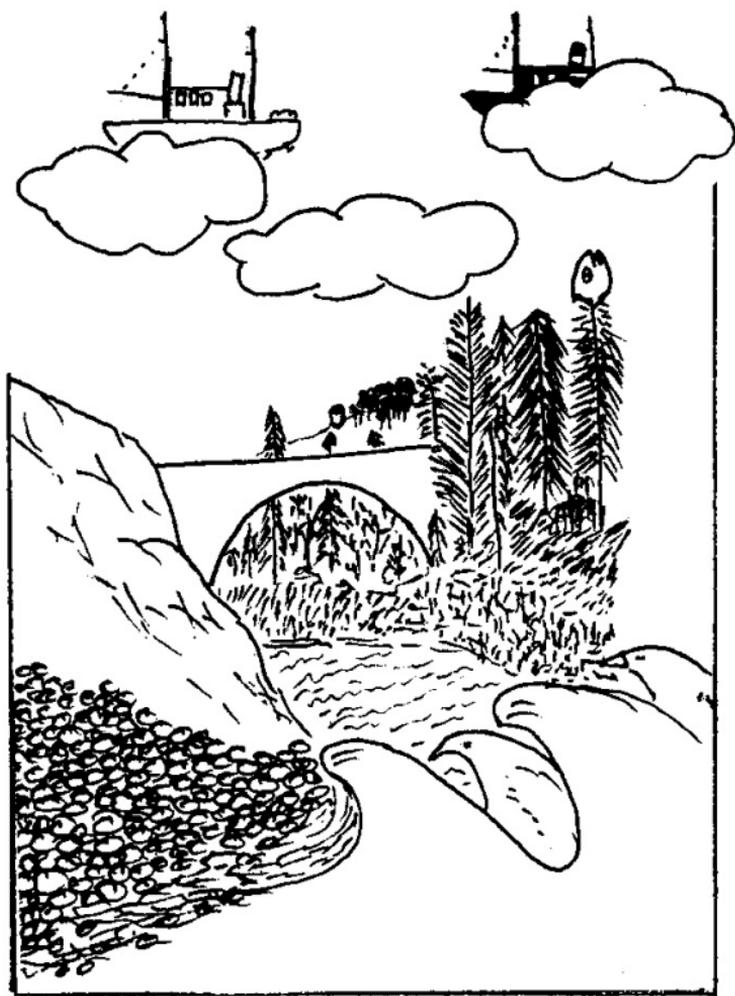


Buchan



Dave Calder

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gardenstown.

the sky is hard and unforgiving
the herded churches cower beneath the crag
touting thirty different paths to heaven
with signs that wheedle, shout and nag.

some sense of earthly prison has gripped here,
of being crushed beneath eternity:
only one narrow road leads up and up and out
all others stumble to the sea.

macduff harbour.

it is getting towards evening and
the drying nets strung from their posts
sag like abandoned cobwebs, flaccid, tom;
the clouded sky and sea sweep together
drawing the speckled dark behind them
and the flashing light dies in one heave
leaving us uncertainly amazed to still
be here on this pavement by the bedrock
after this great net has. drifted overhead and
past, snaring
a greater catch than us.

far to sea the low stars of the ships
tilt and wheel
and other wide-eyed travellers
wander the swift paths of their lives
beneath the heaving chug of these
barnacle-bellied sea-spiders,
as haunted as ourselves
by half-awareness of
the hunting net.

crovie

she is hanging her washing
on the wires beside the wall

the wall does not go up but
down to squat upon the rocks

the wind comes ranting down the firth
a gabble of nonsense, of warning and words
snatched from shouting fishermen

will the clothes freeze before they blow dry?
before the rain comes?
before the tide rises?

the gulls shake their feathers
twice, and settle behind the houses

banff links.

in their high banks
the pebbles turn their blunt teeth on themselves
and grind the violence out of broken glass
the mans hand out of brick
death out of bones.

the wind grinds me
gnawing nibbling hollowing
a vast seabird that swoops and scoops
till i am aware only of these slit eyes
as slashed as a fissure in gnarled rock
concealing in their damp dark who knows what.
these slits of eyes, and a warm ache
spreading from my centre;
a ghost fire for a nameless hunger

like that for uncertain love
its swollen tides bellying and swelling semen flecked
or life cast about and confused
without defeat or victory or chance unchecked
or the earth turning with its wearied burning heart
towards its reconciliation with the greater dark.

troup head.

the sheep lay with her four legs to the sky
becoming a tree stump, uprooted or storm-brought,
the rot and unsettling loss of shape
made petrified and brittle by the arctic wind,
her fleece floating around her, aimless as scum,
flotsam ignored or of a nauseous interest

half a mile away the two men mend a fence
on the hill's ridged horizon near the unseen sea;
from here on the road's shore they could be
at the sea's rim :the cropped grass, choppy,
foam-flecked with sheep, heaves up
and down towards us
and our shouts and waving drown
futile against the wind

conversation with a great-aunt.

