those that are my own. Torno is getting clearer as I approach. Can you see it, Mikel, through the beautiful arms of the snow-trees? My feet grew slowly colder as I walked, making each new step a challenge, a feat to accomplish. Mikel, you are cold too. Your breath streams out before you as you pant. It rushes to meet mine as we pass. The sky is so hard and bright, Mikel; as white as Torno's icy surface. Do not go so fast, Mikel. My legs are so tired, and Anders' are so short. Wait for us, dear Mikel. Now we are beside Torno at last. I never remembered she was so wide, so smooth, so strong with sparkling ice and newly fallen sheet of snow. It covers Torno like a pale, thin blanket of almost warmth. We should have brought a blanket to cover us, Mikel. It is so very, very cold, Mikel. My legs are so stiff and sore with walking, Mikel. Mikel, I want you to help me. Help us. I cannot walk any more until it is warmer, Mikel. We must sit beside the lake and await the springtime, Mikel. The thaw will come soon, Mikel. Mikel, your eyes are shining. My hands will not move. Lay down beside me, Mikel. Torno is warming me. Warm me, hold me, dear Mikel. Anders was so cold. The fire is low. My eyes ache. I wish you were here, Mikel. I am so cold. So very cold. Springtime is taking so long. I am so cold. Why does not come the springtime? I am so cold. I am so cold.

BARBI WILSON,
Accrington.

THE PLANNERS

This is a mean town, with wide, concrete streets,
Where everyone bustles and nobody meets;
Pale, puny minds forced into the glooms
Of blind-filtered sunlight in avant-garde rooms.
Women like vultures, peeping and peering—
The hills here may whisper, but nobody's hearing—
Trees may rustle and rivers wind,
But the people in this town spy round the blind,
And never hear birdsong and never feel spring,
Or smell fresh green grasses; their children don't sing.

But we built them a city
Of white concrete blocks
Hygenically planned,
Where every door locks.
They have baths, central-heating—
What more can you ask?
To please all these people,
We've had quite a task,
I can tell you!

Don't tell me—
Tell them—

Where are the leaves?
And rivers and valleys and nests in the eaves?
Where are the greenswards and clanging church bells,
And hillocks, broom-covered, and sweet grassy mounds,
And snow-time and star-time and night-induced sounds?

They built them a mean town,
Conceived by small minds,
Where they stare from high windows
And hide by the blinds.

SHEILA OPENSHAW,
Blackburn.

IN PRAISE OF THE NEW

Quiet green road
lit by thousand kilowatt stars,
parting twilit air
with an insolence of petrol
indolent in its departing

hanging on the trees,
still beneath the man-made planets,
milky way on electric lines
that skip the sky high

but not as high as the stars
and more attainable
and scattering their brilliance
along a million filaments of wired
scintillation;

yet not admired.

Why? Why no praise
to the green still road
and the clear star-shine
from the manmade line?

SHEILA OPENSHAW,
Blackburn.

MESSAGE TO NELSON

Don't take away our happiness
Don't let tragedy happen here
Don't build lonely skyscraper flats
Where people live in fear.
We want to keep our houses
Where children laugh and play,
Not shut in little boxes
Where nerves begin to fray.
Just look at our big cities
Full of vandals crime and fear;
Be warned people of NELSON
Please don't let it happen here.
I have seen the fear and sadness
Where children no longer play,
Their prison four walls way up high
Where old folk sit and pray.
Don't take away our freedom,
Our happiness, our joy,
The pleasure of your family
Your little girl or boy.
Let us keep our little houses
Where we are happy and content,
Don't build lonely skyscraper flats
Big blocks of terror in cement.

CONSTANCE DINNADGE,
Nelson.

EMPTY TENEMENT

They're going to pull it down
To make way for a store, a score
Of rooms that once were filled
With folk who left some traces
Here and there, cooking stains
And stale tobacco smells that dwell
In darkened passageways and landings
And linger on the stairs . . .

They say a man played Chopin
In number seventeen, in three
A spinster with a parrot
Held seances for friends . . .
In number five a suicide,
A girl was crossed in love . . .
And a fortune was found
Beneath the floor of number nine
By plumbers looking for a leak.

They're going to pull it down
The faded walls and crooked stairs
The empty, silent rooms . . .
Where echoes seem to linger
Of footsteps, voices, and closing doors
Where nothing now remains
But a rag doll in the attic
And a saucepan full of rain . . .

MALCOLM SELLERS,
Brierfield.

Dull rhythm
 of swiftly pounding wheels
 steals
 gently
 over welcoming eyes—
 closing.
 Through shuttered lids,
 dark and
 heavy—
 spears of light force their lethal rays—
 blurring
 sly earth rain and rails in uneasy juxtaposition.
 Sigh.
 fight sleep.
 Rain beating desperately against the glass
 Smudging the starkness
 of trees in winter profile—
 which flash and die in slothful eyes
 almost before they are there at all.
 Chattering wheels have travelled far—tell many stories—
 whispered quickly
 then forgotten.
 Iron talks to iron—
 I miss the tale.

WASTE GROUND

Strangely brown and almost bare,
 You wear your buildings uneasily
 Like the awkward hat a child might wear,
 Playing at being fully grown.
 You are past the fully grown,
 Oiled with cloying wines you
 Did not take the trouble to prepare or store
 Effusing the sickly mustiness of decay on every side.
 With you, to die is not to end but to exist—
 A sole reminder of the dim refusal of
 The time to lie and sleep.

And you, all human, but strangely like this ground
 Uncompromising in your attitudes,
 Lead me to love and yet be mystified.
 To play identity like a pack of cards
 Is not the truth
 You seek so cruelly.
 Decay is not the answer—nor is illusion—
 For these are games played only by the
 wise or dead.
 How soon your life will breathe again,
 I cannot say.
 But never can the seeds rejoice until
 The time of asking comes—
 And when you ask, the will to do shall move.

VALERIE C. JOHNSON,
 Nelson.

WELL KNOWN BUT NOT WELL LIKED

"Look at this mess!" he said as he pushed back the square drain-cover. The sewage man was angry. He was called Jimmy. Jimmy played the harmonica and everybody knew him for the perpetual smile on his face. This bright spring morning, however, there was no smile—just disgust. He was disgusted with all of us round the back because we had used newspaper instead of toilet paper. I don't know why he was so angry since his whole day must be a series of confrontations with these newspaper-users. Well, there it was, all our food, vomit, and pee of the past few winter months lying quietly in its square case. It was like a thick brown impasto, only waiting for some masterful hand to scoop it up and turn it into a raw sienna creation. This actually wasn't the case at all as Jimmy well knew. No, this potential masterpiece was on its way up. It would soon rise to ooze its way over the rough concrete and spread revengefully over our little yard. The sewage man would have liked this, but after all he had his job and reputation to keep, and his smile. He was well known for his smile. We, round the back, we were well known too, but not well liked.

In the face of his bewildered but condemning eyes there was nothing to do but to walk away.

At the other end of the yard, high on the top of the factory chimney, two black silhouettes were preparing to take it to bits stone by stone. At the bottom of the chimney there was my arch, my useless, decorative arch that had harmonised so well with the railway-duct arches behind it; that too was going to be taken away. Oh please let me have it and I will put it into my little house, in my bedroom. Silly thoughts. These men, who were well known for their common sense, were already preparing to pull open the sluice gate which this sensitive little arch had spanned for so long. The stagnant water of the dam, which had once served to drive the machinery of this mill to be worked in by workers who had occupied our present houses, now had begun to crash into the empty grey space below. We had been de-gutted.

