

## **The Water**

EARNSHAW, Steven <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1048-8022>>

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/13247/>

---

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

### **Published version**

EARNSHAW, Steven (2016). The Water. *Thrice Fiction*, 17, 43-44.

---

### **Copyright and re-use policy**

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

## The Water

We must stop and make our foreheads smooth. We could return to water, and not let it prey on our mind. It always becomes a moral panic when we think about it. A return to the time when we could swim. When we concentrate on the water we frown. It should be simpler. When we could concentrate on the water without frowning, each concentrates a ripple. Water was? A desert bond unlike oil. What water can possibly be. She dreamt of the washing machines beneath, on all the time, the trillions who loaded and unloaded clothes from the world. What water as the ground note for the possibility of all life. The temperature of the universe as a metaphor convergence on no free water. That is the moral panic – film, hybrid forms, sensitivity – when water is no form of communication. And yes, she likes to return to the water with discrimination. With what lives in water, the range of waters to take without thought, a new latitude finally, the style of the water.

When she moves towards the water an idea for thought suspension which keeps the ground under its feet. 'Please do not undermine'. 'Remember the time when we undermined? Sending water into space – the very idea! Inspired. Then they told us off. I thought we might have to wash everything again – punishment. As if'. At least once we should try (she thought, on behalf of the others) to help with the washing machines, if the word 'collaborate' weren't so heavy. She rubs the water between thumb, forefinger, middle finger, she is returning to water. This water has no bite, no colour, no heat, no pungency, no burst from the earth. She is undermining. Sometimes it is a question of waiting for water, water is all that is required. It's that, or. Running out of time, the corporation of water. Where the cleansing water goes in the outflow pipe to other parts we do not know. She

refuses to worry about water, tells herself 'don't worry about the water' and hears the devil's detail flutter out of the globe's insidious rills insist she must perform salve. Some kind of the water music drone.

Day two of washing machines to the mental horizons. The visceral rumble that keeps her fixed on the need for water, the wiping clean of physical mentality, the reversion of blood to water, wiping out of corpuscles. If she thinks hard enough beneath consciousness in the land where washing machines are engines of the universe then everything is possible including this. Different sizes colours run speeds, energy supplied by water-cooled plants. Amidst nothing – isolated, deserted, alienated by these necessities, obsessed with smoothing away the water's creases, living on the water in a way which is water's precision. If only, the contemplation coursing on, there was a way which was not the water, the womb return which was not to fluid or vitreous birth-sight gel. But no. The myth of fish persists and she cannot help but look down her legs to the feet in mustard-flavoured stockings in disappointment. She is so ordinary amidst the wealth of washers, the field of washers, the machines garnered for more cleanliness, world hygiene, fully enabled. Jet streams flowing behind lets her glide over the water, heads into a steam squall, memories raining down, drawing deep from the well's half-millennium water that has not known industry, contemporary warfare, medicine and electronics. The water has only its own natural history, she thinks, puts the kettle on. When the oceans are drained, she thinks, my punishment will be a remote archipelago surrounded by rats to all horizons. Thirsty they attack me, they want the liquid from my body and the last sound is from flesh squelched into their tiny pink mouths.

She removes the teabag, adds a spot of milk and a lump of sugar, grabs a couple of digestives. On the sofa she tucks her legs beneath her bottom, partly for warmth as the radiators are just about to kick in, resumes the novel. The rain plashes then pools on the window. It is all a bonus, except the tea scalds the roof of her mouth and for days her tongue tests the blisters strung out across the scorched palate. A feeling of lateness predominates, the time must have gone when it was possible to act. She makes another cup of tea, waits for the heat to disperse, watches the steam mark the air. The blisters must have nearly all gone, leaving the flesh smooth. She puts the book face down on the table and wonders about her fate now it must be too late to save anything. When the blisters have gone entirely it is time to return to the beginning of the year, the visit to the slipway, the roar of some pipe voiding a dam. La Monte, quirky La Monte, nothing but a sneer for life and surface dirt. Her legs accumulate pins and needles in the course of time because she cannot face surface dirt opaque sheen. Tea coldens. A filled bath and if quirky La Monte visits her bath again she sits on his head through to drowning in the course of time. A woman can dream!

Not of a dirty cloth – La Monte is here now and sneers it high – drops the rag into her lap. The smell transfers to his fingers and he scrubs for an absolute age in the kitchen sink shouting ‘buy disposables’. ‘I’ll have a coffee!’ she returns. Further than ever this is away from the water and the feel of time’s importance now it is water. ‘All you ever talk about Kelly’ shouts La Monte from the kitchen, scrubbing, liquid apple blossom goo still not winning aroma, ‘is flumes and chutes. Those days are gone darling, gone! Have you got any music? Play me something with arpeggio cascades’. Further than ever La Monte leads her from swimming under the water. ‘La Monte, where’s my coffee? At once!’ She laughs, but in

