

Keats' Mad Hare to a Lover's Breast



Wendy Webb

**Keats' Mad Hare
to a Lover's Breast
Wendy Webb**

This collection is dedicated to Norfolk Poets & Writers

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STRIKE A LOWRY LIGHT FOR ART

Each time I pick my pen to write
My mind enacts a social rite.
I dip into dark ink, my soul,
And draw bright red, a body whole.

In gallery an artist sleeps,
Reclining bare, she dares and weeps.
Transitory, her art will fade
Or age to Monet's subtle shade.

As Mary Poppins steps inside
A pavement picture dream, to hide,
Coarse public stares, like Lowry sticks,
Will strike a pose, so Tate, as bricks.

A rumbling Underground for art
Dares, on the Tube, each body part.
Shows masses, sardine-fresh and rare,
Strip-painting palettes – artists bare.

STILL LIFE ARRANGEMENT - DAISIES

**“Pushing up daisies is their creed”,
Or so I read
And wonder why
So many daisies pop across our lawn.
“I shall be one with nature, herb and stone”,
As Shelley shells belie belief –
Let fall brave Wilfred’s torso.**

**A Daisy was not born to me one night,
The moon smiled not, nor beamed dull pain,
Nor harvested a single star
Or face.**

**You bled my tears in aching loss,
For days and days and days.
A phase so small or not at all,
A daisy chain of bleeding pears,
Wasp-dizzied at the core.**

**So “Daisy, Daisy,” boy or girl?
For Owen’s creed, bleed not at all,
Just “Give me your answer, do.”
A faceless phase,
or night half-crazed, that life could be so cruel.
Daisies aren’t the same any more,
On the dark side of the moon.**

TELEVISED DESSERTS WITH ALBERT & VICTORIA

An almond slice, it seemed so tame,
a long and oval shaft.
It was simply Act One, Scene One,
of his play still in first draft.

The chocolate biscuits, plain and fat,
rotund, dripped sweet desire.
I longed to lick both into crumbs
then, satiate, retire.

As I dallied with Victoria,
Albert plumped home in Scene Three.
My bowl was empty, moorish,
and desserts, at home, were free.

FIERCE ANIMAL, THAT IS, SLEEP

You're dangerous and wild at night with me,
I keep you caged each day for sanity.
For 'Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright', you grow
Beyond this flimsy conscious that I know.
Some nights your claws are fierce on forest floor,
I shudder when you, stealthy, pass my door.
Yet vibrant symmetry may still delight;
You are my brightest day, my deepest night.
I'm crushed and coated in your thick-set dreams
And, hammered anvil, nothing's what it seems.
Yet, penned and fleeced, my lamb, you satisfy.
Such darling Sleep's brain muses as I lie.

DISHING UP PERFECTION

What white and moist young thing I see before me?
A just dessert for kings and paupers too.
So tart, my teeth dance tomb-steps soft as swan's-down,
Inviting as a virgin ripe for dreams.
No need to ask, nor whisper sweet my nothings,
Consumed in but a moment's pulsing joy.
I could spend hours in this recitation,
Describe perfection, utterly devoured.
But you would then slink hungry to your freezer
And, warmed so fast, sink lemon's rich meringue.

MAKING BABIES

The strangest thing has happened recently.
My poems, bright as newborn babes,
(once borne down hard and long into delivery)
now dilate themselves, in pairs,
as if my brain can ping pong both into a birth canal.

The poem, temporarily in breach,
stops while I breathe to strain its sibling out.
I fear it's joined, placental, in one wake
and cannot help but think that this,
the one that could not birth in time,
has fled into the skies.
That poem you would now scarce believe,
how bright it helps the universe to shine.

You simply see the afterbirth entombed
and, poet as I am, I wander to that place within the stars,
the home my child was born.

DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION

**Love to love may prove
A laundry for soiled garments,
Rinsed and spun and dried -
Till colours fade, thread-weaves bind.
Neither claims odd socks or bra.**

**Prove me not, my love,
Your weave is coarse, my weft fine,
Dress us not in rags.
Cut out patterns, bright and plain,
A complement for cocktails.**

ELEMENTARY RHYTHMS

If
sweet earth's
dip-coated
chocolate drops -
what a wonderful sticky mess we're in.

If
roses'
moorish scent
blooms love each year,
then pray new buds, your offspring, bear no thorns.

If
bright flame
'becomes you',
look no further.
Pocket-hearts are singed when beauty is scored

If
champagne
sparkles still
and quenches thirst,
drink now your fill, for 'roses grow on you'.