They knew us well for we would say nothing.

I left to get my morning tobacco. As I rounded the corner an unfamiliar grey dust was being carried on the wind. Hissing of air pumps filled my ears and there were two amphibious grey-suited monsters blowing away the covering of many years. I remembered the young sanitary inspector saying that we were in danger of getting silicosis from this stone dust. Never mind though, it wouldn't get into our houses, or at least it wouldn't have done if our mayor-landlord had kept his promise about replacing our broken windows.

All this activity around us went on most of the morning. Until dinner-time in fact, when these workmen's thoughts turned to pies and pints.

The rising impasto had been surveyed and stemmed. The decorative arch had seen most of the stagnant water pass underneath her stony half-circle. The silicose dust lying in the road was being warmed by the sun and the stones from the top of the chimney now lay awkwardly on the floor of her belly. It was truly dinner-time — a quiet, waiting time. All the residents of our four houses which formed this court were out of sight except for two. The sixteen-year old man kissed his pregnant mistress at the door and prepared himself for the 2—10 shift.

As he passed through the arch out into the road, she looked blankly wondering how to pass her time until his return. Pop music always fills a gap so she got out her record player on the step and switched it on. The two silhouettes from the sky proved themselves to be merely men as they exchanged workmen's confidences with their colleagues from the sluice gate and filed past the mistress of music. "Hey, hey, jig-a-jig, jig," that's what the record said. The men glanced at each other knowingly and giggled randily. "High, high, higher," the reggae-man declared. Nervously she looked at them and then disappeared inside.

She re-appeared but they had gone. She was holding a gun. Almost disappointed, she sat back down on the cold step and looked idly at her .22. In fact it was their joint possession. With this cool straight instrument, they had a control over their stark memories — desperate memories of sitting on epileptic fathers to hold them down in their fits, drunken red-lipped mothers, foster homes, approved schools and the nick. This was their gesture of defiance against wasted hours, waiting in waiting rooms, waiting for do-gooders and indifferent beaurocrats to suggest yet another place to move on to. Casually she loaded it. She looked for something to aim at. On the banking some yards in front of her was a bag of peanuts hung from the washing pole. It was really a trap so that her lover could shoot feeding blackbirds at his ease, from his bedroom window as his loved one fondled the swastikas on his arm.

So idly she shot at the peanuts, enjoying herself to some extent.

There now appeared two next door neighbours—two young brothers of five and seven. They bounced out of their house, next door to the mistress, almost optimistically but soon regained their usual blankness on seeing that it was only the same as it had been yesterday. They never seem to go to school these children. When asked why not they reply, "Mam forgot." Oh yes, mam forgot. The two brothers watched the mistress lazily shooting in front of her. I was leaning against my door. "You are shooting," I said to her apprehensively. She nodded seriously, not one for talking much. Suddenly she exclaimed wildly to the elder brother to go on the banking. He went and stared with his big bored eyes at the washing pole. You should have gone to school today little boy, you are known there. It happened. The child twitched as if he had been slapped in the face. I was looking right at him and he stared at me, after the impact, motionlessly for a second or two. Then he cried out in total desperation. His face turned into a mask. It was hard to say whether he was acting or not but the spreading red mark on the side of his face as he ran down to the mistress left nothing to doubt.

I knew what I had to do and was on my way to the phone before he reached the house. A quick look as I fled round the corner showed the blood now running freely down his dirty blue jumper. I left them banging on his mother's door. The mistress and the child, hand in hand, the younger brother holding on to her skirt, the black dog barking — they were all crying for his mother to come out and look — they were all crying out for their mothers, the black dog too, as this day had turned out too terrible for them to be on their own.

I made the 999 call and, my job done, I hurried back to the yard. Surprisingly they were still there banging on the door. Coming up close to him, I saw that the blood had congealed on the jumper and he was now very pale. So I picked him up and put him on next door's couch. Pushing the hair out of his temple, I tried to avoid looking at the red hole in his head but could not help noticing some of the hair had stuck fast, obviously carried in by the force of the pellet.

The ambulance bell clanged nearer and nearer, two uniformed men appeared at the corner. "In here." They looked at him confidently. "Are you his father?" "Are you his mother?" "No." Mum was still next door. A grey blanket was wrapped round him, on to the stretcher and into the shady ambulance. There were codewords over the intercom. This was exciting, I thought. I said that his mother should go, not me, so one ambulance man went back and kicked in the mum's door. Mum had actually come down with a smile on her face. It soon went and she got in, instead of me.

I went back to the house to a very frightened young girl. More men appeared at the corner, five of them this time, two in uniform. The black dog growled and went for the plain clothes men and bit the head C.I.D. man in the leg. They filled up the mistress's room with a mixture of control, confidence and savagery. The gun was leaning against the wall. "Who shot him?" They looked surprised when she admitted to it. They took the gun outside. They took the pregnant mistress outside. They tested the gun for accuracy. They tested her for honesty. She was changing rapidly from shades of white to shades of crimson. Tears. They took the gun and pellets. She would have to go to court, she would be notified. They left.

The pregnant girl with one day to go was stunned. Now her lover's brother emerged from out of the child's mother's house. A small, ragged, monosyllabic boy of 17. "What's up?" He was told but there was no movement in his face. Where had he been all this time? What had he and the child's mother been doing? Couldn't they hear the banging and shouting? They had both been in the attic cleaning up a mess and they had had to finish it. He blushed and left.

Now there was only the waiting, and the talking. I put on the kettle and went to stand at the door. The men on the chimney had resumed their work, the stagnant water had nearly all gone, and the sandblasting machines were hissing once again. The black dog in the yard was mooching aimlessly about and the younger brother, having so quickly accepted his single state, was catching the water flowing out of the broken toilet in a tin can. He turned round and looked at me.

It was a strange feeling as we didn't really know each other at all, but we were all well known and not well liked.

BOHUSLAV BARLOW,
Todmorden.

VICTIMS 1973

Victim number one, passed down the never-ending corridor. Guts divulged in congealed blood. Empty sockets instead of smiling eyes. Agonised in pain. Tortured with gun rattles.

Victim number two, passed down the street. Wisps of unkempt hair over a pale face. Eyes black through worry. Hands clasped over her swollen belly where the unwanted brat strove for life.

Victim number three, passed down by the buildings. Got shot in the back in the name of religion. Another sacrificial lamb. Not as effective as the first, being Mrs. Smith's eighth son.

Victim number four, passed through the bar door. Unkind eyes on his light black skin. Wanted nowhere. Invisible tears running down his heart. Clasped thin air for friendship.

Victim number five is you. Smug unbelieving face. Selfish to the point of sickness. Member of the civilised world, submerged six miles into hell.

ANNE ELIZABETH THORNTON,
Colne.

DROOPY TIM

He walks down the street,
with very flat feet,
and his jacket's all tattered and torn.
His hair dangles down,
about a foot off the ground,
and he's heading for market town.

His hat hangs over his eyes,
and his hair is all different dyes.
His pants are all ragged,
he fell as he staggered
with his shoes open at the toes
with his shoes open at the toes.

JOSEPHINE MARSH,
Nelson.

POWER LOOMS

Two fingers only on a withered hand
and a lifetime ground between clench-toothed cogs
to dust motes dancing in a watery sunbeam.
The tortured backing, whining of vee-belts,
whirls his remaining days in dreary round
of sweeping toffee papers after doffers
from breakfast time to brew and then to lunch.

The centre of his life from boyhood days—
this crouching monster in a black stacked jungle—
has held him captive many weary years;
smothered thought and ripped away his fingers
with clamorous maw and set humidity.