here is where the old tide ebbs
and spreads the wrinkled rocks and
sand it lived through and absorbed
out behind it, marking each eddy
each pool it left a little of itself in,
the thunderous cliffs it fronted and the
smooth grind of pebbles

to teach
the new tide?

no, an unwinding
of memories, before it's shrouded
in the unflecked mass of sea,
a setting free
of all it gathered

the flotsam gifts
of passing lives
are wedged around her in
the net-loft's narrow cave.

strichen.

mormond hill's a shadow; beneath the bridge
the ugie water's carried all my childhood twigs away.

this stocky figure casting in mid-stream, pipe
gripped in teeth, is caught himself, hooked by memory.

deaths, losses, clouds, define our landscape;
shade sharpens detail and with the passing light

we are exiled to the present, where everything
holds its place in nervous balance at the wavering

tip of our lives. this grief is a dismal rage.
but against what? nothing. no-one. what cannot be replaced

is mostly ourselves. but to live is to carry
the past forward, downstream; and my hands are stained

by blood sweetness; i sit hidden by the sunlit
berry canes; and from the dominie's house, the rutted lane,

half-heard and not understood, drift voices
that do not seek me, that i do not look to find.

pennan.

the long-necked jet wheels across the braeheads
for an eleventh time;
a frustrated vulture circling the spore
of some invisible victim, some future corpse.

i paid the government all this year and the last;
i feel that bought one of these two minutes
of head-splitting scream and vanished vapour.

how i wish i'd seen, how i wish my money had been
spent upon a whirring wobbling helicopter
from which life lets down rope-ladders

not on this idol of the carrion birds, screeching
over two tiny villages,
flaunting its brief metallic arrogance
to the wrecking cliffs, to the widowing sea.

wars.

on banff, for instance,
two bombs fell. both missed the town.
one dropped far down
the links, on the distillery,
and released from bondage
to the quick brown boyndie burn
a flood of raw spirit, that i'm told
roaring fools took in daft drams,
near-dying of its liquid fire.

the other, falling on duff house in
its open grounds, killed several of its inmates;
all german prisoners

the rest seems familiar to this coast;
shortages, men lost at sea,
others gone abroad, into silence.
the episode marked out as important history
only by abandoned pillboxes, watchtowers,
and a thankfully shorter
list carved on another wall
of the granite memory.

gamrie.

the wind whips through the unjointed sockets of the dykes
cattle gnaw the skull-shaped neeps
where danes fell in the bloody mires

one rook stabbing in brown furrows
gulps the quick and dead alike between
the broken whinstanes on bent earth's bare windknit brow

macduff.

in the harbour bar
the fishingmen curse
the weather and winding gear

leaving through the
narrows of the half-door
the big man says - it's turned to cold
and - this door's an awful stupid size

bridge of alvah.

hours away from its sunset estuary
the foamy sky froths fast and turbulent
through narrows between thick towering
trees that spike the wind with twig-
spines and half-bursting buds; that sway
their long lengths and creak like quaking
crags to the great groaning roots that
grip the rock like spiders' prey about
the single span of stone (as suspended,
short and startling as life) that carries
us above the steep of crumbling under-
growth and sleek carved slabs that slide
sheer and steelsharp to side the sudden
bend of the river urging seawards, peat-
dark and unmirroring in the shadowed shaft
where in a dingy two men sit, one sculling
as the other stares down through glass
into the running deep, sees down beyond
the shining salmon to the inverted arch
of stone and sand and pebble that has spanned
this gap since water was, that still bears
the weight of water across the rushing sky.

the railway inn.

the railway's gone
that used to bring me here
years without fail
pushed one way, pulled the other,
along the single line from tillynaught;

between the steep brae
and the rusting green gas holder
boys race motorbikes
across the scuffed scrub where the station
stood. and only boats of shallow draught

lie in the harbour
between the banks of silt.
from the north seas
the weather's closing in, clouds thick
as stonewalls, rain thin as my thoughts;

another glen grant and an o.v.d.
with ginger, please, sandy.

MERSEYSIDE POETRY MINIBOOKS SERIES

DAVE CALDER's poems have appeared both in this country and abroad in a wide range of publications. They have been broadcast and have formed the basis for mixed-media and performance events. Of the eight collections published since *Dealers and Dancers* (1972) the most recent are *The Batik Poems* (Toulouse , 1981) and *Continents* (Other, 1982) Long resident in Liverpool, he has close family connections with the Buchan region of North-East Scotland.

WINDOWS

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