

First Hotel

Here in the deep red dark, the warm dark
there is no language, no sight,
no touch on skin, whatever that might be.
Within, merely sounds of plumbing
muted vibrations...notes?
obsessively these nine months.
Sometimes the craft does lose way,
as though we've been through a star-storm
and this sense of zero gravity,
the buoyancy, it falters;
we jerk from scheduled orbit.
Say she's eaten avocados again!
Or, leaving aside wine and smokes,
some mechanic palps, pokes,
often catching me shadow boxing
or training for the Tour de France
and I take a stance, put my foot down.
Then one day, happily napping
after an in-flight re-fuel,
these kitten eyes lidded,
bells start ringing and, frankly,
it's like the end of the world.
Apparently it is the start
but picture a tennis ball being forced
down a garden hose!
The drag on ears, the flattening nose.
Traumatic memories, those. I'm told
they fade as in an interrupted dream
but if so, how do I still have them?
The so-called primal scream?
I didn't say moo at the time,

the noise was all coming from Her,
caught between dilate and delight.
Here I'd ask, if I might, is it kosher
to clasp a fellow's ankles quite so hard?
to have one's peach-sized bottom slapped?
that mean clamp put on the fuel line?
and then to be wrapped
so tight in a rasping straitjacket?
This small packet
was wanting to shout blue murder
in the fluorescent-lit substitute 'room'.
Maternity, I've since been told,
comes to soothing rescue quite soon.
All I can report first uncoordinated hand
is that when the light hit, smells hit,
my sound barrier smashed,
senses waving like an anemone,
some kind soul laid me on a full pillow
and a warm bumpy device
– without the required addiction advice –
was gently inserted between thin new lips.
This and that the first word to enter
ears once wonderfully deaf in wet silence,
the in-the-beginning word is:
'Itsa!'
Some of the shocks were pleasant
– if you've not gulped milk, gummed nipple –
but if anyone had taken the bother
to ask, I'd have stayed on
in the all-included, five-star
Hotel Mother.

If Not More

*Beauty is one of the few things about which
Cromagnon man knew as much as we do.*

– Arthur Koestler in *Drinkers of Infinity*

Our cave here is comfortable enough
sandy floor, dry walls
danger of rockfalls
but the Dordogne weather isn't too rough.

All our children wear well-cut bison flay
the wife does good fire.
I'd like to retire
but she says I'd only get in the way.

So it's keep on clubbing, set trap and snare
long days in the woods.
I know all its moods
its smells, sounds, small changes in the air.

My favourite time is Muyt, when the leaf dries
and comes down the tree.
It is telling me
light one day won't open my dawn eyes.

The wife points out some leaves stay green all year:
'Life might continue
at least for the few
who obey Sun and Moon laws while we're here.'

I'm not much of one for such discussion:
water where it flows
fire to warm toes
a wall for art, tight skin for percussion.

The offspring want us to move up a rung
modernise the cave
like the neighbours have
cook with clean wood, not dried buffalo dung.

I preach to them, as any father ought.
Beauty, I explain,
dwells not in the brain:
By a deer, by snow, by sunrise be taught.

Note: He lived about 20,000 years ago, according to the remains found in 1868 in Cromagnon Cave, France. His large cranial capacity is said to make him analogous to today's European.

Moments

When haste meets dilation
rising from well, soft fontanelle
risking headbutt to firstlight.

*

Spineup book on midnight quilt
Finisterre click of bedside lamp
glutting the room with dry ink.

*

Mendelssohn's violins
vibrating Sunday air
as do hawks, or virtue.

*

Homecoming penis
in vagina's warm embrace,
innermost of outer space.

*

Coffin parked on trolley
awaiting the jolly build of degrees
in the oven not for cakes.

Hawks and Crows

*Crow realised God loved him –
Otherwise, he would have dropped dead.*

– from “Crow’s Theology” by Ted Hughes

Hawks ’n crows get more goes
than any other birds in verse.
Here at least Plath and Hughes
saw eye-to-beady-eye
Ted creating a whole Crow book
Sylvia finding angelic muse
out in rainy weather with a rook.

Kestrel, kite and vulture
overpopulate the culture.
The raven ‘spake’ for poor Poe.
Yeats gets scary when his falcon,
Major Tom-like, loses contact
with its ground-controller below.

Another leading talon is the owl:
pr *owl*, h *owl*, sc *owl*
vole to disembowel.
In just three letters
so much vowel!

Many a hovering bard
finds it terribly hard
to do without the eagle
(which lands majestically on regal
though let’s definitely skewer
the next to soar one in ‘the azure’).

Charles Tomlinson and Thom Gunn
are hawk men to a quill
emphasising with elegance
the slightly morbid reverence
so many poets bring
to birds that cannot sing!