

(The Holy Well Feeds) The Mainstream

Lee Nelson

Come walk with purpose like a cloud¹:
to shape the sun
to bear the rain
draw sustenance through feet from earth
now sing
now dance
walk
breathe
again

This chalk you walk will make its mark
on wiped-fresh chalkboards of the heart
on wiped-fresh chalkboards in the mind
scribe messages in clean-carved lines

The words to songs we thought were lost
an open ear can catch, can find
re-cord, reclaim, inhabit, write –

The songs of farmers, workers, walkers,
jaggers, rovers, drovers, travellers
The tales of wanderers, tellers, traders
heard in the silence, read in signs
on walls, on stones, in tree-bark, spoor
in cold-brook-babble, whispering grass,
in birdcall, birdsong, hedgerow bustle²
susurrations all along the branch
the May-Queen³ dusting, carrion rotting,
slime-mold bleeping under mulch⁴
– all calling out to draw you out
– all calling out to draw you out
– all calling you to speak your part

This glossolalia of landscape
– all for all to hear and parse
and add to with the thump of footfall
or pick of stick beside the path – says:

—

¹ Wordsworth.

² Led Zeppelin.

³ Led Zeppelin again.

⁴ If you can, watch the film *The Creeping Garden* by Tim Grabham and Jasper Sharp.

You are the land's, the land is yours
to walk on, write on as you pass
to mark the path as path marks you
en-route, to root, to grow, to branch
And herein rings this writing's purpose
clear as summoning churchyard bell⁵ –
a human eye that looks on green
with old connections starts to fill

For old, hear ancient, deep, eternal
grass on sole-skin, mud between toes,
they walked before, you now, soon others
each by life to land betrothed

For those that roam these Chiltern acres
whether born of them or drawn from far
will each append their own new chapter
don't matter who/where/what you are

Don't matter whence or how you got here
for all we know is here and now
of the billion nows spread through whenever
now comes the now to make your now

So, come all ascenders, climbers
feel earth beneath, feel sky above
feel self between and feel connection,
freedom, space – and that's enough

This land's a land that welcomes wanderers
a land of havens between hills
of stands of trees and holy waters
of green that shades the eyes and stills

the feet of walkers, called to pause
on hilltops curved beneath the stars
feel turf that springs beneath the tread
rub heather-flowers between the palms

And come all you bold, steep descenders
descendants of the ones before
of humans seeking first to settle
and then refreshed, more to explore
This land's a land that calls to wanderers
to come uncover for themselves

⁵ Betjeman.

that truth of land and truth of humans:
that all are equal on the fells

This land's a land that needs its wanderers
- the ones who push the boundaries back
for those to come, the ones who beat
the currently unbeaten track –

to see new ways we haven't wandered
trace ways neglected for an age
since sleep ran to diurnal rhythms
since where you slept wasn't where you stayed

This world's not the world that once was
and much we'd miss if so it was
some lines have blurred and for the better
generations have trod, have trod, have trod⁶

Now! Come all you who hear it calling
whilst stood on streets, grey⁷, rhythm-blind
the cycle of night and day inside
is a wild call, not to be denied⁸

Come feel the real, untrammelled sunbright
Come test your skin against the rain
and you'll find, not so deep inside you
a besom to unblock and drain

the mind of clagging urban poison
clogging artery, ear-canal
Come blast it with some hilltop quiet
or cold-brook-gurgle for an hour

One hour, two or three or four
and curiosity becomes a need
to satiate the money-stomach
and free the ear and eye to feed

the hips to flex,
shift
the foot to fall,
find
a path to follow of its own

⁶ Manley-Hopkins.

⁷ W.B. Yeats.

⁸ Masefield again . . . Sea Fever is perhaps my favourite poem of all.

to feed that newly wakened hunger
sate new-need; deep as blood and bone

Come serpentine, you walkers, dancers,
wanderers, tellers, singers – swell
this land that's green, that tells a story
in hilltop grace and holy well

Come listeners, learners, solace-takers
carers, givers, tired, lost
to land that gives back all you give it
to land that's known, that's kin and host
Yes!

Come you all, blessed human wanderers
feel earth beneath
feel sky above
feel self between
feel your land calling:
Dawn-hearts for peace!
Fire-minds for love!⁹

⁹ King Penda's exhortation again . . . see the film, Penda's Fen, it'll do stuff to your brain . . .