

The Commodity News

**The price of everything,
for what it's worth**

Mel Witherden

*“is what’s happening
today really happening to us?
And is that red thing
heading for us now a bus?”*

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(from The Last Orchid, a work in very long progress)

*From a railway carriage on the journey
to find where power lies*

A girl whose hope and heart
had been too early charred
by knowing of disasters
that would overcast her
rasped like one close to their last,
broken sparse and harsh;
she spoke as if her age was past
and quietly imparted
her precocious forecast
to the listening compartment.

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1. A Child speaks of her concerns

Words, all grown up throw-up words,
your phone app blown up donut words
words that won't condone or show concern
or even own up that I've heard
the future's been deferred by words.

Greater mouse-eared bat, goodbye.
Bye bye, large copper butterfly;
Farewell before we even have identified
a hundred undiscovered fungi.
So long lamb succory;
downy hemp nettle, respectfully
yours - all the bestoya.
Mind how you go to woad, and so nearly
da boch chi,
so briefly known cold Snowdon lily?
Then, how long before times freeze
on bluebells, pimpernels, herb paris
wood sorrel and anemones?
When will the child be born who sees
and mourns the last of these.
Like ungulates that peer through leaves
by woodland paths among the trees
where summer evening light deceives,
or like fluffs of rosebay seeds,
each timid species
only stays if no one breathes.

Our ancestors
loved and lived for forests for a
hundred thousand years or
more till you, incautious warders,
brought us ...
... what? Discord? Disorder?
Nature falling to a vortex?

2. The student explains why he doesn't vote

Forewords. Sure words.

Flaw-words, not easy to ignore words.

Your words, little sister, got it bossed,
cos words record the time we've lost.
Words describe the thresholds crossed.
Words are how the truth was glossed.
But words alone don't count the cost
of passivity that follows
on from life, survival in the shallows
which business swallows.

Your industries for centuries like dinosaurs
have pawed and mauled and gnawed us
till they wore a gaping sore a
nation-broad, a sword, a
weal across our commonweal
which your all wheedling can't conceal.

They're even now extorting new rewards
and courting your applause as
sponsored ecological marauders,
Gaia's rapists and her gorgers.
And so on out beyond our borders,
and all borders is a world as
scorched and awesome as the Borgias'
where you and all your corpus
scorn, denounce, deplore the chorus
that calls out your case as porous.

What? peaceful protest
polite requests?
the stunts that caused you mild distress?
Yes, who'd have guessed
when you're transgressed
the law gives you a hand job to progress.
We're done debating with a tortoise.
We've heard enough of "circumstances force us"
Nothing you say can reassure us;
you've closed the Eye of Horus to us,
We're Carpenters, and you're the Walrus.
Everybody knows the hour is
late and yet you still defraud our
earth, and wind and waters.

3. The Politician has a response ready

Words - words - just mark these words
they're printed large so hark my words
sharp words, stark words
and don't-go-alone-by-dark words.

Of course we share our citizens' concern
for our precious natural world,
and I'll leave no stone unturned
till its security's returned.
But government is a match of thirds:
our policies - our enemies - the herd,
and all we want to do is serve.
Though the sceptics speculate
excoriate and fabricate,
I've always properly confessed
a priority for those with less
and how we wish them some redress;
though poverty is weakness,
their poverty is also blest,
and my kindness is no game of chess.
The point so often missed is this:
to save the people's and the planet's health,
we absolutely must create more wealth.

So why object when I profess
that migrants should routinely face arrest?
They only claim asylum to access
the benefits of safety and success;
then everything they take leaves us with less.
It's hard to know the bigger pest,
their lawyers or those who fake distress:
both are infestations and a cause of interest
to enemies who want to harm the West,
and that it's self-evidently best
this deviance is soon suppressed.

Forgive me, I've digressed.
Poverty's a form of theft
by aliens who would be guests
and layabouts with zest to rest
their elbows on our treasure chests
in hope that they'll divest
those whose means are properly assessed.
We must do all we can to erase
the insult and the waste
of this base and national disgrace.
Then we'll address this regrettable distaste

for the flowers and creatures displaced
by the well-intentioned haste
to make our country great.
I rest my case.

4. An Investor drools

True words - few words - due words
to flush and lose the turds
who'd screw you.

This discourtesy and hurt
that you've incurred from those accursed
is underserved, unearned and worse.
But don't be urged to reimburse
these perverse and worthless
smirking bits of dirt.
We, the better dressed,
are irked but shouldn't be obsessed:
hurt pride will always be redressed.
when we invest.

You can't go back on mining stocks:
the Chilean are minimum for lithium in rocks,
But oil is still the crack
the nation lacks,
and you can max your cash
and even get relief from tax
since guilt is guiltless for the mack
with balls who fracks
the shale and extracts
two quadrillion cubic feet of gas
that's packed beneath our towns and tracts.