Cheerfully he disregards his failure;
cackles gummily at pleasantries; he paws
a friendly shoulder with his half a hand.

ANNE A. ALSTON,
Ramsbottom.

JIMMY PUDDING

Jimmy Puddin' is mi name, an' sometimes Suet-Feet.
They calls me other things an' a', when A'm rollin' home at neet.
But what they'll never call me for, if tha listens to mi song; is A
ever stole a farthing yet, or ever killed a mon.

And its flip-flap, flip-flap, goes mi feet, when A'm rollin' home at neet.
All o' t'lasses deawn eaur street say theer goes Jimmy Puddin'.

In Burnley A did live an' dwell, in t'town wheer I were born
Twas theer A med black puddin's, aye, an' welly deed i' scorn
Each time A hear mi clogs flip-flap, A think upon that day
When they feaund a body lyin' up a ginnel wheer it lay.

They sed 'twur late in t'neet afoor when t'poor owd fella deed
They sed he were not killed for spite, that he were killed for greed
They sed that someone's footprints had bin feaund at t'scene o' t'crime
An' they sed that fella's footprints looked a mighty lot like mine.

As I were lakin' pitch'n'toss in th' early afternoon
Two policemen came for me, an' tow'd me o' mi doom
Wi' iron bands areaund me wrists they carts me off to jail
An' not a word would they believe o' Jimmy Puddin's tale.

Then word went up an' deawn each street as fast as foot could run
That Jimmy Puddin' lay in jail for a crime he'd never done
Then a' mi friends come flockin' reaund an' tow'd 'em t'truth so sweet
That I were workin' all o' t'day, an' drinkin' all o' t'neet.

They give to me mi freedom then, A thowt it ne'er would come
An' A vowed A'd ne'er be jailed again for summot A'd not done
So off to t'cloggers A did go, as fast as clog could fall
Oh, clogger, A've got work for thee, wi' needle an' wi' awl.

Leather patches he did cut, an' on mi clogs did sow
Tha should ha' sin' a' neighbours een as flip-flap I did go
Tha never saw a queerer clog, nor yet a queerer print
But now they know wheer Jimmy's bin, an' wheer owd Jimmy went.

LOL LYNCH,
Burnley.

PRODUCTION WORKER'S LAMENT

Being dawn

I got out of bed and went to work

Being June the 21st

it was midsummer's day

Being work

it felt no different

NIGHT SHIFT CLOCKS ON

Half a skyful of stars

Wince above lit factory skylights:

The neighbours hear the muffled thud of machinery

Only when it stops,

Which is every Bank Holiday:

Pale men with bad digestions see to that.

SONNET FOR EDWARD ALDERSON

If, a month ago you'd asked

Me find you someone, described the man—

Hair the colour of last year's bracken;

A scar you almost couldn't see next

To his ear, the size of a baby's fist;

Probably in a pub — I could have taken

You to him, in the Commercial or the Seven

Stars, Ted's nimbus a mild beer mist.

Now I could not help your search: death is as unexpected as a cloudy pint

But, a drinker like the rest of us. Ted knew his bad pint lurked

Somewhere in the bottom of a publican's barrel. Seeing him lurch

Maybe a mere drunkard you'd call him, merely maudlin seeing him cry;

Drunk and mawkish, but not mere, I gave him a beery aureole

But then, only three of us saw him play the piano like a boy in love.

RICHARD MacSWEEN,
Barnoldswick.

WITCHES CAN'T CRY

The village lay under the hill on what had once been the main highway through Pendle Forest. It was quite an ordinary grey stone village, remarkable only for three things — the old church, the inn-sign with its naked lady pursued by a wolf, an eagle and two black cats, and Mrs. Carter-Pettigrew.

Mrs. Carter-Pettigrew — her name was Rowena — lived at the Big House where she embroidered chair seats in petit-point, and sometimes played the harp. She was a tall slim woman with curiously red-gold hair, and she moved very smoothly and silently like water, or a summer wind. Her eyes were the colour of the sea, and changed as quickly from blue to green and green to grey, and her father's great-great-grandmother had been a witch.

This last fact was known and accepted by the local inhabitants, most of whom could claim or refute that they too sprang from Nutters or Redferns. It didn't particularly surprise them, not the older ones anyway, that Rowena Carter-Pettigrew was a bit, well, unusual; that she could cure bruises and headaches and forecast the weather, and (some said) provide potions for Love. She did a lot of good in the village and most people liked her. It was only sometimes, when they happened to meet her floating along the moor road at sunset, that she gave them a queer feeling, as if a witch had walked over their graves.

Mr. Carter-Pettigrew was a successful stockbroker, and successful stockbrokers, as everybody knows, don't believe in witchcraft. He knew that his wife was an unusual woman, but he put this down to the fact that she'd been an only child and educated abroad. He was in Manchester most of the week anyway, and when he did come back to the village at weekends his meals were always hot and delectably cooked and his shirts had all their buttons on — so why worry? He was a fat cheerful shrewd little man in his late forties — nobody, guess as they might, knew how old Rowena was, but it was generally assumed that she was forty-ish, since the Carter-Pettigrews had an only daughter of twenty who was the apple of their eyes. Her name was Sally May, and she was in Norway working as a private secretary; although she had her mother's slim figure and red-gold hair she was prettier, more ordinary, and far younger than Rowena had ever been. She came over to England for holidays, and her father and mother frequently visited Norway to see her, and everyone said what a happy family, and how fond they were of each other. This was true, and the Carter-Pettigrews might have gone on living happily in the village for ever if it hadn't been for Rowena. For years she'd got away with *little* things — little harmless things like curing spots on the butcher's baby or telling Farmer Robinson which snowdrift in which field had buried his sheep. The trouble began one summer when, over-reaching herself like many an artist before her, she lost her head and tried to capture a Norwegian.

They had met in Bergen on one of her periodic visits to Sally May. Mr. Carter-Pettigrew had been with them then, but on the second and subsequent occasions they'd been alone. He was a young man — fair and handsome and tall — and Rowena had had quite a job to make him look at her twice. But there was a sunset down the fjord and a summer-house looking out over the islands — she still remembered the first kiss, the first glass of wine, the brief bewitched summer darkness stealing in through the wide windows to blot out his fair head against her green satin knee. And now she couldn't forget him, or eat, or sleep — so, on Midsummer Eve, she looked for a long time in an old book of magic and then climbed up the hill.

"Fair queer she looked," said Farmer Robinson to his wife. "I were coming down bi t'brook, and she were standing up there by that great rock, saying summat."

"Happen she were watching t'sunset?" suggested Mrs. Robinson, who, like Mr. Carter-Pettigrew, had no time for what she called daft ideas.

"Nay, t'sun sets in t'west," her husband pointed out dogmatically. "She were staring right in t' opposite direction and *muttering*. And then I saw her throw summat up i'th'air — funny, I could have swore it were a bird!"

"Go on!" Mrs. Robinson clattered her milk-kits together and laughed. "Happen they've taken to keeping pigeons at t'Big House, and she were letting one loose."

"It weren't a pigeon. It were smaller than that — a little *black* bird — and it flew up and up till I couldn't see it anymore. As if — as if —"

"Well?"

"As if she were fetching Summat up."

Husband and wife looked at each other uneasily.

"Well, it's nowt to do with us," Mrs. Robinson said at last. "She knows her own business best, does that one. Best leave it alone. And think on, John Henry, don't go mentioning it to anyone else."