the kitchen his serious way glooms in, the stink of the cloth from the bin outstretches a world never clean enough for him and he never asked Kelly about disposal. 'Caste. Untouchables. Now *that* would make sense'. Worse, the look cast aside and down sees abject crockery waiting for chemical bite. He comes round here and her rag is filthier than ever, converges with the whole place, all of it. 'Is the dirt ingrained?' he shouts, rooting out a cafetière, 'if so...' and 'if so... then ' to himself, 'then nowhere for me to go. I am still'. 'Hurry up La Monte. I'm dying of thirst in here'. The water doesn't drain terribly fast, a small plughole with a high-filigree filter has trapped chopped onion and thick pulses. There's nothing to poke away the solids. The drainer has caked-in dirt on the soft metallic ridges and there is darkness behind the taps. The window above the sink has two centuries of pollution growing. 'Come on Monty, hurry up'. Painfully off the sofa the sting of life into the feet. 'Say, have you ever thought about a foot bath?' to herself shaking one leg after the other 'rippling gurgling between the toes, tickling'. 'Monty – what's the hold up?'

The webs of animal hate hang, tie him to the spot near the sink, let only his eyes move to the cereal splinters, kibble, pea squash, spindles of spaghetti, silver-foil dabs, microscopic glass rubble. It's getting dark and cockroach party, kettle waiting, Kelly waits. Her cries of 'coffee' are muffled, the roach and the rat precede, and rising in the sonic hinterland the deadly bath running on and on, a dam about to give way. What after the rat? Different sizes? Bluebottles churning up the filth in surroundworld. It was always a mistake, here, now, not to wear total suit protection from hazardous material and filth. 'Monty, you slacker, where's the coffee? Forget it. I'm having a bath. Come scrub baby!' It's too late, with the microbotic world in full ooze, some megajet washout required, demolition, death. Nothing to make Kelly clean. Nothing. Not a lifetime of return to clear running water, a

lifetime of digging out the monstrous grime from her skinly folds and furrows. Closes eyes, images the island villa, whitest facade, bluest pool, dry sun killing all growth scorched cleanliness. 'Kelly!' Here, me. Open eyes, ant mandibles biting down hard on La Monte's chin. 'Monty. My back!'

\*\*\*

Drip of drip of drip of drip of the drip drip drip will not stop. The best room mind drifts the best. 'Monty. My back!' Kitchen worst room. Drip of kitchen bath foam big burst through. Kelly must paint those nails. 'Monty, you slacker. Is the kitchen so fascinating? Come. I'm completely indecent. Clean me! Monty! La Monte! Come!' But who cares now the bath water is here? Being in the bath, Drip Drip Drip. One day the tap fixes itself, it has to happen. If Kelly moves too quickly, unsmooths her face, twitches, the water will spill over. I drip in the world as long as clean water. Imagine not cleaning not pure drinking the water. Drip drip towards drip end. The world, dripping through the universe, take me with you. 'Monty, you're banned unless you come in here right now, banned forever' she shouts and worries. The world and La Monte not made for each other. Kelly, world. Well. Dripping through life, coming together, skimwater. Paintrite on nails smooths out nails. Should she wash her hair again today? Drip drip drip of choice.

The body wrinkles, tries to grip water, head under the water now that she has satisfied all material wants and can go unto water without telling any soul. Here are two scenarios under the water, sea, city river, without telling any soul, osmosis leaking the body's material into its environment. And with it what counts? 'Monty!' bubbling up, if bubbles were smoke, breath holding. Her body shrivels, her levels of concentration equalling up. 'The world's dessicating me. Monty, help!' head comes up, she laughs at the very idea. Dehydrating how

it is now, the two scenarios, sunseasand or cityriver, beneath the concrete pylons, the thunderous motorway, face down, bum to the stars. The other is wading out to feed the fishes without giving prior notice, waking up, finding that you are asleep invaded by water for blood, inflating your lungs, feet swells. Wondering what this is like now you feel water.

A piece of the world in her eye, soap, grit, who knows what? It spoils all the fun, thumb and forefinger hold open the eye and she plunges her head into the water, comes out, still the world's bittiness under the lid. It goes, leaving a memory, a fear it may return. This is what it is always like to be in water, getting colder, freezing veins even. Have a hot shower! Monty was in her eye, rigid with nature going wrong, he was gone wrong making atomic models at random. 'H<sub>2</sub>O and this is what it has come to' he mumbles on the surface of the eye that wells up. 'There is no pose that I can work now, there is...' cut short by petrification, a marble work surface, what he would have wanted, in miniature, drilling through Kelly's cornea and lens, adopting a leisurely back stroke through the vitreous gel and up through the optic nerve into brain. In turn this causes her to look at the three-hour old wrinkles changing into cavities until her body is washing-machined inside out and her eyes are looking inside, onto the equally pocked brain. The body begins to collect up water, the drench cycle, rehydrates, having been in water without water. 'How much longer?' Kelly wonders, pulls herself up, reaches for the towel.

**END OF THE WATER**