

Horse Whispering in the Military Industrial Complex

PHILIP WELLS performs as The Fire Poet everywhere from St Paul's Cathedral to Channings Wood Prison, from Buckingham Palace to children's hospices, from 11 Downing Street to children's psychiatric units, in front of everyone from Robbie Williams to Gordon Brown. He has written an opera about Thomas Becket which was performed in Canterbury Cathedral. He has collaborated with rock bands, photographers, sculptors, painters and fire jugglers. Currently he is making poetry films on Second Life.

Horse Whispering in the Military Industrial Complex

PHILIP WELLS



CAMBRIDGE

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For Elizabeth

Words may be deeds

—AESOP

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We Have Come

We have come not to shout, but to listen;
Not to hoard, but to share;
Not to lash out, but to calm;
Not to cover up, but to lay bare.

We have come not to suffocate, but to touch;
Not to dictate, but to understand;
Not to hold back, but to unleash—
Not to shrink, but to expand.

We have come not to shadow, but to colour;
Not to conquer, but to embrace;
Not for ourselves, but for the other—
Not to silence, but to give voice.

Hallowed Ground

Can truth, like jewels, be suddenly found?
In a dream the words lit up my mind:
To ignite the fellowship of hallowed ground.

What does it mean, this eerie sound?
Is it Time itself I hear unwind?
Can truth, like jewels, be suddenly found?

Our planet-threads will fray, unwound,
My task, perhaps, to weave and bind,
To ignite the fellowship of hallowed ground:

One day to see the teachers crowned,
The wheelchairs walk, the killers kind:
Can truth, like jewels, be suddenly found?

Our star shines still as we go round—
From that vast flame the spark I'll find
To ignite the fellowship of hallowed ground.

In storms of mind we run aground;
To the solar wind still blinkered, blind.
Truth will, like jewels, be suddenly found
To ignite the fellowship of hallowed ground.

Uncle Tim

I never saw him happy again.
Jumping across the field with his briefcase
Perhaps, for a moment, he found it.
He should have grown a garden in this place.

I blame his father, mostly.
Years of exams and rigid sums
Because the old man had to be sure :
He should've listened to his mum.

She shared his silence and his love
Of harebell, primrose, fuchsia dawns :
Every spare minute of his early days
Was among the oaks and Richmond fawns.

But the father was strong ;
*And each root must be paid for
In pounds and pence ; and pain
Is the testing life we're made for !*

He should have climbed the oak,
But his father barked him down :
Life's too precious for risks
He said, only anger in his frown.

He took the path his father wished,
But my child's eye could tell
Each family picnic in the park
Was a subtle, breathless hell

Where he'd remember what he wanted
And he'd want to tell us all—
But he'd whisper me round, and show me
How the leaves swell up and fall.

And so one day I asked him
In the park at the end of the day:
Why do you work in an office?
Why don't you run away?

And he shrieked like a child
Unleashed into the heavy rain,
Jumping across the field with his briefcase.
I never saw him happy again.

He came quietly back and I started
To talk about rare plants and the people at Kew,
But he carefully steered the subject around
And asked what I wanted to do.

I wanted what he'd never had;
And more so when I saw his still face.
He should have grown a garden: he should
Have grown his garden in this place.

Creators

Neatly placed on their appointed shelves,
Prize vegetables glitter like crown jewels.
As if they'd grown the bloody things themselves,

Owners of bulbous marrows measure their lives
By volume, width and weight. What fools!
Neatly placed on their appointed shelves

Sprouts assume a pride outside their little selves:
Another purple-veined face gloats and drools—
As if they'd grown the bloody things themselves.

Whatever time or pesticides this prize involves,
Something's forgotten in the winning and the rules.
Neatly placed on their appointed shelves,

First and second onion inflame the blood, the wives
Exchanging poison recipes, then kicking like mules
As if they'd grown the bloody things themselves.

So doctors are Gods when the patient survives;
And designer babies, spliced by researchers' tools,
Neatly placed on their appointed shelves—
As if they'd grown the bloody things themselves.