They didn't. But three days later the village was electrified to see Rowena walking down the street with a young man. He was tall and fair and handsome, and she was looking up at him as they walked, her green eyes glinting in the sun. *She* seemed to be doing all the talking, they noticed, for the young man said hardly anything at all. He didn't know what to say, for he was bewildered. He had simply no idea how he came to be here in this ugly grey English village with Mrs. Carter-Pettigrew whom he'd last seen six months ago in his own country. Oh yes, he'd enjoyed those crazy evenings in the summer-house above the fjord, but he hadn't meant to see this woman again. It was strange that all at once, out of the blue, his ship had developed engine trouble and put into Newcastle — stranger still how he'd found himself going into a telephone booth near the docks and asking for her number. It was — well, almost as if he were being *compelled* to do these things — and when at last he arrived at the nearest station and saw her waiting for him, he nearly wanted to make love to her all over again. Nearly, but not quite — for later that evening after he'd kissed her, he said dreamily:

"I think I should tell you this. There is a girl I have seen in Oslo. I think I am in love."

"Who is she? What is her name?"

"I do not know her name," he said. "I met her for a moment only, at a big party. She is young and pretty and just so high. When I go back I will look for her."

He felt Rowena stiffen in his arms.

"How old is she?"

"Oh — nineteen, twenty — what does it matter?"

Twenty, Rowena thought. Sally May's age. She hadn't told Sigurd that she had a daughter in Norway — it would make her sound too old. And in any case Sally May was working in Stavanger, not Oslo, so she couldn't possibly have anything to do with this other fair pretty girl Sigurd kept on talking about. Silly boy!

"You'll forget her," she said confidently, touching his hair. "You'll never see her again."

She was quite unprepared for the sharpness with which he turned on her.

"No, I shall not forget her. And all this must stop, you understand — all this with you and me."

"I can make you forget her!" she said passionately, and he noticed with an unaccountable chill that her face was full of lines and that her eyes had turned cold and grey. "Stay with me — and it will be like it was before. We had such wonderful times last year. Remember the summer-house? And the sunsets — and the logs burning — and the wine?"

His face softened. But he was a strong young man and a ship's officer, and he was used to importuning middle-aged women.

"No," he said.

"Just another day?"

"No. One day or twenty — it would make no difference now."

It was like the poem — "he looked like thunder and he went away" — and Rowena, watching him go determinedly down the hill to the train, knew that nothing would ever bring him back to her again.

Why, you may ask — why, if she really *was* a witch, couldn't she have kept him? It seems not, although she tried every spell in her book. And whenever she went up on the hill at sunset and looked for that girl's face in the black waters of the tarn she

could see only Sigurd, fair, tall and maddeningly, frustratingly desirable in his navy-blue ship's uniform. She had to imagine the girl, and whenever she thought of her she saw her all in white, wearing a Norwegian bridal crown. And as the days went by and the wet leaves began to drift over the garden, her heart, and the house, and the brooding hill became filled with evil. Even Mr. Carter-Pettigrew felt that something, somewhere was terribly wrong, for his meals were no longer hot and his shirts no longer buttoned. He noticed on one of his weekend visits that there were cobwebs in the larder and a kind of damp cold permeating the house — when he spoke to his wife she answered him, but as if she wasn't there. She'd gone terribly thin, too, and she looked old; he went back to Manchester quite perplexed. Perhaps she was missing Sally May? — for it was since Rowena's last visit to Norway that she'd begun to change. Or perhaps she was ill? But she laughed at him when he suggested her going to see old Dr. Briggs — and when he said well then, why didn't she have another little trip over to Norway, she'd said a very strange thing — that it wouldn't be any use. Of the young Norwegian who'd turned up so mysteriously and stayed the weekend with them, Mr. Carter-Pettigrew never even thought. He would have said, if he *had* thought anything, that the whole idea was ridiculous. He would have been quite horrified if he could have seen his wife turning over the pages in the old black book and heard her begin to read from it; nor could he ever have imagined the jealousy and pain that had driven her to this final dreadful thing as, crouching in the cold attic, Rowena read aloud the words spoken by Old Demdyke at the Witch Trials in Lancaster in 1612 . . .

"The speediest way to take away a man's life by witchcraft is to make a picture of clay like unto the shape of the person they mean to kill and dry it thoroughly; and when they would have them be ill in any one place more than another, then take a Thorn or Pin and prick it into that part of the picture you would so have to be ill; and when you would have any part of the body to consume away, then take that part of the picture and burn it. And when they would have the whole of the body to consume away, then take the remnant of the said picture and burn it; and so there-upon by that means, the Body shall die . . ."

A picture, she thought. That means a clay image. A little image of a young girl, with long legs and bright hair. If anything should happen to her Sigurd will *never* find her — not if he walks the streets of Oslo all his life! . . . And if he can't find her I can bring him back to me, for he did love me once . . .

The very thought of it rejuvenated her, and after her hateful task was done she went and walked on the hill again, smiling to herself as she was blown along by the wind. She was so certain that her Norwegian would come back to her that when the telephone operator said that there was a call from Norway she caught hold of the receiver with the thrilled fingers of a young girl. But when the call came through it was not Sigurd's voice she heard, but the faint frightened whisper of Sally May, her own daughter.

Across the wastes of sea and the Pennine hills and through the disturbed air it came — that little tragic cry for help — "Mother! Mother! Please come. I feel so ill!"

"But Sally May! — darling — what is it?" Rowena called back. "Have you had the doctor? What did he say?"

"He doesn't know," the faint voice whispered. "It started quite suddenly — oh Mother, I was so well, so happy! I went to Oslo to a friend's party — I met a young man — and last night I had a letter to say that he was coming to find me. You see, he didn't know my name — he sent the letter through my friends. Oh, mother, please come! I — I think I'm going to die!"

* * *

Mr. Carter-Pettigrew broke down at the funeral. He wept noisily as the coffin was lowered into the grave, but Rowena, white-faced above her expensive mourning, neither moved nor spoke.

"Not a tear!" said the village, affronted. "Not a single tear!"

They were quite shocked — which, since so many of them were descended from the Nutters and Redferns, was rather astonishing. Or perhaps — for after all, three hundred years had passed since the last occasion — they'd forgotten. *Witches can't cry.*

JOAN POMFRET,
Great Harwood.

One
by one
the golden feathers fall
from the sun's brilliant
head-dress
lingering for a moment
upon the eyelashes of the sky
then drifting
like the fiery days
of another year
onto the damp earth

and the ancient star-raker
limping eternally along dark lanes
in search of fallen feathers
fills his empty sack with charred star-dust
and shrivelled moonrays
but never finds
the scraps of sunlight
glistening beneath
the dying leaves
of a winter world

Like silver water-birds
fishes glimmer
through chasm and tower,
peak and gully
of undersea mountain ranges.

In deep timeless cloisters
they know nothing
of earth creatures
or the land's dry tears:
perhaps will never know
of lakes fouled and soured
or trees rattling
in shrivelled death
and they will not grieve
for the lost gold of the dandelion
or the end
of all
sunsets

TINA MORRIS,
Blackburn.

FISHING TRIP

On a sea like a mill-pond
Eight men in a cobble from Whitby
Sat or stood in the sun and fished.

The horizon dissolved into a haze
And in the middle distance a school of dolphins broke
And broke again the rocking calm.
The men were silent, absorbed, baiting their hooks.

The hook goes through the mussel's tongue and fleshy stem.
The weight drops through the clear water
Through the dark green water
Down out of sight
Into another world where soon
Some living thing remotely nudges my finger.
I jerk and reel
For an age I reel
Drawing at last a shining life
Out of its element,
Or two or three on the same line.

