

I

A modern man in the time I was born  
Can still be weighted by ancestry's yoke,  
Thus I shall detail in romantic form  
With these rhymes, as if old minstrels had spoke.  
This here, my old, new tale of love and woe,  
From walking great highway had inspired,  
But whether truth or tall is mine to know,  
With songs of a lady much admired:  
She had the fairest head, as weaved from gold,  
Her cooling eyes, an opal symphony,  
I'd have given all that cannot be sold,  
To be joined in a sweet matrimony.  
But now comes the time to spin my love's yarn  
Of how rosy cheeks had drained to pale wan.

II

Across this ancient way, she and I walked,  
This trodden path of always and beyond,  
Within love's brief window where death had stalked,  
We tarried the road of our sacred bond.  
Carried by Mersey, Severn and the Thames,  
Youthful spirits adrift in worried times.  
Fortune's seamstress, stitched these souls without hems,  
Leading us onward by sweet, fated chimes.  
On these mythic plains, iron hills, and streams  
Through Neolithic stone and pagan wood  
Where we sought the answers to deepest dreams,  
Barrows where yon ancestors nobly stood  
Those famed sites where the lost roved in their day,  
And found it, here, on the timeless Ridgeway.

III

Up Overton Hill did the journey start,  
And by the highway of stone we followed,  
To the great Sarsen henge that moved my heart,  
Over sleeping dead of ancient hollows.  
Winter had begun his hibernation,  
While spring's cherub sun found her birthing door,  
On the wild wood's wayside, far from station  
Stepped Lady Bristol and the Troubadour.  
The bracing gails, the songs of moaning souls,  
Strummed the dark legends of these mystic priests,  
As in the grass I searched for soil sunk bowls,  
That once lined tables to greatest of feasts  
We crossed ceremonial avenues,  
Asking the reason these men paid these dues.

IV

Beside the Kennet's sacred confluence,  
Where fists of twisted willow guard the banks,  
Which river goddess' influence,  
Brought those brave farmers into mining ranks?  
When building Silsbury's immortal mound.  
Those mines have long since filled, their workers gone  
To lie beneath the chalk veins underground,  
Yet the Sun is the same that would have shone.  
O'er the hill, not far away, straight west,  
The long tunnel to unknown afterlife,  
Shrouded shapes watching from their hallowed nest,  
Ghosts of children, a husband, and his wife.  
I ask if she'd enfold in here with me,  
To remain in her arms eternally.

V

That famous road that stretches far along,  
Formed by stamp, we tramp the uneven stones,  
Bathing in the chirp of the robins song,  
Spirit of olde England beneath our bones.  
Swooping and flying, we watched a red kite,  
No string could halt her, or silence her shriek  
Did she once soar above their sacred rites?  
Has she always known what makes man so weak?  
Hares dance and box in verdant undergrowth,  
Sun drenched gorse sway thorny yellow flowers,  
Be it this place to make the sacred oath?  
Best before they come, those distant showers.  
Alone in beauty, a salve for our times  
Alone together inspire love rhymes.

VI

Barbury castle with its hell deep scarps,  
Had many a visitor scale its heights,  
From Briton, Saxon, to G.I gun tarps,  
Folk say you can still spy her memory's lights.  
A brain on the landscape, that giant's head,  
The carving scar of foot, hoof, wheel and war,  
Marked ground of once high gates and tribal shed,  
In the valley, modernity's roar.  
Beyond the hill, cloud shadowed Swindon sits,  
The town of Kingdom's comings and goings,  
A sight that began loss of lady's wits,  
And in her heart, blackned doubt was growing.  
While this is country beyond city fear,  
Lady had woes that stayed ever near.

VII:

That slow streamed Og runs through many a bourne,

But the path passes a saintly old name,

Although in my rambling I'm often torn,

Whether my restless spirit can be tame.

The Lady Bristol, the noble pale queen,

Would that she let me wander forever,

For as long as England's gardens are green,

Steadfast I'll amble, stripping her tether.

Lording her castle and taking her hand,

Seems a fair price for he that's lowly born,

But to never again visit new lands,

Is a life of longing, always to mourn.

The Lady knows that I am of those men,

Whose love must be shared with a writing pen.

VIII:

Climbing closer to our strolling ending,

The love we almost had was waning too,

Unlikely oasis, pigs with wings,

Settled the sounds that from our bellies grew.

Together we supped on fresh bread and ale,

While golden meat pies were flung on our plates,

As if Ms Browning had founded the grail,

We chewed, we gorged, forgetting our doomed fates.

The table between had grown in distance,

I could never work out who built it thus,

Was this the reason for our love's mischance,

That none could build a table just for us?

Remnants of the day, the crumbs of a pie,

Soon came the moment where we said goodbye.



IX:

Craftsman's tomb and its master's godly forge,

Below the desmayne of white silent steed,

The noted hill where brave riding St George,

Halted the wrym of unnatural greed.

This was to be the final battle,

War drum and Carnyx blared to break our ears,

Distant anvil strike shook frightened cattle,

And the old mill pond filled up with tears.

Even poetic words were lost in blaze,

Romantic ballads we learned were lost,

Torn from the earth, land trauma's scarred haze,

Revenge for the limits that men have crossed.

How could we had known before we started,

By this journey's end we would be parted?

X:

Perhaps we were never on Eden's wind,  
That old wishing tree hung no hope for us,  
Not on yon hillfort, nor up distant mynd,  
Away she rode on a dapple greyed bus  
The love we had lost, matters none to me,  
Fair Lady Bristol and the patchwork bard,  
It takes ancient landscape in which to see,  
The true mirrors of selves, in broken shards.  
Ramble will I, a rover of the way,  
There is much of this road set out for me,  
When I return, not one person could say,  
Contented am I, in love's memory,  
And those old dreams of us remain in song,  
While the sacred Ridgeway winds ever on.