If
two hearts
beat in time
and love grows sweet,
then earth's your oyster: aphrodisiac.

If
fine wines,
chocolates,
flowers, breathe love,
then earth, wind, fire and water rhythm-blend.

O FOR THE WINGS OF A DOVE

**You are not obsessive
as you tick off your shopping list,
check your Birthday list,
pay your bills as clockwork.**

**You are not compulsive
as you delete your emails,
delete your ex-correspondent friends,
buy your weekly beer and curry.**

**Obsessively, compulsively inane,
you cannot claim to know your mind,
the jewels of human Fabergé
engraved in rote conformity
to socialese and human sleaze.**

**Excuses, excuses,
his OCD an eiderdown of doves
to keep a mind encased within its skull -
without it he can't fly.**

DUST AND FLOWERS

**You must have been the face to greet my birth,
bright raspberry slashed from your kneaded crust;
as anger from your life daubed all in pain.
Where now that flour? Sifted as your dust.**

Your place a window, shuttered.

**You must have been that face to charm the lens;
my napped dumpling, chubby in your stew.
So broad upon our waters, rowing hard.
Freeze-framed, those pictures. Why are there so few?**

Your space a window, shuttered.

**You must have been so misplaced on your Day,
no trophy-cards to count that I had grown.
My bread and dripping mopped away dull grief;
home cooking's simply missed when daily known.**

No face inside your window.

**You are this present mother's absent mum,
a coq-au-vin delight without a dish.
My sons bake fine eccentric recipes,
as pictures, dust and flowers fade my wish.**

No place inside my window.

ALL YOU NEED IS... EDEN

**One day, a long time ago,
I considered mother love eternal,
Nuclear family, the universe;
A father's caring arms all-protecting.
Strange how the world and I have grown older.**

**One day, a long time ago,
I considered the world large, untrammelled,
Nuclear holocaust, a fading hell;
A father's caring arms, like God's, supreme.
Strange how the world falls out of family.**

**One day, a long time ago,
I considered parenting, like apples,
Male/female hybrid in a fertile plot;
A father's caring arms and mother's love.
Strange how fruit-bearing branches spread so far.**

**One day, a long time ago
I will consider a father's bruised arms:
The cider keg of special families.
Mother Earth, yet flushed with bright-orb apples –
Strange how Eve's sons regain new Eden's fruit.**

COMMUNING WITH NATURE'S TREE SPRITE

**To nature, close, she hugged a tree
Deep-buried her ancestral roots,
In spring's green life-defining shoots
No self that passers-by could see.**

**Last night our ancient genes disclosed
A tree sprite leapt to Mother Earth;
Embarked man's link with plainer berth,
Our TV hearts' birdsong exposed.**

**Barking, they called one suburb sprite,
Inhaled rich air that spanned our skies
And drowned, a mermaid to their lies
That canopied lost souls from flight.**

**She heaven-breathed, then gasped her last
And, fledgling, soared azure so vast.**

CREATIVE STREAK IN THE FAMILY

**Sometimes autism runs in families –
see that eccentric uncle, unmarried,
His sister's care was always just enough.
Like 'Streets of London' he carried gas mask,
billy cans, old newspapers and spittoon.
None ever asked what he did in the War.**

**His rages blasphemous, or so they seemed,
of simple diction steeped in Scriptures, rich.
Calling down fire from heaven, or from storms,
into fixed routines of yesterday's news.
Such plain securities worked the ceiling,
fifty years rigid; Raleigh's Hall of Fame.**

**Sometimes autism runs in families
and strangers imagine, give charity,
pity homes where children brood in corners,
do not look, go out in public, or speak;
lost behind flimsy glass of dull routines,
arms, bodies, dancing to a foreign dirge.**

**Sometimes autism runs in families,
looks you in the eye, tells you who made God,
views rain in Scotland, fresh, three years ago -
as if on the tip of your almost-thought.
Then answers your question of yesterday,
abstract as Monet, behind cataracts.**

**Sometimes autism runs in families,
grabs your shopping, barges blind past your form -
so primitive your shape, Picasso's Nude.
Your face, disordered Salvador Dali,
your shoe, profound as Michelangelo.
Supermarket lights gleaming Turner's steam.**

**Sometimes autism runs in families,
breaks conventions, talks too loud, looks too slow,
Renoir's La Loge, a china doll, blush flowers,
Impressionism's hall – do you see her?
A Venus, Botticelli-born and bare.
But see – sometimes autism, sometimes art.**