What man doesn't get erect,
who doesn't genuflect
or sense that destiny's possessed
him when the markets and the index
collectively detect
where wise funds should be directed next?

And for those not quite so blessed
as us who have a smaller pot to test:
why not a little property, a nest,
a comfort from a sad bequest,
returns for all those closest, dearest,
(and somewhat less for all the rest)?
It's essential everyone concocts
a hedge against commercial knocks:
an office block perhaps beside the docks,
a row of second homes in Wester Ross,
flocks of rare breeds on the Quantocks,
some mansions down at Boulders Lock.
Then since life sucks,

they say, for those in flux,
you can be the friend who chucks
up homes for all the clucks.
To everyone who shucks
out half a million bucks:
a pretty, private hutch,
their little box.

Whatever's wrong with making profits?
It's the reason we've got pockets,
(though we buy our real estate on credit
for as long as we can get it).
But oh, what happy recompense,
those dissidents that we've incensed
will have to pay our interest
and our rents.

5: The Adman promises

New words - shrewd words - and reused words -
it's our job to choose the schmooze words,
working words you heard here first,
set loose to be absurd,
abused and cursed.

Ours is the currency that listens
in worlds of larceny and prisms;
they're the mystery that glistens,
gives novelty its chic and frisson;
they tell you all what is, and isn't;
they're words to liberate your reason,
set the price on things you're missing.

Whatever people see that isn't taken,
my job's to make them
ache to get them -
any flotsam, any jetsam
any mission, hokem, token,
any off-street on-screen legend,
any molecule or serum
fake elixir or gem
anything that's made or mined,
any meme to mate with minds
that might defuse the surplus time
of purchasers of things divine
and bring them closer to sublime.
We only need to make them shine.
Our every word and number's prime.

6. A Single Parent minds

Snot words, slot words, grot and rot words,
any shot that gets your slop heard
don't-you-give-us-all-the-trots words.

We get your drift,
your glyph, your riff.
But say you're home and frozen stiff?
When did you last play what-if
with an empty fridge and empty kids?
never getting half a sniff
at the extra evening shift?
watching meals arrive as gifts?
slowly slipping off a cliff?
Did you start the week with nothing left,
without relief, adrift, bereft?
When did *you* ever lose belief
in the power you've achieved
for inflicting grief?

Clearly your collective interests sit
in cutting benefits to lift
us into work that doesn't fit
our family, or faculties, or wit.
We can always take our pick
from anything that makes you rich.
So in the end the lives you break
are equal to the stake
you make us make you make.

Crude desperation which induces
us to queue for scraps of food
naturally eludes the farmers who produce
it and middlemen whose skewered
duty is to process out what's good.
So industry and politics collude
to boost their dividends and dues,
choosing rude excuses
for the damage that ensues.
The bottom line can wear a minor bruise
from any obtuse news
about the lives they lose:
mere inaction keeps the revenues
while your profit still accrues.
While you win, we lose, and lose, and lose.

So, you phonies and you donors
city brokers with your bonus

you elected ones with boners,
floaters, hangers on and chronies
famous just for what you're known as,
you told us that our dreams were out for hire,
we could be a flower, be a flier;
were free to trade in moonlight or in sky or
merchandise state-customised desire.
You thought the songs you gave us would inspire,
but we were never asked to join your choir.
You played on platitudes and promises
that someday every worker will have riches
and everyone alive will purchase ...
what? Fame? Success?
Presents for their little prince or princess?
Or anything to fill the emptiness?

Now it's clear just what you meant:
you will choose the time when you relent,
and those on whom the system's mostly leant
till then stay worn and weak and spent,
ignored and worthless, condemned
as wimps, lifewasters, kept in contempt
by you lifewasting pimps and gents
at the national Department of Pretence.

7. An old man with a can of beer wakes in alarm

What mist? What lost mythology?
What careless airborne mystery is this?
How could we miss these
indiscrete asymmetries
and this poor woman's miseries?

What twist-fisted economics
that were supposed to make us rich
could leave so many in the Styx?
What a system and what wisdom to inflict It!
You must have missed some interdicts
restricting use of these slick tricks -
to make a fixture with no fix
and one that stinks so much like piss.

It's odd the state's so often
stated first obligation
is the safety of the population
yet in self-delusion
it can't even find excuses
for its climate change confusion,
and abrogation of its duties.
Now, after many years of rumours,
storms, floods and fires are here like tumours
to alarm, bemuse and doom us
while leaders couldn't be more clueless,
do less.

