

The Well

I stand on the brink of an apology,
sorry for the times I've walked
thoughtless over your handiwork as I
crossed to the sink to drink or wash plates,
not once looking down to what lies below
or back to then when a tap was unknown.

Yet I glimpse you over my shoulder now
digging relentlessly in the near blackness,
pressing down down towards the aquifer
with scratched hands and simple tools,
a mole, earth-thrower, scarcely seeing
but shivering as you touch the chill of
bared flint and pull muddied shoulders taut,
tingling as half-severed roots like
emptying veins brush over your skin.

To the rhythmic grating of iron against stone
you wait patiently for that moment
when the salt bead on your brow will
fall, swallowed up in the earth's cool water
which pools at your feet.

Five centuries on another came here
to build, stood on the brink – unknowing –
and dug, felt the ground crumble under
his dust-covered boots, stepped back as it
all fell in to reveal a dark hollow space,
every brick set in perfect place.

And they all flocked to see,
pored over the shaft for days,
applauded your daring and skill
though nobody knew your name.

(cont...)

But then they declared it a shame,
agreed it disrupted their plans
and regrettably could not remain,
poured into the shaft for days
ton after ton,
consuming your space till nothing was
left and their work was resumed.

This morning I stand in their walls,
fill my glass, drink the water you found
which flows here still.

Heather Shakespeare

the River Mole

At the end of it all, it was my love, Diana, who first brought me to this river, gold with daffodil and silence, where butterflies become light and the waters tend the beginnings of infinity - beneath a gliding, white and radiant gull:

minutes
by the water
become the span
of great light that is
wordless, like this river

I have discovered its strange astronomies, glimmering at night with stars and sky: I have seen snowdrops on islands in the stream, islands like dreams within a dream of the stream - the dreaming of being as the river flows: the river is born with the dawn and the morning ringing of light singing: it is the coming of spring on the wings of a swan: and I have come to the river of morning, the river of light, and of God, and have learned to listen to its waters: in this place I listen to the robin's song, clear as running water, deep as a world, clear as white light at dawn, or the song of summer breeze: a wind ripples the whitening surface of the water - I follow in the wake of a swan on the waters of the sun:

the old river
this cool spring morning
teaching me how to move
through
light

and I am here still, stunned by its ever-changing, unchanging beauty, and it flows within me like a current: a truly floating world, it carries me along in its motion: the spirit moves through everything, always, almost without end - and in my turn I have come to be like a spirit bird, grey before silence, still as a heron: three egrets pass overhead in tripartite light: knowledge of the river is the knowledge of our valley and of light and of becoming: I have learned to live in the moment of this river, sustained and amazed as it unfolds into time present, its wild willow sacrament and cascade into breath: it is a course for kingfishers, a course for wings:

silence
the flare
of a kingfisher:
the silence has changed...
the river has changed...

And all the world, the world, has changed...

A A Marcoff

After the storm

Chalkpit lane awash, ground gleams
bone-white, clear water trickles through
choked heaps of spent leaves, broken
twigs, rinses clean the earthworms,
each one stretched to full extent, both
ends tapered, luminous in palest lilac,
saddled in pink, skin drinking in air,
summoned by the paradiddle rain;
we side-step, almost dance, awkward
in walking boots, watch heels, toes,
find spaces in-between – wits pitted
against disturbing this untidy peaceful
protest in face of uncertain earthworks,
this terracotta army on stand-by.

Helen Overell

Ranmore

Beneath a skim of topsoil –
solid chalk, packed glimmer
of planktonic skeletons,
sea embedded coccoliths,

solid chalk, packed glimmer,
mark maker, hopscotch grid,
sea embedded coccoliths,
microscopic polyhedra,

mark maker, hopscotch grid,
pictures chalked on pavements,
microscopic polyhedra,
ephemeral, marvellous,

pictures chalked on pavements
of planktonic skeletons,
ephemeral, marvellous –
beneath a skim of topsoil.

Helen Overell

Adonis Blue

Chalk
Whistled past my ear.
Talking again.
Chalk.
Great clouds of the stuff
Whenever Pippin slammed the board rubber down.

And now
A greater body of chalk
Lies beneath my feet
As I stand on the North Downs.

Rare orchids grow here,
Bee, Monkey, Man.
In meadows shaded by Juniper and Box
Cattle graze.

Distracted by the train below,
Chugging across the landscape,
I miss the Adonis Blue as it flutters past.
A disappointment which
I chalk up to experience.

Tony Earnshaw

Leith Hill

Oil beneath the Greensand.
Let it lie.
Why despoil the heathland?
For God's sake, why?

Let it lie
Asleep beneath the beauty.
For God's sake why?
Why ruin lanes and hills?

Asleep beneath the beauty,
Oil best left untouched.
Why ruin lanes and hills
With HGVs and drills?

Oil best left untouched.
Why despoil the heathland
With HGVs and drills?
Oil beneath the Greensand.

Tony Earnshaw

Finding Flints

Sea and sand long gone.
Under pressure of sedimentary
Rock, ocean organisms
Reform and transform in chalk's
Empy pockets.
Years on discovered by early man

Dug out, tooled into axe or sharp blade.
Is this one half buried at my feet
Artefact or geofact
Manmade or natural
Only now it's not important
Not when its knapped edges
Delicately scatter light
Surrey Diamond glinting in the rain

Sue Beckwith

*The term Surrey Diamonds is used by Alison Gill on her sculpture **Wellfont** in Norbury Park. It is described on the plaque as made from Surrey Diamonds (local flint) and lime mortar.*