SIMPLY EXISTING

**You want to not exist.
You barely know
and I know less
of how to win that smile within your eyes;
and I can only guess
the pain that shatters everyday
into a tempest of your sense
and senseless floods this muddy now –
a shipwreck of life's joy.**

SIMPLY FAILING TO EXIST

**You never shook the world, nor your rattle;
such absent eyes, to recognise no face.
Never grew impatient of your prattle,
or Primary, marked bare your new star's trace.
Simply, you failed to exist.**

DREAMING A NEW DREAM

**You were tough on us, my son,
and could not hear us from your padded cell,
where all the world was muffled,
except your ego voice.**

**You could not learn dull words to interest you,
because your tools were not yet born,
to trade as socialite.**

**You tracked the world's confusing shunts
to engines lined, derailed at will.
Drift-patterns leafed all videos, books,
and bricks and parents, sequenced by
precision-balanced mind.**

**You, echolalic, learnt by rote
to intimate your vast concerns
with Thomas, trucks and engines, red,
and daubed your paintings, walls and clothes
one angry shade of plain.**

**You waved the world, with gestures broad,
an actor's ghost, you staged your lines.
Script heartfelt themes ran through your Play,
but far too fast for lesser souls who guessed at dialogue.**

**You read a social rite, of sorts,
and rigidly applied new rules.
Your parents' gaoler, each clocked in
to smooth, soft-padded walls.**

**Your mind, with fireworks, daubed your skies;
on cue, exploded, tapers burnt
and, on occasions, failed to light until we homed you, safe.**

**You painfully learnt social-ease,
each brick, a rule, to build twin towers.
Your enemies and friends grew too,
a minefield, childhood dreams.**

**You were tough on us, my son.
We, crafty, confiscated toys,
because you hurled them, missiles, down the stairs.
We, naughty, caused your head's dull ache,
until you screamed ripe hurt.**

**We were tough on you, my son; yet gentle too.
We shared the pain of difference,
a Phoenix from the ashes of our dreams.**

IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU

**I do not know how to tell you, son,
about eternity,
for in God's house are many rooms.
"They must reach so high to the sky!"
You fervently hope that you're on the ground floor,
in case it's windy at night,
a building so tall could sway in a gale
and your need is earthbound, it's secure.**

**You asked, out of the blue, if God had bad dreams,
but meant in the same way you do;
with heaven so good, your whole family
could live there, immediately.**

**You heard of some soldiers, who killed by the sword,
Bible tales, where they washed themselves clean;
then you wanted to know, from your mum, if you might
wash your brains out, exactly that way.**

**Your nightmares were scary, a life full of Why's,
a head that made no sense at all.
I hated to lie to that rule book, your soul,
about God, in this world, even God –
for heaven must wait, although full of good themes,
in this world, even God has bad dreams.**

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

The darker side of midnight, you betrayed
A boy who did no wrong, who called the world
A place of love, a place of heaven's light.
No place to wash, in bloodlust's tarnished crowds,
Your crucible of silver.

The darker side of midnight, there's no aid,
No friend Samaritan to tread his road.
Too late for phone calls - scream despair too late.
Last breath exhales, as Morning Press, his air.
A street exchange for coppers.

The darker side of midnight's left unmade,
Community to strip the bed, his side.
Inclusion shares no duvet with his need,
Funding's public brass in a swimming pool.
Wash your hands too late – he drowned.

GENESIS OF EXCLUSION

It takes a long time to diagnose exclusion,
vast Genesis of little deaths each year.
At the first sign of disease a leper
is branded, outcast, made to ring a bell.
Stares rise but a moment after delivery:
if a baby is labelled 'Downs'.

**So how long does it take to diagnose
a wide-eyed smile, a high-pitched laugh,
a Monty Python life or gait?
Supermarket tantrums rise in flames,
as Phoenix from the ashes of toddlerhood.
Autism's unspoken pain, through little deaths each year.**

**Baby's empty cry, toddling into sounds,
a clicking of points and signals without a Thomas smile;
revolving doors of pre-school's failing play.
Speech therapy, phonetics, rules;
tick charts, time out and calming strategies.
Praise, rewards and firm, clear words;
reports and Statements, boundaries
and stars for school and home and out.
Penalties, home goal, red card,
a little death each year.**

**Staring rises a moment after playgroup:
parents, professionals, pedestrians, pensioners,
a bell rings behind their eyes,
'Unclean, unclean, protect my Project: Eden.'
A high-pitched laugh, a wide-eyed smile,
a clicking of points by rote,
until children are shunted into sidings.
Tumbling of empty sounds,
one day the family's excluded - a little death each day.**

THE WAR IS IN THE PITY

We must to war,
I know not why.
The sun still shines
and flowers bloom.
More falls than rain
and yet again
more war, now there's the pity.

