

# HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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As the half-century turned, Albion's muse pined at the last gasp:  
The adroit surgeons arrived: most of the wise thought she was done for:  
For the bards minced: they were silk-worms of their own souls: — *Miserere!*  
The lament rose, a polite noise.

From the subject to the object, in the Newtonian age-end,  
There was no bridge, there was no view: there were pert, curious peerings:  
To the sense-bright Manifold, mind, with a perk here and a jerk there,  
Was a jackdaw in a junk shop.

Data-drunk, like a research-beetle, they pored over a town world,  
To record custom, reprove class: with a sharp eye for the outside,  
They observed nature and made jokes: they were bright boys in a back room,  
To devise empirical stunts.

She was dim, Symbol, and Myth's ichor was all etiolated:  
There was no life in the Earth, none: metaphors died upon lips loth  
(Eliot's, Pound's, silly Auden's) to accord nature a psyche  
— Till *They* came to the rescue: —

First the gnomes came fussing, the cubitali,  
Corny, shrewd root-labourers, quartz-frequenters,  
Through the chalk drifts tooling, along the ore-charged  
Vessels of Tellus:

These desire no luminousness, but rather,  
When the moon shines, like little knights in armour  
Sheathe their own identity – joust, defending  
Self from erosion.

While they trudge obscure metal ways, above them  
They, divining sharp petal shapes, receive it,  
When the blossom fades, back to the root – the form, the  
Blossom-imago.

Open intellectual Organs – unvexed  
Gnostic oafs – how teach them to understand not  
Mind' opaque translucency, rock to whom sweet  
Pervious air is?

Easy, instantaneous apperceivers,  
 Universals – thinkers in the act of sensing,  
 Mixed themselves with slumbering souls, or through them  
 Buzzed disapproval:

Down the brain's void galleries hooted anger,  
 Jeered at nice abstraction's ineptitude, mocked  
 Wittgenstein's dream, over the extroversion  
 Chortled of Russell:

Deep they delved, each slumbering soul in 'Tellus'  
 Lively womb laid warm – and the naughty sextons  
 Spanked the sod: they roared, with a mort of goblin  
 Bugles: – *Awake, Sirs!*

Soft through the sleep-drowned flesh, recreating him,  
 Transmuting lymph with submarine alchemy,  
 What fluctuant forms interfused man's  
 Blood with their ethery undulation?

Servants of angels, brede of the waterbrooks,  
 Who spurn the fixed fish form – ever altering,  
 Who dream their own motions and, dreaming,  
 Work with the gifts that the gnomes prepared them:

Who man's libido, dull and incestuous,  
 Age-old, desirous dreams of his infancy,  
 Convert to green exfoliation  
 Coiling aloft from root to blossom.

These laid on man, constraining to freedom, all  
 Their swiftly changing forms' catenation – with  
 Moon-wisdom undinae endowed him:  
 Soon in an infinite, undetermined,

Undying Sea, suspended in ecstasis,  
 Each poet-mind, just moving sufficiently  
 To keep itself still, wide-awake dreamed,  
 Thinking the verbs of a world-creator.

Look, when, soaring on high, birds in a flash, as one,  
 Wheel, their stirring of air's audible music wakes  
 Light-winged nenuphareni  
 (So named, since in the air of song

Bright words, fallen asleep, waken again); and these  
 Outspread form in the flat – whorling them, imbricate  
 Changed leaves, airier leaves, charm  
 Scent, moth-soft petal out of light,

Weave fantastical shapes, delicate veins and hues,  
 Keep gay Persephone's sampler of old conceits . . .  
 These ones, working on wish, lend  
 Ghost-bright, fanciful wings to love,

Groom nostalgia to grace, lashes of ladies' eyes  
 Make seem fairer than clouds fleecing an April day –  
 Absence-easers, who transport  
 Heart-felt blessing about the place.

These, indancing the light, crowding the light with love –  
 Limbs aswirl in the light – render it breathable:  
 Through man's panes the elixir  
 Floods gold, greeting his waking eyes,

Tone sings finer than dawn-chorus of birds in May:  
 "Here, here, here in the sunflux is the word: Receive!"  
 Ah, not feeling alone – sylphs  
 Outpoured *Being* in eager hearts.

With the fire-power of the Gold Shower, his Sire, earthward of old  
 Danäe's Son to the rescue, from the sky dropping, came:  
 When a high summer's pomp jettisons cargoes of gold,  
 Many rose-robed salamandri – butterfly-lords of flame –  
 As on winged steeds, to the herb's eager heart spur pollen-grains,  
 Sending male seeds, like live gleeds, to her warm womb, mother Earth's,  
 Where the worms weave in the dead leaves, as the wise light refrains,  
 Where the dome-pated gnomes wait with the loam wet for births  
 Of fresh life, the soft thirst of the undines to still.

Nor strive those salamandri as to bless nature alone,  
 But flare also for men. Soon in the world-streaming of Will,  
 A fire-ghost with wings crossed, stayed each poet-soul,  
 Consumed, flagrant, self-sheathed in a flame-aureole,  
 Till the wit's fire and the heart's fire and the Earth's fire were one,  
 And the élan of the elf-horns, as the Self, waking, stirs,  
 Was *cantabile* re-born from the salt root of Verse . . .

When the half-century turned, most of the wise feared she was done for:  
 There was no life in the Earth, none. With a sharp eye for the outside,  
 The bards make a polite noise: in the background are the bright boys,  
 Who observe nature and make notes.