Jinja

Though the boys selling Coke at Jinja,
the source of the Nile, have never heard of Egypt,
kingfishers know to point their bills like telescopic sights
and dive; emerge with silver in their beak,
and the perfume of the Nile in their feathers.

At the river's edge, above the stagnant pool,
red dragonflies advertise their passion;
ignore the disappointment of water
burned to dust at the margins,
never to flow on the great journey.

Flies bright as rubies
move in binary waves
across the river's silver plains:
moving to the rhythms of their race,
if they pierce the river's veil, they drown.

What watches me, beyond the veil?
What watches all the rivers
gliding through my heart?
At the end of my journey,
what sea, what planet waits for me?

In the kayak of my mind I set off
with the faith of horizons, not knowing
what rapids or falls of fire I face, or what
canyons and chasms, what echoes
in what dried-out beds await.

Yet I hear only the rivers and seas turning their wheel;
sense this is no time to question the wisdom
of water, nor the source of all that flows.
I only know these eyes, the sudden dive,
the joy of flight with silver in my beak.

Sorceress

'I am a spring,' she says.
'I am the source.'

Come down then, down to my river—
flow through me—

trickle through the startled light
of my meadows—
these petals so curved, the pollen so moist.

This sorceress, she moves me.

Slowly she sighs an ember breath.
Fingers curve their grace on flesh
and my smile is sabre-tooth
and the beast bends in the deep cavern—

frenzy of fire on flint-cut walls
and my hide is in hackles—
bristle of nerve and sinew
roar of muscle and pulse
crush of a whisper

and agony—

the dawn sigh.

This sorceress, she moves me.

In the gasp of cooling dew
she turns

and we settle
like hands in prayer
into us.

Joyriding

for Scott Waring

The only sin is to limit the is
—RICHARD BACH

A car isn't just the spark plugs and the engine,
the absorbers and the wheels:
it's the idea of travel, the thrill of speed,
the E-type sculpture; all the wacky beered-up
dreamings that led to the gasp of Ferrari Dino . . .

Yes, I suppose a car *is* just an A to B machine.
But what about these curves?
Won't you take her for a spin,
screech Silverstone corners,
sail your love's long hair at 150?

No, I can't say you're wrong. A car *is* just a car.
But can it drive round Le Mans on its own?
What about the invisible sparks and atomic combustions,
the way it sways out of corners,
its torque and thrust and racing lines,
its beastly rumbling zorp . . . ?

Yes, it *can* just be a Focus or a Golf or a Vectra,
something that takes us from A to B.
Simple as life or death.
But aren't there more letters than A and B?

What, that's what's coming out of my mouth right now?
Just a string of letters making sounds that die . . . ?
I can't deny that.
But aren't I also trying to make words,
make sense, get inside your mind?

The car has evolved from rolling stone to lightning,
like our minds. You can open your eyes
wherever you choose. You can live on an island
where you only ever need to walk or you can live
in a world where the green cars of the new time
ghost across the seas like breath. You can walk in the circle
of your own tracks, or you can follow your desire
into the cockpit of your dream flycar
and rocket to the edges of Orion.
The wonder and the technology is all there.
The true science is all in place.
Nobody alive or dead has ever seen the whole picture;
but that doesn't mean there isn't one there.

Who gave you eyes? These gates into new worlds,
or, unconnected, these slimy marbles?
How does an embryo know how to grow
its own fingers, or develop its logical arguments?
Why does the earth move in circles
and not scream off like an unknotted balloon?

We're like islanders in a drugged haze,
rolling pineapples in the sand, stumbling
from one coconut grove to the next,
mumbling enthusiasm for the shuffle of feet.

So why not? Dive into the cockpit, step on the fire
in the Z-type of tomorrow—imagine the ultimate
torque and curve, and the fire'll be singing in your skull;
you'll see the pistons through the bonnet, feel the speed
ripple your face; you'll dream the shape and praise
the beauty, feel the atoms pulsing to your beat
as your heart hits the ton in the shock of a blink . . .

