

new worlds by Martin O'Connor

The Shape of the River

This river
These hills
Those streams
That valley
That fork
That seal
Did you see that seal?
This wind
Them cobbles
These streets
This folk
This sun man
They buildings
The seagulls
That rain
Them there
That noise
This place

This river
Running
And running.

The Crook Burn,
The Daer Water
The Clyde.
You know that bit.
It's bigger here
Merging
Taking in tributaries
Fattening itself up for the race.
Watering the plants on the way.

Keeping up appearances til it gives it up
For the black sprawl of Glasgow

And then
Then it waters the machines
The machines of industry
The machines of pollution

And then
For about twenty-two mile
It's not a river

Not an estuary
But a ship channel
Nothing natural about it here
It's been forged by human hands
Red Clydeside
Grey Clydeside

And then
Then it's something else
Cannae tell where the river ends and the sea starts
That wee Crook Burn
Don't recognise it noo
You're all grown up
And then
And then
The Firth.

Open water
Sea water
Island water
Atlantic
New world
New jobs
New people
Resources to take
And labour to give
And trade to trade
You've come a long way son
But no as long as that
Cos you find the world over
That people are much the same
They depart
And arrive
They depart
And arrive
The cycle of cycles
The tide of tides

But wherever you go
You take it all with you.
Not the green and pleasant memories
You carry with you
The rough skin on hands.
The metal in the water
The spent sweat
The rattle, and roar
Of the riveting hammers.

The Talk of the Town

It was the talk of the town
For days and days
The creation of the ship
Ships he had seen by the hundred thousand.
But this was a ship in a million.

Was it the size of her?
The cliff of upperworks bearing down on him?
Was it the majesty,
Her ability to rule the waves?
I think the lump in his throat was just the beauty.
Gracious and elegant and manifestly efficient.
That a thing like this could be made by hands and metal and wood
That this was what his neighbours could do
People he knew
People he passed on the street
And it was on his doorstep
Labouring on the banks of his own river.
It was his. It all belonged to him.

Greenock

He was always a wanderer about the quays of Greenock;
And he would go mooning about the wharves and docks.
From the lighters puffing up the roadstead,
By way of the tug boats and the river steamers at Princes Pier,
Jutting out under the cranes in the harbours.
His brother was sent to his apprenticeship in Scotts.
And all his pals were the sons of shipbuilders, shipowners, ships engineers, and ships
captains.

He would start on a Saturday morning, early,
So that he could see *The Jupiter* take her passengers off the Glasgow train and set off for
Arran
He thought about the Comet, The Greenock and The Canadian; he remembered *The Falcon*.

On he went eastwards, dawdling to gape at whatever was there to see.
The transit-sheds.
Maybe some cows from Ireland
Or sugar being unloaded from Cuba.
Piled against the quay of the Albert Harbour
The cobbles all sticky with the brown stuff that oozed out of burst bags,
The air heavy with its smell of burning toffee.

To Every Ship Her Destiny

To Every Ship her Destiny
To every hand a tool
To every sky a pulley
To every swing a shovel
To every Truss a Flag
To every child a path
To every journey a destination
To every imagination a reality
To every man a job for life
To every ocean a crossing

Another World

He saw his first launch here.
He saw a squirt of spray where the bottle struck the bow
He saw a wet mark on the plating;
He saw the great hulk move.
Moving too fast and could never be stayed.
He saw her rushing at the water, a thing gone daft.
Rushing at the water, the check-chains clattering.
Rushing at the water
He saw her dive and thought she'd never come up again
He saw the surge
Stupendous it was
He saw her riding high and safe on the Clyde,
He saw the people cheering
To him it was another world altogether.

The Firth of Clyde

Ealasaid a' Chuain

An t-Eilean Arainneach

An t-Eilean Bhòid

Eilean Dà Bhàrra

Cumaradh Mòr

Eilean Mo Laise

Cumaradh Beag

Sandaigh

The Argosies

One thing they say is there's space
So much space and air and room.
Nowhere more space than this.
The foamy firth
The purple paths
The iron limbs
Precipitous parts
The pliant sea
The sloping shores
The velvet tides
The golden lace
The restless pebbles
Fine spun sand
Shrieking steam
The sooty sky
The hammers clang
The cranes creak
Rattle and swing

The people that sleep in winter
That get up in the morning with the lark
Daily dawn
Burning through the smoky east.
Where men sweat gold
That others spend.
Plying their craft,
Soldering the years
Until spring appears.
It's world enough for me.

And here are men to know, men to love.

Optimism and Defeat

Greenock is a grey town,
A drab town,
In the bits where its money is made,
But it's funny
He had no eye for the misery.

Because it was built in optimism,
In size far beyond its needs
And in boilers under decaying roofs by the dry dock
There was tar,
Solid and dirty.
Did he not see it was a failure,
A last, costly projection of pride
That nobody wanted to admit?
That Greenock was destined to bow the knee to Glasgow.

It is lavish defeat
It is a long and tangled story
A strange and colourful story,
How intimate these things were
On the lives of people there.

Long Now Since

It is long now since the logs were dispatched
It is long now since bluff blows
It is long now since the timber ponds at Langbank
It is long now since IBM was the future
It is long now since my weight was on the sea
It is long now since my parents left
It is long now since the ghosts of ghosts were laid to rest

So far they are

It is long now since all my steps were taken
And now I walk with hardly a look back
My first steps from my mother
Towards the world's crest
Or walking towards the other
The new step that we all take
But when the new step arrives
There's nothing new about it.
Because that step comes from all the steps taken before.

Australia

Are you male, single and young?
Forget Canada, that's old news
How about Australia?
Are you a housebreaker, thief?
Have you stolen an animal?
Don't worry about it.
How about land, marriage, higher wages?
We'll pay for everything, just pay us back when you can
No women? No problem
We have a scheme for that
Forget the city life
Forget the Highland life
You know there's gold there, right?
And look at you now
Director of the Australian Bank
At least now you can pay us back.

It's not creaming off the best
It's not selling you a lie
It's not called clearances
It's called opportunity
It's amazing in't it?
How you always find a Scot wherever you go
Must have had a lot of get up and go
To get up and go like that
Got up
And gone.

Are you male, single and young?
Forget Greenock, that's old news

Here to There (and Back Again)

From here to there
And back again
There to here
And off again

Home from home
And back again
Home to home
And off again

This place
It places me down gently
And in placing me
In place
There's more place for me
No real place
A place no more
This is the place
The place is here
The place is there
Home is the place
Now the place is around me
This place within me
Placing me wherever
Placing me in history
And in a future place
But this present place
Is a place for now
This place is good enough