Meanwhile tumescent
rivers now assume a
loose and gruesome sluice
that flows down avenues
and roads of beech and yews,
choosing where to nose and ooze,
in whose home the sewage spews,
who'll lose, who rues,
which of us soon discontinues.
Then what comes after?
What next destruction? Fresh disaster?
What slow starter and unchartered,
unobserved departure
that is yet to come?
Not water tumbling
but perhaps the scum -
fungi back from summer slumber
with blackened tongues damp and fumbling
through the things we own, and crumbling

all we think that we can summon -
till our culture has become their medium,
something feeding in a seep
of failure, slugs that come in sleep;
a vague malevolence that creeps
through all we sow and reap.

I can sense a grieving,
sleazy thieving
running in my margins
and imaginings like merciless machines.
I even dream my own awakening
as if reality is breaking
down and flaking
in the aching age before I'm taken.

8. The Last Optimist tries not to sound desperate

What? No words of hope?
no words of hosts and homes?
words of closure and repose
no scope for roses, hawthorn, sloes
small promises for moles and voles?

Slow down: we must be cursed
if we can't nurse diversities,
put nature first,
reverse adversities and hurts.
Say goodbye to Perses and Circe,
and empty out your bursting purses -
there won't be thanks for smaller mercies.
If enough of us can work it
and our effort is concerted
together we can still revert it:
So everyone get down (don't bow, don't curtsy)
and don't get up until you're dirty.

Already farmers have made pledges
to replant the wasted hedges,
put back those tatty, unproductive wedges,
of dispensable field edges,
the once extraordinary engines
of life's connections and defences.
They say that they'll return with tractors, dredgers,
dig out long-lost ponds and ditches,
entice back sedges, toads and midges
before the last of swifts and skylarks fledges.

There could still be hedgerows left to etch
the landscape, split the stretched
out boundless fields and stitch
the farmland back together.
Why not refix the once green bridges
so slow worms, fieldmice, crickets
woundwort, stitchwort, blackthorn, vetches
can flex their ranges, mix the sexes,
reclaim sustainable genetics?

Though we obsess about the snow
and the roads it closes,
and how the nation blows
its top at bans on hoses,
there must be someone here who knows
the scent of smoke on roses,
and chauvinists could save oceans

by imposing more than prose and poses.

But maybe there's a double-take and
our concerns for safety are mistaking
quakings of our mind's own making.
Let's be optimistic and contend
our great experiment
with greed comes to a sanitary end,
and we won't let an
angry planet take revenge...

... Yet even then,
if we weather weather here with ease
it must depend
what power oversees the overseas?

Oh please, one final semanteme:
is what's happening
today really happening to us?
And is that red thing
heading for us now a bus?

9. Now everyone joins in

The librarian objects

What? Still words?
No, worse.
Sick witless winded words.
Words that never did a day of honest work:
nitpick, fickle and lickspittle words,
teeth-gritting and earth-shitting worms
of words *in verse*.
And this is not the worst...

The park keeper keeps nothing back

All of you with power
are a trowel-coward shower
of cock-furrowed clock-borrowed
stock-horror harrowers,
famed for your outstanding
loutish misbehaviours,
pronouncing nature's nadirs
to tout yourselves as saviours -
like gardeners flouting failures
with azaleas and dahlias.
You lounge about the wallflowers
crouching over leeks and sprouts
and souring the ground round gallows.
You mount with the hounds,
you joust with old wheelbarrows;
while you measure in todays
you're ploughing our tomorrows.

The reporter sees the future

The delegates to COP-Con Fifty-two
meet on a cruise ship over Tuvalu
to watch beneath a lovely sky of puce
the islands disappear into the blue.
Governments who come with dirty flues
jostle there to flog their fossil juice -
and fight their futile feuds
intended to excuse
refusals of the mitigation dues
to countries that have nothing left to lose.
The West comes dressed as a flock of ewes,
while the Non-aligned aren't easy to amuse,
and oil men take you back to rooms
for talks with floozies, coke and booze.

There's not a leader here who leads or even moves
while commodities are burning down the fuse.

The chef vomits

What amazement and distaste.
What dismay, what waste,
to negotiate with the Don Quixote
president who brays,
and liaise with states already dazed
in the cage of their aphasia.
Their taste, some say,
is their worst mistake,
their execrable taste,
glazed by gross displays
filling up their faces, waists,
and all the vacant spaces they embrace
with the stuff they craze.
Like a kid who plays
with sucrose and chlorates
they so need us to be amazed.
Their tyres, their brakes
scrape way below unsafe,
while Earth spins in an autoclave,
awash, ablaze,
and plagues rage
as if these are the last of days.

The divorcee demands concession

What differences? What dissent?
It's the job of businesses and parliaments,
not citizens, to show repentance,
and relent on those demented
vain pretenses that incense us.
Maybe once, to engender some consensus
(since they're barred from membership of Mensa)
in preference to their entry-
level common sense
they could condescend
to demonstrate intelligence.
Ww

The street sweeper takes up a shovel

You're our pavement,
we're the pissed off claimant:
it's not punishment we want,
but you won't change our sentiment
till you're scraped clear of excrement.