And when you finally reach it,
that final speedtrial at the edge of time—
not until beyond lightspeed will you know . . .

and in that final blazing through to stillness—
when man and car and fire are one—
you'll be lit up forever, like an imperishable star.

The Storm Of Creation

Thunder—
Two continents
of rock collide.

Lightning—
A crack
in the eggshell sky.

Rain—
Cleansing
for the sacrifice.

She cuts off your mind
with a golden sword

and to the drum
of the infinite drum

you hatch
in the healing moss ;

and dried
by the lovelight of suns

you fly out beyond
the outer skies

to explode
your star of love,

sending out
the storm of your seed

to wake new wings
to the highest skies of fire.

Falling Apart

Batman? Gandhi? Bruce Willis? Jesus? Superman?
Never showed up. Innocence crushed in a million tons of ash
And not a phoenix to be seen. Only a flying great white shark
With teeth of fire and blood, cloned for destruction
In the black hole egos of the wounded
Where beauty is smothered in suffocating darkness.

Two thousand hearts torched and torn in hellfire,
Smashed by a hundred floors of ash-thundering steel and stone.

But some, they jumped—some, hand in hand—
Dreaming they might wake before they hit the ground.
They *hit* the ground. Felt the nightmare concrete punch of dust.

Spiderman? Jesus? No sign. No miracle airlock rescue.
No mother and son reunited in great hug of hope. . . . Hope . . .

Hope is a candle, burning inside; and now spinning in whirlwinds
Of light as supernova hearts explode open at the edge of the universe
And here on earth simultaneously; incredible miracle of the possible,
Light you don't get burned by to become the sun in your inner sky
And scorch to shame those who *think* they've found the flame—
They're playing the old, cold game of nail the lovers down.

God forgive them for they know what they do!
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

And a light uncurls this fist to a palm as we remember
We are in good hands—the only hands that will hold us forever
With the tenderness always of a newborn in the strong grip
Of his weeping father—the hand that will be there waiting for you,
Taking away the pain of your fall

As two ordinary superheroes jump out of burning hell
Just to know the brief wild freedom of leaving
Their slow motion skyscraper life hand in hand—

Just to open the eyes of the whole world
And show that only love holds us together.

The Academy

They made words and sense here :
Orders and borders and morals and fear.
Not fetres or beat and rimmonson chins
Or litanies plastered in muggings of Pimm's

Where strawhats inspire at the burdicled view—
Where innerskull icepins inglisten with blue—
Transfoxing old bookworms of mortarboard chins
Who with oratored chalk and warblegame sins

Demysticate joy and the sting of the song—
The ploy of the noise in the blaze of the bong.
But oh jingle be phrased, they have lost the boook
Forbidding all kinds of gobbledegook!

The gobbledefractal buzzing of moons
Rotating the truth in our quantumleap spoons—
The tango of fins in the grail of the deep
In the middle of minds where the phoenix can't sleep

And volcanoes have wings and a labyrinth hatch—
Where galaxies spin on the whack of a match
To dazzle the learned, whose red-adair wits
Now start to hiphop to the rhythmical bits

And tie up their chi with an ecstable smile—
Flashing their bulbs in the novabang style—
Mid the mare of this mash that mangled their scheme
And flooded with gold the old dry academe!

The Footballer in the Square

for Andy, Chris, Will & Paddy

The young boys show off their skills
And keep the ball from the youngest one
In the square of Puerto de Mogan.

All around the families are smiling,
Breathing slowly as the children learn.

The youngest footballer squeaks like a puppy
As another cunning swerve foils his longing
For a touch of the ball. Enter stage right

A humble face of nineteen with feet of light like bells
That dance a spell to steal the ball, and flick it back
And up and kick, kick, kick; quick balance
On the neck and flick; and trap like a gift at the feet

Of the youngest boy, whose eyes widen like a sky.

The other boys bow as the humble face walks away.