Whiting and larger haddock and big cod
Gaped while the hooks were wrenched from their throats,
Slithered and thrashed on the deck, then stared
Through a thickening mist at the staring sun.

It was a good day, a day to remember, that August Wednesday.
Our arms ached from reeling in so many fish.
The men smiled and were happy.
This was what they had come for.

On the way back they admired the jigger
That had done most damage with the big cod.
Next time they will all bring such jiggers.

Crowds gathered on the quay to watch the catch brought in.
Wives and children lined the streets to watch the boats unloaded.
Fridges and larders bulged with fish. Many were thrown away.

The North Sea did not notice its loss.
The depths still teemed with whiting and haddock and big cod
Eating the smaller fish.

Fish don't feel pain. And what if they do?
We did nothing worse to them than they do to each other.
We accepted the morality of the North Sea.
We enjoyed the carnage and the day out.

KEITH MILSOM,
Grindleton.

WHEN ALL THE BEES ARE GONE

When all the bees are gone and flowers die
And the grass burns to dust and no birds fly,
In the high towers how loud inside the flats
The surging power of the thermostats.

Vast libraries of film and tape fill leisure
With wonders of the earth's once living treasure.
Each child will learn with speech how swiftly earth
Lost what the many-millions years gave birth.

Reared with their own machines, still men in name,
Impotent magi, they are not the same.
More rational from adversity, too late,
They pore on shadows they can't re-create.

In the high towers a million men survive,
And on earth they only are alive.
The cities sand. The lost tanks ramble on
When flowers die and all the bees are gone.

EXAMINATIONS

At last in old age
With all youth dried out
To be given a mandarin —
A north-western province of minor importance.

Being able to write on the Four Classics
Brings not a tittle of wisdom.
I am prouder of my peonies
And the striped camellias I grow from seed.

It is pleasant to hold jade in the hand
And wear silk.
I remember the times the soup was like rainwater,
The times we ate frogs.

Now school-friends rediscover me.
I have requests for my calligraphy,
And when I can no longer enjoy them
An abundance of boys.

GEORGE MOOR
Burnley

SONG OF BLACKBURN: AN UNPLANTED AND UPROOTED TREE

Your grim stone walls are soft with damp
and a century of black lung corroding filth.

As a jewelled flower reflected upon wooded hills.
As a solitary singing bird in winter's clear frost.

Blackburn's sad and lonely bricked-up terraced streets.
Shawled mill girls in early morning phantom dreams.

Clogs freely floating into imagination's pool.
Walking the taut straight line of fantasy.

Teenage office girls woven into living tapestry.
Enveloping your bus station to await the day.

Watched by men, long fused with ancient benches.
Flowered from their seats like magic fungi.

Corporation buses riding endless convoluted tracks
into collective memory's remote terrain.

Mapping a false but comforting geography.
As if discovering the final answer to everything.

Grime still hovering over sand-blasted skin.
Industrial rain upon cobbles, council flats and dust.

It's a cold, wet, bleak, windy vision
of factory institution's early morning shift.

Blackburn's hair is grass and its legs are trees

Fingers of branches and bellies of fields.
Eyes of rivers and tongues of oceans.
Thighs of hills and breasts of mountains.

Blackburn's voice is forests and its hands are woodlands.

They are your future as seen in this present.
The mystic global tribal dancers looking back.

As if poverty and factories and slums
had just begun to intrude into your nightmares.

As if discrimination, homelessness and deprivation
were creatures of some deranged imagination.

Almost too terrible to ever again be thought up.

Night's northern lightbulb moon gently flickering
over ghostly taxis and indifferent drunks.

Drawn curtains; protective guardians of lonely houses.
Every family gathered round a rented television set.

Last beers vanished into Blackburn's open veins.
Each concrete rooted bone, resting undisturbed.

Eager still to reject authority's transplanted gifts.
Grafted in discord upon your old traditions.

Untroubled slumbering town, innocent of change.
Monstrous technological demons impatiently await.

To watch your breath, moving slowly in and out.
Savouring King Cotton's last tortured gasp.

Some unidentified presence seeks awful transformation.
Whilst slowly cutting off living breath at source.

Your forgotten children, betrayed and wronged.
Craftsmen, hand loom weavers, free thinking men.

Those simple living anarchic liberated poor.
Now resurrected in joyous celebrations of equality

Spirits of communal brotherhood and love.
Spectres of foul profit's divisive greed.

This town lies suspended in our imagination.
A great unknowing where its heart should be.
Unsure just where night ends and day begins.

For life is little like its story books.
The cavalry sometimes shows up late,
And fairy god mothers not at all.

Of Blackburn, what can we truly say.
To speak of history is almost to deny you.
You are not this or that or of description.

Blackburn is an idea in many different minds.
An unplanted and uprooted tree.
A seed forever doomed to winter germination.

Tonight I walk your empty illuminated streets.
To press upon each door, buttons of electric bells.
To reassure that living things exist within.

Blackburn, stretched out in some uncherished place.

Down on lonely knees in hostile nights.
Broken, tamed, defeated; explaining nothing away.

Your greatest need is always to recreate yourself.
In bricks and stone and concrete and sewers.
Lasting light-years beyond our fragile memory.

Creator, comforter, mother; destroyer of us all.
Our breath machine and alive mythology.
Speaking words that have never been said before.

Blackburn's lips are peace and its throat is freedom,

Ears of poetry and teeth of music.
Feet of joy and genitals of beauty.
Shoulders of warmth and buttocks of loving.

Blackburn's arms are magic and its beard is wonder.

A town of wild horses brightly singing.
Flashes of laughter amid their flying.

DAVE CUNLIFFE,
Blackburn.

RESTING

at the top of the hill
the old man stops to lean
against this oak
which was an ancient tree
when his grandfather was a boy
and gathered acorns here

now where a patch of bark
is stripped away
his fingers idly trace
the tangled labyrinth that reveals
an insect's secret wanderings
through the brief summer that was all its life

ALEC SMITH,
Todmorden.

THE PANEL GAME

The Appointments Panel was somewhat piqued; it was 15.03 hours and the Applicant was already three minutes late.

"This creates a bad impression," the Chairman observed, swivelling his albino ringed eyes simultaneously in opposite directions. "If the Applicant doesn't report by 15.05, I shall invoke Rule Ten and disqualify."

"Quite right," the Consultant agreed, consulting his multi-digital wrist computer, "our aggregate time-cost index allows that."

"Capital!" the Accountant sniggered, playing with his abacus.

"There may be mitigating circumstances," the Director of Integrated Personnel ventured, touching his receding fuzz with delicate, attenuated fingers.

"*Mitigating circumstances!*" The Chairman and the Consultant looked askance, their toothless mouths opening and closing in unison.

Hitherto the conversation had been extended by the Appointments Conversion Monitor, but now, as the Chairman went on to censure the Director of Integrated Personnel, the critical override phaser substituted the seven letter Rapidict alphabet.

"I beg your pardon," the Director of Integrated Personnel apologised two seconds later, "I wasn't thinking."

"Unfortunately, you were!" the Consultant corrected, swinging his stumpy legs in vexation. "I shall expect you at the next Segmental Attitudinal Seminar."

Sometimes the D.I.P. worried the Consultant. Unlike most executives, the D.I.P.'s logico-brain layer still accepted an occasional regressive thought pattern.

The Consultant's own thoughts were interrupted by the three-dimensional manifestation of the Chairman's secretary on a mutter plinth.

"What's the mutter?" the Chairman demanded.

"Applicant Ptorth has arrived," she announced, primping her wig.

"At the third primp it will be 15.05 exactly," the Consultant intoned.

