

Post World War One Idealism A Municipal Dream, A New Utopia

Everything changes
The snowdrops die, daisies carpet the lawn
Punctuated by sunny buttercups.
Off the grid, bats and hedgehogs
Patrol suburban gardens.

The snowdrops die, bats and hedgehogs
Patrol suburban gardens.
Daisies carpet the lawn
Punctuated by sunny buttercups
Off the grid, everything changes.

Sonnet To Slightly Bruised Fruit

Slightly bruised fruit on the allotment shelf
And my gorgeous flesh is no longer firm:
One of your 5-a-day to make you squirm,
Fruit and vegetables are good for your health.
In the allotment I was gardeners' wealth
But now no longer perfect and cast out;
Ego is bruised, off the grid, here I pout,
My good looks have been stolen by Time's stealth.

I'm just slightly bruised! I still taste the same!
Is it my fault I was dropped on the floor?
An endless fumbling in sweaty paws?
I blossomed, grew, witnessed summer's flame,
Birds sang in my tree, knew them all by name.
I'm at one with the air, the sky and earth.
Just slightly bruised - how can I have no worth?
What is my crime and how am I to blame?

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30th May 2023

Allegory for social inclusion - we all have issues. You wouldn't throw your legs away if your knees got bruised, would you?

The Little Path

The little path, half lost beneath the woods,
Runs on the hillside where, in some old days,
Strange shapes of men moved at their task of life
As me, who trod this path, move still and gaze
Across Short Heath, blue with summer haze.

Plain where the trees fall towards the midday sun
The path winds on above the heathland scar
And, off the grid against a pale blue sky,
Turns from our sight - but on the upland afar -
Passes where the deepest strobes of green shadows are

And beneath the hawthorn woods that stand listening
In Maytime's peace in repose, save where, dry
About our feet Autumn's leaves rustle, runs
The little path. Afternoon closes and with a sigh
Day's banners tumble from the stricken sky.

The years in long procession come and go;
The warm gold summers and the autumn rain,
With smiles and tears, go by the fields and woods
Where we passed once and may not pass again
Though still our footsteps in the grass remain.

Sleep lightly in the weight of time, Birmingham,
That made me glad; and when the darkening vale
Lies deep in dusk's embrace and from the sky
The last sun, smothering fires of daylight fail
On Short Heath's hill the little path glimmers pale

Though I, in passing, shall not stir the dew
Though sweet years of nostalgia will meet in that still heart
Of Birmingham. The night, voiceless and calm,
Will quiver with the words that may not start
From memories the passage of time cannot part.

Suburban Dawn

The red scar sunrise
Glides through cold, steel skies
And high pressure sodium street lights
Fade their saintly blue halos
Over roadways and ring roads.

Electric light melt into furnace-orange doorways,
Another suburban dawn in Birmingham.
Short Heath awakens and, off the grid,
Witnesses the triumphal entrance -
The birth of light

Before the fires of day seize
Parked cars revving in anticipation
Of somewhere else to go:
Commuters to warehouses, offices or factories
Amongst a landscape of central reservations

And dual carriageways and grass verges.
Warmth given to school children at bus stops,
Gardeners in allotments, dog walkers, joggers in the park.
All blissfully illuminated
In this new utopia of a municipal dream.

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30th May 2023

'The social housing in the Short Heath area of Birmingham is part of the first flush of post World War I idealism. Under the 1919 Housing Act, the long term vision was to create a municipal dream, a new utopia. As the Secretary to the Local Government Board put it: "The money we are going to spend on housing is an insurance against Bolshevism and Revolution".' (David Moore)

The Lisieux Trust in Marsh Lane (NeurodiVERSE)

Autism didn't stop Einstein, Mozart, or Newton reaching the stars!

Support those with a disability
We provide accommodation and care,
We just have different abilities.

Happy lives full of opportunity,
Create independence, choice and health care
Support those with a disability.

Skills needed to thrive in society,
Special needs, off the grid, "here" not "nowhere":
We just have different abilities.

All of our people have nobility,
We nurture their confidence and welfare,
Support those with a disability.

Tenancy and responsibility,
Supported living and not "anywhere";
We just have different abilities.

We're blessed with powers of capability,
Our people are the answers to our prayer:
Support those with a disability,
We just have different abilities.

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31st May 2023

For more information about the Lisieux Trust - www.lisieuxtrust.org.uk. This poem is written in the form of a Villanelle. 'The building was originally a Welfare Centre where vitamin tablets, cod liver oil, orange juice and dried milk would be issued along with vaccinations for polio'. - David Moore, who attended the Welfare Centre as a child.

Court Farm Primary School

("Dream, Believe, Achieve")

Our Court Farm School, dare to believe
Success and the power to achieve;
In teamwork and community for all,
Continued learning when we all leave.

Motivated children in sleeves
And through education they weave,
Future leaders in children small
Our Court Farm School

Off the grid, to our motto cleave
As through life like a cannon ball:
Keep memories from playground to hall
The motto "Dream, Believe, Achieve"
Our Court Farm School.

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31st May 2023

(For more information - www.courtfrm.bham.sch.uk. This poem is written in the form of a rondeau. David Moore went to this school as a child. 'New schools after the war saw a culture of air and light with rows of classrooms having opening doors down both sides to let in light and air and high windows to let in light' - David Moore).