The engineer breaks down

What crocks! What schmucks!
Where's the stop, cock?
Can't you lock it?
We've only ever had one rock yet,
and you had the knowledge
that could shock it, shuck it, hock it;
you gave it pox, you made it toxic,
now you want the Moon to mock it,
pock it, cock it
up too (you've got the rockets),
but when it's gone you can't rebox it.
So here is why it's time to knock it
off: you're the gear that's missing sprockets;
you're the hole that drains the bucket.
You're the pests, you're the vermin
leaving stinking trails of urine.
You've filled our home with dog-shit
pig-piss economics and logistics;
but you're not the ones to brick it,
so you can stick it, lick it.
Get it?

The girl suggests an economic solution

Fuck it!
It's our planet.
We want it back,
and you to fix it.

10. The author reveals his bias in doggerel

*“Why give up on our conversation?”
demands the passenger, my muse.
Because we know there’s no solution,
just the time to come we can’t excuse.*

Bads and goods

What disparities; what iniquities.
Despite our infinite capacities
as the wonder species
which can conjure cities,
number galaxies,
aren’t we also numbed and humbled oddities
who have become commodities?

Untended consequences

Everything depends on one assumption:
our salvation comes from more consumption.
The Pound pub hangs a giant coin outside,
Pompeians only speak by selling guides;
dumb bank subprimes and rock music idols,
speeding with the past, die suicidal.
Then if poison logic panics winter sales
we’ll make it true in next year’s rationale;
tomorrow’s prophets must incentivize
though when we tell a lie another species dies.
In a future age when rebooted words
loot all we say and loosen the absurd
there’ll be nothing left that’s a point of view,
and nothing we believe will be untrue.

Leading questions

Are we Star Trek humans who somehow got benign?
Was there a New World Order after Eighty-nine?
Did pre-post-covid fear really make us more aligned.
No, conflict, malice, greed are part of the design.
and yes, we share the blame for missing lethal signs -
no one who’s alive today can default the fines;
so we don’t need governments standing back behind
the focus groups they pay for telling them the time.
Give us just one guardian with the strength of mind
to confront reality, someone who’s inclined
to lead campaigns for remedies, not blame for crimes.

Whitehall floors

Don't load your guilt on us, your pawns,
expect our gratitude for paper straws
or that closing stable climate doors
in a thousand years restores
the balance of your causeless wars.
Saving plastic bags is not our cause:
this distraction and futility is yours.

Thicket brake

Still as spray in pictures of cataracts
the graceful grazing ungulates ghost us,
posed a moment on an open track,
and dare just long enough to focus
on the slope we're on - to almost scope us.
If only piston senses could relax
that cervine spine while they broker
the impulses and instincts to contract
with our own laxative and broken locus,
wouldn't they see creatures wracked
by helpless fear, both real and bogus,
and a world in anguish at our backs?
Yet these survival facts don't slacken
in their instant dash back into bracken.

Owed to a Skylark

Sorry, old soaring blythe-spirited mate,
they've draped our Downs in oilseed rape
wrapped fields in blue linseed, green belt, red tape;
If you still expect to twist and twitter
you'll be constrained to mountain tops
without our wildlife, shelter, crops.
You may survive, but your song grows bitter.

Free for all

Who knows if nature, which abhors a
vacuum and has been your whore as
long as men have cheated whores, can restore a
sound discourse, a
lasting equilibrium between and for all?

If I was air...

Today I'd travel north with clouds against the flow.
While office girls and sisters fly the streets

and city south to blister on the beaches,
I'd convect to peaceful upland meadows
flushed late green by steamy sun-soaked mists
that pin the Snowdon lily high on cliffs
and backs Scots primrose up against the sea.
I'd linger with lost bewildered species,
escaping natives, displaced casuals,
with bitterns, butterflies, and pipistrelles,
and whale and shark arrivals on the shores.
Yet, meanwhile, I'd take everything by storm
industry has made since the earth was warmed
till your hot and poisonous breath would force
a course back home through the holes in your skin
where sweat seeps out and nothing yet gets in.

Lent sacrifice

Hang on, fellow citizens:
incompetence and violence
in all bents of government
make incoherent sense -
except to censure innocence,
and render an immense
propensity for crapulence.
So if we shine a lens
on what their moral indigence
and indifferent defence
of borrowed growth has meant,
we'll display a world's descent
in a blaze of pain and mad dissent.

Application

Was all life an interview
for us to overstate
what we can and want to do,
then fail to interrogate
the obligations due -
or maybe to evaluate
our options when refused.

[end]