"In that case," the Chairman opined, "we have no discretion. Deliver him now," he ordered, rejecting his mutter and denying the Applicant the customary nine seconds gestation period.

The Applicant materialised in a sitting position, confronting the Panel across a legless pulsation table.

"You're very late," the Chairman frowned, activating the Panel's inclined ouija pads.

"Very late indeed!" The Consultant emphasised, conscious of the Pertinent Contribution Clause written into his contract. His omniscience could, subject to certain obscure penalty sub-clauses, inflate his fee considerably, and he had conditioned his logico-reward responses accordingly.

"What happened?" the Director of Integrated Personnel enquired.

"I regret," Ptorth replied humbly, "that the moving pavement broke down."

"The Pediflow," the Director of Integrated Personnel mused. "It does sometimes."

"I ran all the way," Ptorth pleaded, "but there was so much congestion."

"Ah, congestion!" The Consultant exclaimed, augmenting his fee, "that is *most* important."

A profit symbol flickered on his ouija pad, and one eye focused on it while the other regarded the Applicant unblinkingly.

"I like running," Ptorth resumed. "It's better than the Ped — the pavement."

"Better!" the Chairman squeaked. "That's not logical — it's a question of *effort*."

"Never mind," the Director of Integrated Personnel temporised. "Was the vector disc satisfactory?"

"Oh, yes," Ptorth said gratefully, touching the button on his lapel, "the lights and voices were quite clear."

"That will do," the Chairman said coldly, "we shall communicate our decision in due course."

"Turn your vector disc over and you'll receive reciprocal directions," the Director of Integrated Personnel instructed. "The Imprest Dispenser will issue your subsistence token downstairs — you can use it in any Macrovend."

"Thank you," Ptorth said, rising to his full height and striding to the door, "I am rather hungry."

"Hungry!" the Consultant expostulated as Ptorth disappeared, "what rubbish these people eat!"

"I will not tolerate palindromes," the Chairman repeated, tripping his neglected penalty sub-clause recorder, "It's vulgar."

"Oh, very well," the Consultant pouted, abusing the table's molecular memory with a series of intricate configurations. "It's obvious the Applicant is keen on sport, a devoted family man, socially aware and, above all, ambitious. Not at all the type we wish to attract!"

"Oh, I don't know," the Director of Integrated Personnel retorted. "His fully compensated I.Q. factor is encouraging."

"Exactly!"

"He has a sense of humour."

"Precisely!"

"He displays initiative."

"Indeed he does!"

"He's financially ignorant," the Accountant scowled.

"I found his definition refreshingly droll. Anyway he seems reliable."

"Ha!" the Consultant whooped, "he was late!"

"Twice," the Chairman added vaguely, "and he paints."

"In colour!" the Consultant shuddered.

"They multiply so," the Accountant contributed darkly.

"Come, come," the Director of Integrated Personnel protested, "the demographical reproductive parameters obtain absolutely."

"Do not confuse us with facts," the Consultant grumbled. "You ignore the longevity syndrome."

"Their salaries are chronically modest," the Director of Integrated Personnel sighed inconsequentially, "a thousand Terra Credits a month."

"A thousand!" the Accountant yelped, losing his balance, "plus subsidised sky web accommodation."

"They have to live," the Director of Integrated Personnel reasoned, "and they *are* human."

"They're so earthy," the Consultant grimaced.

"Well, this *is* Earth, after all," the Director of Integrated Personnel suggested wistfully.

"Tell me," the Consultant purred in his silky way, "are you the Director *of* or *for* Integrated Personnel?"

"That's enough!" the Chairman warned, elevating his posture pod to an imperious level. "I find polemic intellectually debilitating; the fact is that when Beta Two developed anti-life support characteristics, it was agreed to resettle voucher holders here— other Federation Planets did likewise."

"Not all of them," the Consultant demurred.

"There were socio-economic and climatic considerations," the Chairman stated; "the Law is quite specific concerning prejudice."

"Some of our own arrested mutations are still squeamish about colour," the Consultant cautioned. "I understand Beta Two people vary from light to dark green."

"That will pass," the Chairman shrugged. Like most of his kind, he had been colour blind from birth and pigmentation had no meaning for him.

"It is now 15.45," the Chairman reminded them. "Please declare."

"I am the Devil's advocate," the Consultant announced grandly. "Negative!"

"Positive!" voted the Director of Integrated Personnel.

"Personally, I agree with both of you," the Chairman confided, ignoring the Accountant, "but we do have a problem in the production complex and these people are invaluable for their —"

"Common sense," the Director of Integrated Personnel murmured.

"Conditioned reflexes," the Consultant parried.

"An ability," the Chairman said carefully, "to identify and relieve *congestion* when the robot mechanisms fail. It is significant that the Applicant instinctively recognised and overcame a congestive situation when the Pediflow fatigued."

The Chairman cancelled the ouija pads from a master switch.

"Appoint the man Ptorth as Probationary Congestion Operator," he ruled.

"Now," he said, "let's have some tea."

Their magno-kinetic trolleys converged on the Microvend which dispensed transparent capsules containing a mixture of tiny black and white nutrition spheres.

The Chairman, who was black, and the Consultant, who was white, washed their capsules down with globules of distilled water. The Director of Integrated Personnel, who was grey and still retained a vestige of colour appreciation, watched thoughtfully; while the Accountant, who was colourless, fretted over the cost of the damaged ouija pad.

"What a stimulating afternoon," the Consultant enthused. There was another Appointments Panel tomorrow and his fertile imagination was already busy devising fee earning ploys.

"Pip, pip," he gurgled recklessly, breaking the surface of tension of a second globule of distilled water, "pip, pip."

ARTHUR DOUGLAS,
Padiham.

from THE PENNINE WAY

KINDER SCOUT

Dark sombre crag of massive grit
Whose sides are smeared with fearful stain;
Crowned with oceanic mass
Of squelching peat:
A great terrain
For those who like
The mud.

Vast peaty oceans rise and fall,
Giant breakers tipped with bilberry crowns;
Escape from black industrial towns.
A fantasy world
Of sliding feet,
And mud.

Islands of cotton grass; blue black sea;
A broad expanse of peaty waste
With chocolate brown or blackened ooze
And peaty pools in which to wallow
As a change

HEBDEN BRIDGE

Towering terraced houses stand
Four storeys high on either hand
A sombre world of greyish stone,
Of billowing steam and dripping stone;
Glistening wet flags and flowing drains,
This Yorkshire world is full of rains.
Behind wet walls
Lies warmth of glowing fires.

WITHINS MOOR (The Brontë Country)

Away from the cloud and veil of smoke
Which northern industrial scenes evoke,
Lie purples, russets and burnished grasses,
Clean swept hills of heather masses.
The sky is blue,
The air like wine;
Prospects are good:
It should be fine.

But nimbus spreads its anvil head
And sits astride the path we tread.
The squall builds up before we pass:
Rain in torrents; lightning flash;
Tattoo on capes; the boom of thunder;
But a shaft of sun breaks all asunder:
We crouch by the wall, feeling spray, and wonder—
At a moor that glistens and sparkles with water.
Each diamond blade bends low,
Submissive to the rainbow's glow
By blackness of a monsoon sky.
Slowly the rainbow passes by,
Leaving behind
The field of burnished gold.

MALHAM

Gordale's cyclopean crags
Rise upon either side:
Awesome masses poised in silence,
Leaning inwards with the steady drip of lime
Fixed for an eternity of time.

