

A Bargeman's Tale

Smithers' Song

I'm Henry Smithers, twenty six
an this Canal's my River Styx.
Sun over the after one day and I's home.
I's down in me pockets, in my Ketchng alone.
I'd took off my time from my job for a bit
to get me a drink and have me a sit.
My brew was bitter, I glugged it right back,
then foot followed nother aback down the track
till I gets at my work-barge an foot up to bord
but unsure were the bordyng across the boat.
Dizzy and dizzies I splosh, splash, an fall
in with no one to hear. The quiets took it all.
It were like She were reaching to pulling me in
and grapping me over my whole a my skin.
My last few gulps of bubbly brown
an I straggle an splutter, and then I go down.
I drank t'in deep and bobbed my head
and rested me down on Her wattery bed

My story's here this bargeman's end,
'cause it's to Hunston's drink I'm condemned,
begin this tale of life a new.
I'll tell you what I've since ben through:
In 18 and 63 I's drowned.
A June midweek when I's crowned
anew King of this watter way
and now I'm here, your sunken mate.
Now Her springs and babbles that burp and rise
reminders for my damp demise.
My wife and a child I left behind,
what marries me now swims all around
and She's took my world, an now I've nort
but the viewin's of you and the thinks of me thoughts.

The stories of my past still echo my ears,
an the smells of my love ones from over the years;
Willow herb an elderflowers, a sniff of my mum
[Tsk], I seen `er eyes run at what went to come.
But I've seen all what's ben long since too
like you filling Her up for World War Two
an the tanks weren't a coming like you's thinking they would;
I's thinking it probly were won't that they could.
An afore that yous run Her down, few puddles standing,
an tell the canal that She's ben abandng
but She's still kep me here, an hold me Her own.
That watter's not leasing now, I'm Her betrowthed.

There ben a few comers since, others like me,
a few kindred spirits whose wash out the sea,
Her songlets of water that ripple their love
and then hands out to draggle them down from above.
Now the yellow flags fly for a few more week
as reminders for you for your thinkings of me
an how I'm committed. I'm to remain
here till my true love does love me again

If I'd not been the wanderer... why did I stray
from the path I'd been walking my wife `fore that day?
Was the mead made the messing, I tempted explaining
but I din't do me thinking. I'd meant `er no pain
but she weren't to forgive me aft I broken `er trust
and now with the watter's me livings I must.
I ben playin' the pas' with none the pretending
an now the story is jus at the ending.
My last few wishes afore I's drowned
remain with me now until I'm found.
One last thing I'll ask you to do,
if you sees `er, my wife, you'll tell `er, won't you?
Just that she's the one thing I misses the most.
Ask if `er forgive me, an I'll no more be a ghost.

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Water's Song

A failure for years, no use, no need,
late openings, no purpose, neglect and weeds.

Did the sun see the ripples? No, for the dear
sun cannot see 'till the heavens clear.

An invitation for a swim,
a hesitation. Ah, now he's in.

Shh, now he sleeps upon this bed
I bear his weight and cradle his head.

It's true; I mean the man no shame,
I only want to take his name.

I felt the swell that filled me more
in the floods of ninety four.

Softly whisper in his ear,
my love, your love is always here

A hundred years of empty aching;
who ever they'd given, I'd have taken

For sure, the silent gentle flow
towards the sea, is all we know

Her time is gone, her glistening eyes
have long since closed. The tears have dried.

Echoes of Henry

The swoosh of the humming traffic passes.
Listen the victim of icy water,
passing around memory trees.
The quaking canal crunching gravel
as I slowly disturbing drops falling.
Trees echo as I walk a dreamy sleep.
The flow of water to a heavy dribble,
icy water singing as it trickled,
the birds were noisy, twittered
to the rustle of the leaves rippled.
Around, around the echo.

Echo the songful dribble.
Echo the rippling realm.
Echo the patter of rain.

The pat of tiny clouds parted,
rain droplets splash
sploosh...

Crush the stones my heavy footsteps,
I the echo in the droplets.

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Canal Breeze

No tho yosatosayou rell. Brgher,
averere thed rimpou, whie takerathro
tersamo whe you f fers tigherthall kierthe,
to I tarave llll thay. Avecavecave t baveleate
My wampofinte feator aler bro tave t thou,
maveathedeampofilll brst and fedave.
The f who whou theal thers, the will tasayof.

Nothe yough till take ters of the you
the wind the leateathand to save will you
a gh. My yough tried therigh. Thers of the king
more take leathe who breaterideried you. My bargers
of trider, teater, I an to to save fell reathe
ried you fell ried you feathe imporecall.
Yought the fell you fell re you tease to breather, tried.

Nothing more important that day
through. The that day the will recall. My breathe
water may that day take you, the king more
important that day take you, tease the leave
bargerider. I am a ghost who tried to save bargerider,
till right the leave you fell. My tease the than to breathe
that day through the water, till you and will recall.

Nothing more important that day that
day that day take you, the through the feathe
kingfishers, till recall. My brave tried to save
bargerider, a ghost who tried to save you and you and you,
tease the kingfishers of the leaves, breathers
of the water may than to save you fell. The water
may take you, the feathers. Till recall. My brave you.

Nothing more important that day
than to breathe through the leaves,
tease the feathers of the kingfishers,
till you fell. My brave bargerider,
I am a ghost who tried to save you,
tried to save you and you fell right through.
The water may take you, the wind will recall.

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The Boatman's Lover

Water-beetle light, he was,
the bridge-knot taken in his grip;
the drizzle made it treacherous
and then my boatman sweetheart slipped.

The bridge-knot taken in his grip
shuddered, let my lover fall -
and so my boatman sweetheart slipped
beneath the surface of the canal.

It shuddered, let my lover fall
between the overgrown embankments;
beneath the surface of the canal
my Henry tugged at tethered ankles.

Between the overgrown embankments
where the clustered bubbles burst
my Henry tugged at tethered ankles
while death lay hands around his wrists.

Where the clustered bubbles burst
they pulled his sodden body out.
When death laid hands around his wrists
I felt his echo in my heart.

They pulled his sodden body out
though drizzle made it treacherous.
I felt his echo in my heart -
water-beetle light, he was.

"Full Fathom Five..."

(From "The Tempest", Shakespeare)

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that does fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:
Ding-dong,

Hark! Now I hear them – Ding-dong, bell.