

# Response

## NUCLEAR POWER

I do wish that Dr. Peter Hodgson could be just a little less sure of himself than he seems to be on nuclear power. In a booklet published by the Oxford University Press in 1985 he said:

Those opposed to nuclear power say that the consequences of a nuclear accident are so horrific that we are not justified in taking even a very small risk. This question is partly answered by recent studies of reactor accidents. These studies show that it is physically and chemically impossible for reactors to spread huge quantities of radioactivity over the surrounding countryside, as was at one time feared. Most of it is trapped in and near the reactor itself. The worst disasters described by the anti-nuclear lobby just cannot happen because they are contrary to the laws of physics and chemistry.

Within not many months of this definitive pronouncement there came the calamity of Chernobyl.

**Bruce Kent**

*Dr. Peter Hodgson's original article appeared in the  
February issue of New Blackfriars.*

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## For Catherine (Siena, Edinburgh, Avignon)

1.  
Your blood and Christ's blood running together, month  
after month in a cinder-room under the stairs.  
Grandparents fell asleep in soaked earth, a friend  
walked the ghost road that dissolves in water. Years

when the end of the book rang like a chasm  
and crowds of folk clambered to meet  
their dire destruction just once more. Back  
from the grave one message echoed in hoofbeats:

We love you, will carry you further — a name  
written in blood on the cloud's brow.  
Take the road that opens beyond the gate  
as smooth as water from a flooded house.

Between the resurrection and the vanishing  
don't count one difficult day.  
A sharp intake of mist in the throat  
breathes out your April into May.

2.  
Allan is preaching on St Catherine's Day.  
Above the altar in the chaplaincy  
Christ as an open-work circus king  
swings on his steel trapeze between

heaven and earth—cool as a bridge  
striding the gap from Forth to Fife.  
Through hollow hands and side we see  
lime branches sprigged with thoughts of leaf

and clear beyond their living wood  
the gracious air, like food, like speech.

3.  
Knowing the strength of words in season,  
Catherine, a flower becomes a tiger's eye,  
saliva dew on the face of a tree. Light enters  
the priory of grass

where all work quietly, some in vain.  
There is an arrogant beast that feeds  
on others' backs; a humble one that fetches  
seasons in its grip.

And the sun loves all that, the earth.  
Your mad crusade to paddle muddy waters,  
to wring replies from broken reeds, question  
the moorhen for her fixed abode—

exhaustion overtook us on the road.  
We waited cup in hand for clear water  
but tasted salt, salt. So this life rises  
and falls like smoke, acrid then

sweet and vanishing as a backward glance.  
Till your heart too grew tired of carrying its  
haversack of effort, provisions for the ghost road  
—herbs and bread and wine.

Losing all track of pain. Then like a deer  
slipped in one sideways leap from the valley floor  
to the cool of the lip of the hills that opened up  
around you, azure and everywhere—

James McGonigal

*The Feast of St Catherine of Siena falls on 29 April.*