

## Signs of Spring on the Ridgeway

There are dragons here, and heroes.  
At any moment marauders might enslave us  
or Alfred's troops coerce us into Christendom.

*Red Kites now are as common as pigeons.*  
And this we find is true, they are wheeling all about us,  
every feather gleaming in the late Spring light.

*I've never walked it myself, says our host.*  
*I'm more your signpost man.*  
*I hear the stories, pass them on,*  
*offer a hot shower, a clean bed, the use of a kettle...*

And why should he ever leave this place?  
Swallows flit between old barns.  
Land slopes green on all sides,  
keeping tumultuous secrets.

But next day, back on the Ridgeway  
we revel in the freedom to walk unhindered  
where once we would have kept to the village  
under the rule of landlord and priest.

How hungry we would have been  
for travelers yarns of storm and shoe blast,  
of battle and of beast.

Here and now though, whoever will believe this?  
Before us on the chalk path, beak curved, crest flattened,  
an impossible herald of hope,  
stands a hoopoe  
straight from the Kingdom of Solomon.