We must to war,
last year and this.
No time at home,
nor peace, nor bliss.
I cannot tell
why I must go
to war, now there's the pity.

We must to war,
defend our realm;
each foreign field
and hill and dell.
We cannot trade
our loves in death,
so sell our course
for war. Now there's the pity.

AS THE SPIRIT BROODED OVER WATERS

The unthinkable we have survived,
Though at what cost and with what lies;
Bright sap has drained, poor shoots, our spring
As heavier winters enter in.
We cannot plan our lives of towers,
Or whirlwind-plane to calmer hours.
Emotion's storms, global, unjust,
Freak winds, incendiary, combust.
Our sun shines still, unfairness clouds,
As Spirit on the waters broods.
Creation's voice no longer sings,
We trash our toys earth's Father brings.

FULL OF EASTERN PROMISE

Flowers bright as my imagination,
Summer's bloom in perfect combination;
For Monet will relax, too thrall'd to paint
And nature's Evensong will bless a saint.
Packets of seeds – such promise.

PATting A PASTORAL SHIFT

It was never meant to be:
The bloom of youth and hope of love, all gone.
My song of seasons, crumpled, blotchy, brown.
Perhaps these driftings of my dense dreams leave –
How now, dull cow, discern why I've grown weeds.

BIRDS IN THE SATELLITE BREEZE

Simply, the garden looks beautiful now
And, if not this year, next year, or the next.
I plan each season's bloom and fall, and how
Each seeding breeds a poet's musing text.

Small birds sing for the ending of my day –
I hear one boy reads language in the breeze –
Creation's song at sunset has its say;
My words as twigs and branches etch my trees.

Returning to a dim electric earth,
I hope the moon shines yet in nature's night.
The world, in broadcast news, shows death not birth
And politic, raised voices screech to fight.

O little town of Bethlehem still lies,
When heaven's star takes satellite and flies.

TIME EMBROIDERS ARCHITECTURE

If you embroidered time once more
And snipped away those colours, grim,
Would mosaic patterns wreath your floor?
If you embroidered time once, more,
Into an architected door –
Mild features, yours, but oh so dim,
If you embroidered time once more
And snipped away those colours grim.

‘DO NOT GO GENTLE INTO THAT GOOD NIGHT’

You say Good Night, the ending of each day
And tuck so tight, no words are left to say.
So gently sleep, then night will be no more,
Go softly, slow, sap shoots from heaven’s core.
Good night, but go now, gentle.

You may, good night, rack our last hours in pain,
Or gently let our blood to heaven’s vein.
So softly sleep, or fight until all’s done
And tuck so light, for words you’ll find there’s none.
Good night, but go not. Gentle.

GOLDEN STEPS AT THE END OF A RAINBOW

**If your heaven is over the rainbow
will your heart flutter, dulling and slow beat?
Look for the gold and not treasure the part
where a soul can dance dreams in joy's prism.
Still treading light on sunlight.**

**If your heaven's no longer a Babel
will the gail howl, screaming or hushing?
Look for the bend of a bow in the sky,
peace like an olive alights as a dove,
still treading light on sunlight.**

**If your heaven's an Ark, not a rainbow
will your feet burnish bright paths that are fire?
Drift through dense floods to a harbour in death,
tightly anchored in mountains of dreamers.
Still treading light on sunlight.**

KEATS' MAD HARE TO A LOVER'S BREAST

A painted canvas, wet from Monet's strokes,
In bleeding death, a sunset in a frame.
Blanched from a tomb-cloth, coiled around a corpse,
Obscure, he signs himself without a name.

Dull ink, bright page, adorning.

A crowd of faceless names around past deeds;
Birth, death and life squeeze acts into a Play.
So many scenes flash, staged in civil halls.
At curtain call, applause lauds night as day.

Dark stage, bright room, a dawning.

An Easter vigil chickens into spring,
As children rabbit long on eggs and treats.
Our winter's soul lies dormant, yet in death
'Love's ripening breast', mad hare, we hatch (fair Keats).

Still frame, sweet rest, adoring.

*Inspired by: 'Love's rip'ning breast', 'Last Sonnet' by
John Keats.*