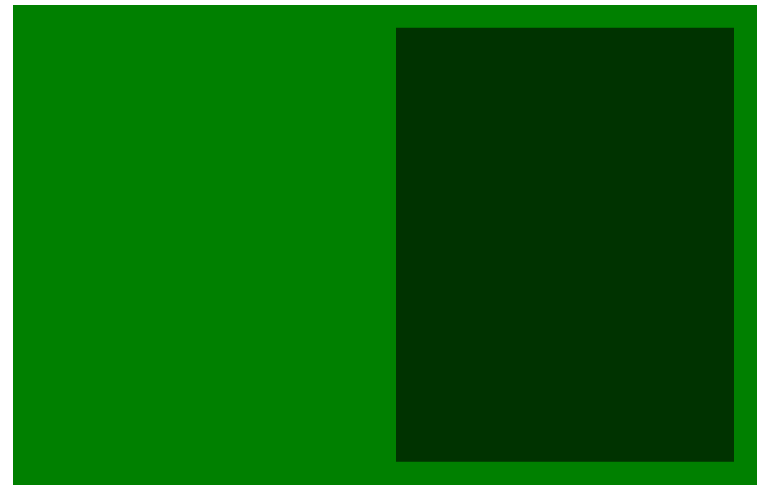


In the borders



Peter Davison

In the borders

In the borders, at their edge,
in the forest's densest heart,
there plaits a serpent's weft
of twisted twigs and leaves,
where a hungry falcon waits,
its beak a sharpened blade.
Down below, a clumsy vole
pokes among briars and ferns,
when, from a cloudless sky,
with swift fanfare flourish,
the bird snatches its prey,
gulping flesh and bone,
as it weaves a fateful strand
in the cloth of life and death.



Along the pilgrim path,
have we known despair,
among coarse grasses,
where earth belches,
up-heaved, forgotten,
places so barren,
they're barely worth
the conqueror's sword,
the command to battle,
or the raising of a flag.
The load has been great,
and we know not ease,
we know not simple joy,
for we are burdened
by this accursed corpse.
The rain can be endless,
our feet grow sore,
our skin made raw
by the splintered handles
of this battered cart.
Though devils tempt us
with hollow promise

of an easier life,
doubts still grow,
fuelled by fear
of the way ahead,
and the weakness
of our slender purpose.
To what end this journey,
when blindly lured
to darkened woods,
to desolate valleys,
to the lairs of hungry wolves?
Good Lord, spare us,
for faith does not pull
a dead man's weight.

Angels protect us,
when belief is tested
by storm and quake,
by ruthless hunters
with sword and axe.
Led on and on
by seraphic light,
we persevere,
for though his body
rests cold in death,

his soul shines brightly,
refashioned for Heaven,
a congruence of nature,
a palpable mystery,
growing in, around,
beyond and through,
insinuating all things
to make them whole.
Wheeling these relics,
settlement to settlement,
along a twisting line,
is an illumination,
a rich, living texture
of Word and icon,
that is here and also
eternally vanished,
beyond these borders,
yet in their bounds.
We carry him
to complete his work,
to redeem this world,
to restore fair Eden,
the place of our birth.



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As we wander, in the margins,
no shelter above our heads,
we yearn in vain for an end
to aimless peregrination,
that we might fall upon a bed,
or fill our bellies with meat,
for we hope one day to find a home,
a welcome glowing hearth.
We look upon the simple man,
who lacks our moral sense,
watching him and envying him
his carefree life, wondering the while,
how might it be to drink too much,
to father children of pretty maids
who, exuding warmth and gifts of love,
reward their men with fleshly joys?
But the Lord's command reminds us,
be not tempted, trust your calling
to the eternal task, for pleasure dies,
betraying its promise in a moment.

The saint is borne, a precious load,
transport of the holy spirit,
that fills us up with quickening love,
virile source of potent breath,
inspiring us with the pulsing rhythms
of countless jigs and reels,
movements of a creator God,
who dances world to world,
for in these crossing places,
these vague and lonely havens,
Heaven and Earth
make sweet exchange,
by night – a silent prayer
is sent to the stars, by day -
the sun is crowned with gold
and stirs all living things.



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Meandering, realm to realm,
we move through borders
of time, of place, of being,
mixing clay and spirit,
till there is no edge,
save a chain of links,
of ceaseless change and growth.
This to and fro is healing us;
a well sprung, a lull in the storm,
an illness cured, a harvest saved,
for nature bows in awe
before such peerless power,
the enlightened saint becomes
a vessel of the will divine,
a tower of heavenly might,
full-filled by sacred fire,
infused by spiritual light.

On the horizon is an apparition,
a mark without distinctive form,
but as we draw yet closer still,
it becomes a tree upon the hill,
strangely rooted in barren soil,
offering shade from a zenith-sun,

and in the tree sits a tiny bird,
sat upon a delicate branch,
who warbles in joy at fragile life,
bursting out in prayerful song
of resurrection and manifold spring,
of exotic flowers in distant lands,
of a paradise where war and struggle
blight no more the sacred ground.
Here is spirit descended to Earth,
a vision of what we might become.
We recall among us, by that tree,
the miracle of our holy duty,
for what is this gift of saintly man,
what to witness so worthy of awe?
That through his simple state of being,
he knows in his heart and deeper still,
what God asks of us and why,
and by his seer's condition of grace,
we know it too and gladly obey,
so all our doubts and hesitations
may at once be laid aside.
Thus dawns the truth from heaven above,
uniting our actions with all Creation,
turning our speech into hymns of praise.



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Lucifer chattered,
he made us weak,
so we tried too hard,
we wavered in faith,
and in our fear,
the Word was lost,
for the heaving sea
consumed it whole,
a blackened sky
made dead our hearts,
our wisdom was stolen,
our knowledge of past,
and we were forsaken,
bereft, unguided,
our hopes were dashed
by freakish winds,
which smashed our ship
from its wayward course
upon the western way.

But the saint appeared
on a wispy cloud,
and instructing us,
he said to wait,
wait on the beach
for a visible sign,
my brethren wait
for the Word's return!
We obeyed, but we wept,
for the fault was ours,
we had failed in our duty
to protect our charge.

Then the tide turned,
the sea was becalmed,
and upon the sand
the book washed up,
unsoiled by the deep,
its pages the more
precious than before,
it was a light in the darkness,
our thread back to God.
We should not cross
to western lands,

but make our peace.
We should not shun
what greets us now,
but accept our fate,
for the Word is true,
and it lasts forever.



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We tread ancient paths,
seeking refuge from those
rampaging unimpeded
who invade our blessed homes.
No sacredness halts their surge,
no faith in relics or the one true God,
for spurred on by greed for land,
for food, for the wealth of kings,
they crush what's fine and pure,
desecrate what's soft to touch.

Good God this night protect us,
save us from cruel and ruthless men,
lead us upon our testing mission,
to preserve the relics of the holy saint,
to bear his uncorrupted body,
so generations yet to come
may know his glorious example.
His coffin is our heavy burden,
dragged and pushed beyond all limits,
but where his sacred relics rest,

where his mitre breaks the ground,
all hardness grows compliant,
and waters flow from a secret cave,
unseen by man nor any thing,
a reservoir rich of liquid pure,
a well of fertile plenty.

Where presence divine has entered in,
a winding trail is slowly crafted
of living wonders and miracles fine,
too esoteric to comprehend,
but impressed for now and all times hence
upon this our beautiful land.

