

SAMPLER

*Some Speaking Swirls*

ALSO BY JOHN MILBANK

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John Milbank

Some Speaking Swirls

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## Infancy, Abstracted

Long prior to myth  
and its chthonic crudities,  
where the Eighteenth Century  
is pure nursery,  
reason-less.

The crooks of shepherdesses  
with their tilted hats.  
The shaken handbell  
beneath the tricorne  
announcing  
unnecessary curfew.

The hills spread before you  
and beyond  
like eiderdowns.

The chimes chiming  
with the ring of leaves  
back before any  
sense of beforeness.

Each pale golden dawn  
tending to dark golden  
woods of transit.

To gleaming inlets  
where every boat  
inaugurates a voyage  
of return  
from the outset.

Prior to the time  
of the appointed snake-catcher  
in his pantiled cottage  
worn red beyond danger.

Not even a hint  
of allegorical disaster  
in the misplanted tree  
or the wrong bird  
in the wrong bush,  
or the unlucky hurl  
of the ball over the  
hedge into  
the neighbour's garden.

In retrospect before  
ever there were  
gladeless places  
called Copythorne,  
but solely the single  
inimitable rose  
of the one-crush,  
petalling everywhere

Southern England's  
well-kept mysteries:  
the tidy paths  
that fondly lose you,  
even or most of all  
through such means  
of easy-beckoning as  
mossed branches,  
never hinting at  
even a trace of the  
red monarch's  
shed blood.

Reams of trunks,  
swathing themselves  
in a trance-dance  
of light ribands,  
rippling ever onwards  
to unravel the sun  
into his real trivia.

The glimpsed island  
that tasted of crescent,  
palpable, buttery moon  
besides the seashore.

Her flavour remaining  
forever,  
just as she lilt,  
just as she waves  
in lost glances.

The trees are heavy  
with longing  
to float there.  
For voyage  
and just plunder.

For deeper sea  
and its antidote,  
deeper water.

Trees capture trees  
to beseech  
with blandishment  
denser darkness  
from beyond the stars.

## The Polity of Jackdaws

A flock of daws  
is released  
streaming, screaming  
in stuttering flow  
of cacophony  
from the great tree  
like a sudden expulsion  
of selected leaves.

Congregation done,  
hierarchies settled,  
and bondings paired,  
the birds roar  
slitheringly down  
the meadow, bound  
to a collective  
and purposive work  
of unknown idiom.

Maybe what  
they have decided  
in their daemonic throng  
at this end of August,  
is that once more  
there can be harvest,  
but a harvest of shadows,  
while their half-deluded  
regimen, their sinister-led  
massing in the heights  
still prevails here.

## The Michaelmas Wedding

Summer is ending  
and I must marry the mist.

Enter  
behind her veil  
into  
further obscurity.  
Leaves patter  
there  
for a while  
to ornament  
encroaching darkness.

Ripeness rustles.  
Decay prepares.

There is a feeling  
of sad succulence  
in the hedgerows.  
Dewberry topping  
Red berry Dewberry  
lingering into lateness,  
into evening dawn,  
when ripeness and  
decay argue themselves  
into coincidence.

Contention of passion  
is at a stalemate. Soft  
and silky is the rain  
as new and riper desire  
is instigated. Soft and

silky-grey is the  
mist-wrap round you  
at the heart of fester,  
beyond it  
to endure. Now  
commence our  
true and  
irrevocable nuptials.

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## Contemplation in time

History is such that  
after a while,  
things that once  
seemed natural  
can be revealed  
not to be so.

Long, long  
into evening last  
the deeds of dawn,  
and even unto  
the darkest night.  
Concluding for death  
is still trying to  
complete even  
the commencement. Or  
the real shadow of  
merely apparent sequence.

Some mornings,  
I venture to retrieve  
a twilight from long ago;  
make its detritus sparkle  
somewhere between  
the airwaves  
and the dew.

Somewhere there is  
a *southern*  
that might hold us  
into billowing.

Into a suspense  
neither over land,  
nor exactly seawards.

There are burnmarks  
on the houses  
in the region  
of the clay.  
There is looking,  
doing, making,  
but the looking  
must look also at  
what is done and made.

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## Hidden England

Leaving the circle of oneself,  
such seriousness to rot.  
The flat rivers surrender  
their sole writhing  
in loneliness of water,  
now the saturating rain  
lends them all cosmic affinity  
and they may turn their bending  
to a damp unity  
of prismatic light.

Only the light penetrates  
their courses in  
a refracted wriggle  
to illuminate  
and guide the mist.

A twisted river of sun  
coursing through the  
broader and invisible  
stream of water where  
*Manannan*, holidaying

inland for Autumn, now  
the humans have left  
his August shore,  
tells us through  
whispers of his minions  
that all the watery circles  
resultant from drizzling misery  
are the interlocking waltzes  
of his hidden capital.

Those tunes one might hear  
and dances glimpse  
if one attended carefully  
to seamlessly parted,  
triplicated and intersecting  
disks of liquidity. To the  
impossible performance  
of unimaginably delightful,  
more than beautiful as  
so sheerly pretty, altogether  
alien and yet familiar creatures.

Continuously rained on  
all the while, in the willowy  
Newark backwater, at the  
end of the secret alley in the  
back-streets of hidden gentry,  
seriously geared to pursuing  
the forever lost  
nobility of waterborne trade.

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## Transitions

Ensnoced below ivy  
the person.  
Rugged and then slick  
in country and in town.  
You go  
by the remaining green  
in Autumn.

Whoops and whirls,  
screches and fairtime  
hysteria at the  
first lapse of light,

exultingly to greet  
the darkness  
and the human burning.  
And you pass  
by reddening and  
redeeming to the  
lone pyre after all.

As bricks build  
by flame to disclose  
a nestled corner in  
being always  
under branches.