

Three Poems

Ronald Gaskell

Gordale Scar

Well, the sublime is not much in demand now.
Even at the Academy
Mont Blanc at Sunrise no longer takes away
the hanging committee's breath. And yet
this showpiece, this gloomy dinosaur, this
stage-set for a *Prometheus*,
hardly less remote from our lives
than the steam-engine or the spinning-jenny,
still disturbs. Not by the rhetoric
of its grandeur; and not just after
the smooth lawns and smoother faces
of Sir Henry Who, Lady Aurelia,
their dogs, thoroughbreds and children;
but by its silence.
Thirty years from now,
when the last birds and animals are ash
or dust, when the tormented
earth spins in cold and darkness,
will a seed, a spore, caught by a gust
of wind or thrown back by the scatter of the breaking
wave, grip these crevices: a thread
of green stray and struggle from the soundless
rock? Will even the end, the Marche
Funèbre — 'O convoi solennel
des soleils magnifiques' — be a beginning?

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'O convoi solennel ...'

Laforgue, *Marche Funèbre pour La Mort de la Terre*.

Harvest Moon

(Palmer)

The moon dreams.

In the moon's dream
the earth has risen.

The moon wonders at
the fertility of the earth.

A crag
flares above the wooded hill. Yet the moon
is soft, the tree
sways its foliage towards it as the tide sways.

In the paradise garden
harvesters move, men and women
reaping, binding, stooking the cool sheaves,
their shadows
turning and returning.

White, then silver,
the moon climbs.

Under the protection
of the tree two figures pause.
The sheep
turn their heads, puzzled. Their fleeces
brighten for a moment, then grow dark again.

Star Map

Begin by choosing a large, a really *large* sheet of paper, then select one star to put at the centre.

Suppose we take the sun as centre. Arbitrary, but from our point of view—and what other is there?—obviously a good choice.

Now decide your scale : say, one centimetre for the sun's diameter (this may have to be changed).

Racing, or at least orbiting round it in concentric ellipses, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, etc.

Things are going to be difficult here since Jupiter, at one millimetre, should still be more than ten times larger

than the earth. (Distances can't, of course, be shown to scale; not to the same scale, anyway. No matter.)

We still have to get the solar system into relation with the other stars of the galaxy—'our' galaxy.

Here, too, scale may prove to be a problem. With the sun one centimetre, Antares should be roughly what? Three metres?

Even with quite a large sheet of paper, this could be awkward. Better start again, with the sun at one millimetre.

Jupiter, then, still just visible, 1/10th of a millimetre. Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto. OK so far? Right.

Now, where were we?