Dark streaks the face of Malham Cove,
The sooty stain that chimney sweeps behave;
An inspiration Kingsley had of Water Babies
Etched upon a limestone scene,
Alcove of the Pleistocene.

KIRK YETHOLM

Legs like jelly in the speed of this descent,
But pause before you enter,
Then look back.
There lie the Cheviots crowned purple and gold;
And not only the Cheviots, but the whole of the Pennines
laid out below.
All this is yours
For you have walked over it;
Nothing will ever take it away.
This is your heritage:
This is the Pennine Way.

KENNETH OLDHAM,
Barley.

it can be seen
through green bottoms of bottles
tea without milk
silvery silk
and perhaps
men in the littered street
with squinting eyes that wink
whirlpool colours

it can be seen in grubby eyes
of children disguised with guns
running
then dying
then running again

it can be seen under
tentacles of oak
where dippers soak their streamlined bodies
and fairy wrens float
this way
that way
then this way again

it can be seen
in black-crow darkness
it can be seen
it can be seen
even by the blind man's gaze

KEITH MELLING,
Fence.

BOULSWORTH HILL

there reclines my venus
where grass flows merry
on the unfenced spine
under the true canopy
immersed in vapour
my venus reclines
on cracked jelly layers
of ancient peat

if dark clouds should be seen
to shroud her head
or thin winds tug
at her changing emerald
she will not close star-lit shutters
nor lift her minds edges

if man should boom
and draw her blood
or blurr her heathered view
then skinny rain shall be said
to be her tears
and the moors whisper to be her voice

there reclines my venus
where grass flows merry
on the unfenced shoulder
holding fast the well of wonder
when thunder thumps the bewildered sky
holding fast the well of mystery
when lightning dazzles
her deepest thoughts

KEITH MELLING,
Fence.

THE COT'S IN THE DUSTBIN

Yes, it went today, and before breakfast the grubby dustbin wagon had bounced down the holey road that leads to the back gate and received another rare delicacy into its maroon midriff. Never has it had indigestion though we have fed it with fireplaces, pokers, watering cans, plastic engines, soldiers, rattles and once a kitchen door. There was pleasure in seeing the reminder of sleepless nights disappear so relatively peacefully. Today though was Wednesday, the day when Joan was going Christmas shopping and so, having set the alarm for 7-30, we got up promptly at 8-15. There was no time to see who had put their trousers on back to front, or if each was wearing his own vest; time only to hear the snaps, crackles and pops, scrape the black off the toast, to promise Sara that we would be here at mid-day with lunch ready, and to wave bye-bye to Mummy who had forgotten to comb her hair, but at least her seams were straight. We didn't feel like washing up so early in the morning in that cold kitchen and there were lots of other things we had to do — make the beds, dig the garden, collect the sawdust, haircut, paint the door ... We had a conference; Christopher was for jig-saws, Mark was for making railways, and I was for a walk up the park, so we went to sleep. About ten, the bikini and I were getting nicely acquainted when things fell apart and I heard two familiar voices arguing as to who should have the guard's van.

"Daddy, it's my turn."

"You've had a turn."

"Well it's mine."

"Daddy ..."

We decided that Mark should have the engine and tender and Christopher the carriage and guard's van, so we cut the string and carefully re-fastened the new knots.

"Mine's a diesel," said Christopher.

We set it all up — two bridges, wiggly lines under the television and past the potty, straight lines under the settee and between the chair legs, all joining up just in front of the roaring fire. Now the cars, the wagons, the buses, the kill car, the station, the buffers, the cows, horses, pigs, elephants and polar bears. Lovely arrangement.

"Isn't it nice, Daddy?" said Mark.

"Yes," said Christopher, "Let's do a jigsaw."

He pulled the case from behind the wiggly lines under the television, tipped the eleven little plastic bags fastened with elastic bands on to the middle of the floor. "Cat and the bubbles" for Christopher, "Moses and the bullrushes" for Mark. They were quiet, settled and content so I went to make certain that Charlotte Armstrong, White Swan, Queen Elizabeth, Suter's Gold, Montezuma and Jiminy Cricket had been well trodden in last week. No need to put on both boots, one would be enough. I could walk on the path with my left slipper and on the garden with my right boot. Yes, they were secure and dressed Coldstream fashion and anyway it would be a job "up on the right"-ing them now — I had too many rose tree scratches planting them last week. Gloves I suppose are useful but I don't suppose Joan would lend me her new brown leather ones and we haven't any more. It was outside, better than being inside; the sun was showing through and there were a few blotches of blue sky — a wonderful day for a walk — so I went inside.

Now for the inside jobs. We each tramped upstairs to pay our respects, made the beds and tested their springiness in the usual trampoline manner. No sooner had the beds been nicely ruffled than it was time for the butcher's shop to close, and did the Post Office close at twelve for lunch also? What a rush, the pots had to be washed ready for dinner, the breakfast table should really have been tidied earlier. If only we weren't so capable of confident procrastination. Still, it has always worked so far, this time it would too. Duffel coats, where was red, where was blue.

"Do you want any gloves on, Mark?"

"No thank you, Daddy."

"Do you want any gloves on, Christopher?"

"Yes, please."

"Daddy, why can't I have my gloves on?" said Mark.

We got there just in time to see the butcher half way across the street to his house. In a rather "hoping we didn't" manner he said, "Did you want something?"

"Well, we really came for some sausages but we can have it for tea instead."

Whether it was that we looked so hopeless and forlorn or whether he half wondered if he had locked the door, or perhaps he hoped we might buy a turkey at Christmas, but whatever it was I'll bet he was cursing us blue beneath the solid meaty double chins that made his cheek bones fit into his neck. I can never work out bulky butchers. Are they really wrestlers, powerful, menacing, magnificent, or just sickly specimens of humanity who cannot bring themselves to cut out cholesterol.

"A pound of beef?"

"Yes please."

"Two-and-six."

"8723."

"Does it go round?" asked Christopher.

Now what did that mean? There was a big refrigerator, there were the scales, the sausage, the spare apron, the door knob . . .

"Does what go round?" I asked Christopher.

"Yes," said the butcher.

He had children too and I suppose he understood, but I couldn't work it out. Christopher seemed satisfied, yet I would like to have known. There was not time to continue as Mark had dashed out of the shop with the sausages and round the corner towards the Post Office. Bread, cheese, allowance. Now which pocket had my money, which the change from the butcher's, then there was a pocket where I had the haircut money. Oh, why bother, things will sort themselves out and if they don't they won't. We each carried a loaf of bread. Christopher's was up to his nose, Mark's under his arm and his car in the other hand.

"Daddy, can I carry the sausage?" said Mark.

"You'll drop it," I said.

"I won't, I'll be careful."

It was as well we hadn't bought eggs, even sausage is difficult to pick up with a loaf of bread under one duffel coat arm, wool gloves on, and with an obstinate wind doing its best to blow the paper away. We re-organised and I carried the sausages, the cheese, the flour, and the loaves of bread which just reached up to my nose.

"Daddy, will you hold my hand," said Christopher.

Ten past twelve and there were the breakfast pots to wash. Still I could put the sausages on while I washed the breakfast things. It would be nice if these kitchen scissors would cut. Why do they have to make sausage in one long string? There is an art in arranging a pound of sausages into a ten-inch pan. Like a pin wheel working from outside till, if you bought it from the right shop, the last piece ends up dead centre with no overlap. I was just beginning my second attempt when Sara came in.

"Daddy, what's for dinner?"

"Sausages. Nearly ready." Liar.

She laid the table, washed the knives and forks from breakfast time and *mirabile dictu*, hey presto, the sausage was eatable. We had four pieces each. They were a bit hard but tasty.