Conversation In A Pub

(With apologies to Tom Waits and the 1973 album *Closing Time*)

Well, I hope I don't fall in love with you
Sitting alone, do you need company?
This old tom cat soul could never be true.
Have you come in here to forget, like me?
Do you have time for the tears of a clown
And humour me as all my troubles drown?

Well, I hope I don't fall in love with you,
I don't want to corrupt you with my heart;
It's always searching for someone new,
Perhaps it's better we should be apart.
There must be a more worthy man in town
Off the grid under evening's ragged gown.

Well, I hope I don't fall in love with you,
Emotional attention is a curse;
If we do go to bed, this night you'll rue,
Charity to have listened to this in verse.
I am but a tumbleweed ever blown,
It's a job description in verb and noun.

Well, I hope I don't fall in love with you -
It's last orders, I hear the barmaid shout.
Let's have another beer, I've drunk a few;
What you drinking? I'm having Irish stout.
If such sad acts were king, I'd wear a crown;
Depressed? No! See this smile? I'm never down.

Continued

Well, I hope I don't fall in love with you -
Don't want to annoy you with words that rhyme.
Last orders but you've gone - my feelings grew
In the pub's tick of my borrowed time.
You see I love you but I'm just a clown
And you've gone - so in tears and beer I'll drown.

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31st May 2023

("After the war men were seen as the breadwinners. The brewing industry saw an opportunity to extract cash from working men. Positioned on major road junctions and near bus routes a number of substantially large pubs were built with multiple rooms and bars for the working man to indulge. These places were geared up to extract as much money as possible from working men before they had been home with their wages" - David Moore).

Remains of Tram Lines on a Central Reservation

Here lie the remains of utopia,
New social housing and idealism,
Creation of a municipal dream
After war and years of dystopia.

War to end all wars - Europe redrawn
Cultural and social change across the world
And new housing needed in Birmingham
To fulfil the dream in the post war dawn.

Tram lines on a central reservation
Traces of ages-lost idealism;
Archaeological evidence unearthed,
Fear of Bolshevism and Revolution.

Here, where waves of grass and the earth worms creep,
Where all the tides of life have ebbed and left;
Off the grid, the gaunt ribs of Birmingham
The men who made her mighty workers sleep.

And we, with equal gaze, are dumb before
The shattered stone that bears Birmingham's name;
The massive columns, deep in ruin, laid,
Or print of workers' boots that walk no more

Nor have walked since unnumbered suns have set,
The roads that lie over the barley fields.
No lore of books shall make these sleepers stir
But remembering them, never forget.

Continued

The glory that a thousand volumes fills,
Slumbers on a central reservation
In a vision of road infrastructure
Crafted by working class labour and skill.

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1st June 2023

("This new utopia seems an ideal lifestyle. Homes for working class people with amenities for health and leisure, transport and education. It was a time of improving equality and a glowing bright future" - David Moore)

Thick as a Brick

(With apologies to Jethro Tull and the 1972 album *Thick as a Brick*)

Spinning back down the years
To the days of my youth
Alone, listening to Jethro Tull
“Thick as a Brick”
And drinking London dry gin.

The early hours
And another bottle of alcohol:
Comforter, maternal teat,
Sandcastle virtues all swept away
In tidal destruction.

Night. Locked out of the house,
A labourer and now sacked,
Off the grid, huddled for warmth
Amongst lawnmowers
In the garden shed.

Wise men don't know
How it feels
To be thick as a brick,
Spinning down the long ages
To sing the songs.

Pronounced fit to fight,
Told to get a job,
Taught to play Monopoly
At the kitchen table
But not to sing in the rain.

Continued

Is it really 40 years
Since that night?
Climbing into rich people's gardens,
Feeding London dry gin
To wide-eyed goldfish.

Built sandcastles by the sea,
Dared the tardy tide
To wash them away
But wise men don't know
How it feels
to be thick as a brick.

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1st June 2023

Thick as a Brick by British rock band Jethro Tull is intended to be a parody of the concept album genre. The original packaging, designed as a 12 page newspaper, claims to be a musical adaptation of an epic poem by fictional 8 year old genius Gerald Bostock although it was actually written by Ian Anderson from the band. The personal story of working as a labourer, getting sacked and sleeping in a shed are true.

Short Heath Graffiti

(one last time)

The stylised tag of youth culture,
Marked out turf in an act of boredom
Or to stage out a nocturnal conquest.
Graffiti continues to spell out “decay”
Off the grid while paint fades.

The message is nothing lasts forever
As the old man remembers and looks on,
Remembering youth from his memory.
Once upon a time, a new municipal dream,
An era of social housing and urban utopia.

These indifferent bricks may have forgotten him
But he remembers this wall of brick -
Can't forget -
Or that breathless kiss one magical night.
Leaning back they had watched the stars

Across the night sky of Birmingham,
Cast adrift in Short Heath
Like two marooned lovers on an island.
They etched their hearts, whispered their words
But never married

And now she's dead.
This wall is a memorial to their love,
Testimony to their acts of passion
And the old man, full of regret, cries:
Someone has spray-painted a stupid tag

Continued

Across the wall where love was found -
His wall - their wall - and he wishes
He could trace her name
Just one last time
Over these bricks.
What is my crime and how am I to blame?