"What next?" asked Sara.

"Well, I thought that was enough."

"No, you should have made a pudding."

"Tell you what, let's have some soup."

We had tomato and, contrary to all previous experience, didn't spill any on the cover. Anyone can make Ribena and dinner was over.

Time for a pom on the piano. Food seems to have a creative effect on me, or perhaps it's the chance to indulge myself while their spirits are numbed by the nausea of a satisfied stomach. Off with the front, the lid, now where's that odd "Balulalow" carol The Times recommended? Sounds well if you double the bass. The trouble with our piano is that the middle D is held together with an elastic band. Doesn't sound too bad though, particularly as there are more than a few wrong in any case. If only I had time to practise. Lovely melody. Haunting rhythm. But I was playing a duet now. Christopher was tinkling the top keys. It must be a thrilling experience to push a key down and see the up and plonk. He laughs at the keys and cannot understand why they do it. Then we had a trio with Sara as a thunderous bass. Well, I had five minutes.

The room really should have a fire in sometimes. Christopher was dripping on to the keys and came the regular request "Can you blow my nose, Daddy?" I got out the once white piece of lettered cotton from among the pocket of keys and fluff, and staunched the free flow. The top notes are not really loud enough for him, Mark is the quiet reserved one, so he took the bass from Sara. That put paid to all hopes of further orchestral arrangements. Mark had by this time retreated like a dog on bonfire night so we consoled him with an assurance that the symphony had ceased. Ten past one: teeth, wee, wash, then hitch up the tights, which were by now hanging like bangles round Sara's knees. Christopher was kicking the floor with foot stuck in one of the trouser legs, Mark had got the wrong fingers in the gloves, and just in time we were able to hustle one in the pram, and arrange the others at each side like a well trained dog team ready for the trek to school. We got there on time and just in time to see the two teachers do their regular spring to avoid the lynx eyes of the headmaster.

"Daddy, can we go and see the witch?"

"And the fish?"

She had one tooth and occupied the first floor. With great ado we clambered up the stairs; the rail was just too high for both the boys to reach easily, so I carried them like two sacks, one under each arm. She was there, her dress faded even more than last week. Dirty face, ferocious tooth, loose stockings round skinny legs with feet into broken high-heeled shoes fastened on with wire. She stared at us nastily, said not a word, but sat securely on her broomstick as if in another world. Perhaps she was, for a plastic fishing line secured to her skull hung her in the ceiling of the museum.

PETER WIGHTMAN,
Colne.

DINOSAUR

War,
Dinosaur, extinct.
Too cumbersome,
Lumbering into traps,
Spies, counter spies,
Counter counter spies, counter
Counter counter spies spies;
Brain too small,
Jungle modern man's
Apocalyptic ingenuity,
Sublime good sense.

DERELICT HOUSE BY THE BROOK

You can see where he laid the first stones down,
Stood back and looked as he straightened his aching bones.
Trees are greener than the meadows beyond, high, stretching up
Out of the hollow where the wedge of rock leans
Reaching toward their tops. The water trickles from its crevices
Into a rust-bog of sodden leaves to join the brook.
Those trees are like his dream of the house he was building,
Evasive yet intense, make an edifice of their own in which
Filtered sun, mosses, shrubs, roots live damp, cool as
His rooms would be when he'd flagged the floors, put in
The shallow sink, the flat wide shelves, the lumpy stairs;
When he'd lived there with his wife in her cold smell of
Sour vitality, coarse apron, clogs, feeding the hens
On the only patch of unsheltered grass. It's passed
As the years dropped like the season's growth, unnoticed.
Without monument except this skeleton.
Its windows blocked with bricks, the doors padlocked, spring breeze
Freshening the cave of its interior where rummaging
Youths have gouged its eyes and crawled inside to violate
The cairn his rough hands piled meticulously,
Marking his sweating climb.

CAROL BRUGGEN,
Briercliffe.

I caught a fly
and drew its wing
on silk that I had by

I ran around
and put the city from my mind
but it struck out a chord in my eye

the bricks
like books on my brainshelves
for those about to die

I locked myself to a lamppost
grew a tail and began to bark
the people hurried by

I caught myself running away
but joined in the ranks and ran
we hopped on buses
rode the tubes
the streets went rolling on

we joined ourselves
into a happy throng
as our footsteps reached to the sky
the roads leading to heaven
where we passed the sacred stream
swimming hard for all our worth
breaking through on the ice of Buddha's dream

I scattered my collections
drowned hundreds with my words
but they baptised themselves to another god
and rode the whirlpool down

I was left circling in the sun
while the goddesses flew down
into the city full of hollows
filled with people
the tide had now begun

automobiles herding everyone to charnel houses
as they cried for mercy
but beneath the tombstones
the worms worked
hurrying their process
for time was short

we had pitched our tents on high
watched this scene of wonder

seeing the city now
buildings confined to long white lines
as sepulchres in a row
when statues from the plastic factory
groped at our starry-striped eyes
sauces dribbling
from their transparent mouths

an intelligent one cried
we had to put him to sleep

the red telephone boxes
muttered their dark conspiracies to one another
eyes averted and shaded brow
solid square and impassive
they ate up every word
no one could escape
not now

cigarettes marched to ashtrays
of their own accord
not even disgracing our fingers with a stain

I came down
and passed a wall
which would not say hello
"our service is getting too personal now
economies will have to do"
"but don't cry in shame at the window pane
it cannot answer you"
and all the graveyards began to laugh
for what it said was true

N. S. THOMPSON
Todmorden

AND NO-ONE CRIED

Dark, stark, and sheer the concrete towers
to crush our earth, obscure our sight.
Now asphalt grows instead of flowers
polluting senses day and night.

Bright neon's shining searching beams
probe deep our eyes, construct our mind;
till waking differs not from dreams,
we live, not knowing we are blind.

High piercing notes of jetted haste,
dull, everpresent, traffic roar;
our air is poisoned with their taste
yet here we sit demanding more.

Long walls of pictures bid us buy
those things which no-one really needs.
Illusions, conjured for the eye,
are offered now instead of beads.

Consumed with pain, no sign can show
the thing that's happened deep inside;
for there, where once man's soul did grow
a cancer spread, and no-one cried.

B. G. D'ARCY,
Blackburn.

DREAM THEME

I listened to the dream of the man in the bar;
High as a kite on God knows what—just living?

"The room had a ceiling, plastic maybe,
With concealed lighting, and the constantly changing patterns
Thrown there by the ashes of his cremated wife.
You can't get higher than a plastic ceiling,
Even when you're dead", he said.

He ordered a Guinness:
"And everybody thieves from him.
Everything! I mean, he gets up one morning
And some thieving swine
Has pinched the corners of his room.
I ask you! A room with no corners!
The ceiling is still there—but no corners.
How do you get out of that?" He spat

On the floor, lit a cigarette.
"All the time it's the same: everything,
They steal . . . everything.
He gets this bird; a lovely warm, living girl
In bed. And he's loving her,
You know — like there's no tomorrow.
And they steal his orgasm."

"I tell you," he went on,
"The poor sod's frightened to go out
In case the room has gone when he gets back.
They steal everything: his shoelaces,
His clothes, his orgasm, his voice.
What's going to go next?"

"His consciousness?" I ask.
He doesn't hear me; he is there
With that guy in his cornerless room,
Frightened to move in case they steal something else.

It's too late my friend.
Whilst you waited, frightened and blind,
I came like a thief and stole your idea,
Now you live—in my mind.

SHEILA CAMPBELL,
Oswaltdtwistle.



