

Arrivals of Light

SAMPLER

ALSO BY ROBIN FULTON MACPHERSON

POETRY

Instances (1967)

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PROSE

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The Way the Words Are Taken (1989)

Robin Fulton Macpherson

ARRIVALS OF LIGHT

SAMPLE

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‘In the Gaze’, ‘Birthday’, ‘Shore Wisdom’, ‘Remembering Mist’,
‘Whitsun Without Words’, ‘Far Away is Here’ and ‘The Light Maker’.

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CROWS AND HERON

From the black lace of a leafless birch
seven crows seem to be watching one
heron rowing air from A to B.

On my way past their landscape I'd like
to ask the crows why they haven't moved
and the heron why it's chosen B.

Like an impatient supervisor
my own landscape hurries me forward
fearing I'll leave my long alphabet

uninvested like the one talent
of the unprofitable servant
who was banished to outer darkness.

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RUSH-HOUR

Seed wings from plane trees scuttle
like souls across open space,
huddle in lines under walls

as if
where two or three are gathered
there might be hope for millions.

PARALLEL

The universe I live parallel to
has its hard surfaces and timetables.
I have no immunity against them.

In dreams I flow through them as moonlight flows
through the brightest and the darkest shadows
along forest edges and nocturnal shores.

SAME TREE

Driving through mist, through nowhere.
A pine tree, the only one
in the world, in history,
looms over me, leaning in
from its many centuries.

Next day, same road. The tree hides
now one in a crowd. It stares
back at me, is defiant
as if it had never been
to the ends of earth and back.

ABORIGINAL

Recollected or
reinterpreted –
Scotland? Perhaps, if

curlews too distant
and corncrakes too close
to say where they are

but if a gravestone
or two with Macleod,
Sutherland, Shearer

there can't be a perhaps.

IN THE GAZE

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The small waves are identical.
They hurry just to get nowhere.
The fjord wants to stay where it is.

The remarkably round beech tree
halfway up the hill is content
to remain remarkably round.

The hill has no wish to be moved.
In the gaze of eternity
fjord, tree, hill – and the man en route –

can't perhaps expect a wide choice.

BIRTHDAY

Dandelions have invaded
all of yesterday's green spaces.
The yellow can't control its rage.

A number is attached to me
for a long race. Where do I run?
I'm trapped in a blind labyrinth
made of invisible hedges.

CLOUD MASTERY

The blue clouds turn the oceans blue.
The green clouds turn the forests green.

Not everything in the heavens,
though, is as the heavens would want.
Spring light landing finally here
seems disappointed: was it worth
the effort to illuminate

neglected backyards, dumped tractors,
dried willow-herb stalks from last year?

LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

If only the trees would stop rushing past,
stay where they are
so that from a still point I could watch them.

We grow weary balancing on the edge
of ellipses.

DREAM-DOOR

In my dream the door had no lock
no handle.
“You’re pushing at an open door”
voices said.
But the door was intractable.

I asked my dream what was beyond
the closed door.
“Cotton-grass by Loch an Ruathair
or perhaps
a harebell by The Pentland Firth.”

NASTURTIUM NIGHTMARE

I planted small ones, got big ones:
leaves as wide as wide umbrellas
blocked out my southern horizon
then darkened the highest heavens
with an unfathomable green.

Blossoms shrank to ochre pin-points.
The pin-points shrank into the night.
Watching them I too was a point
perhaps some day detectable
in a fuzz of radio waves.

FROM A VERY HIGH WINDOW

A cloud the length and breadth of Aarhus
half darkens every street in Aarhus,
looks more like a stone lid than soft cloud.

The cathedral, millions of bricks piled
to make us look up, from here is squat.
The tenements know how high they've reached.

The word for spire tries to hide the spire.
The word for cloud tries to hide the cloud.
The word for eye tries to hide the eye.

Beyond the jurisdiction of cloud
there is brightness to be imagined
flowing in oat-fields and forest tops.

SHORE WISDOM

It was the fifth day:
there was agreement
that the deep waters
on the face of Earth
should remain opaque
and teem with knowledge.

At the shallow edge
even of oceans
we see everything:
the stones bulge and shrink
slightly
as the water breathes.

WHERE OLAV H. HAUGE LIVED

At times he found space for them
in three or four lines of verse:
the height of the high rock slabs,
the depth of the deep black fjord.

However few words he used
crag and fjord took their revenge:
the hard crag became higher,
the black fjord became deeper.

AN ARRIVAL OF LIGHT

Still-life with hospital walls,
slabs not built to last long, pocked
already by the present.

I was trapped high above roofs
in a box called Wednesday.
I couldn't cross the chasm
to the next box, called Thursday.
The dream failed to rescue me.

A gash in the cloud-cover
glared me into wakefulness.
Sunlight that travels so far
so fast lands here so gently
as if to persuade me walls
can be made of light, immune
to the corrosions of stone.

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A NEW DAY

Dawn was a cramped shadowy room.
I stumbled in with unwieldy baskets
full of the night's dream-detritus.

A voice that sounded like my own
mumbled to me from the inmost corner
“Don't bring your bedlam-baskets here.”

A pigeon on someone's roof moaned
“Nowhere to put them, nowhere to put them,
you'd better go back to the dark.”

AFTER SOMEONE'S DEATH

They can hold out against September gales,
all those leaves not ready to be scattered.
Each tree has its own voice in the fierce air.

Calendulae, cornflowers and nasturtiums
have followed me for all of my decades.
They wonder if I am ephemeral.

I wonder if the wall we imagine,
the one beyond which we have no knowledge,
is not a wall but a net, filaments,
and the forest wind, its many voices,
without hindrance sweeps to and fro between
a world we can't begin to imagine
and a world we can't imagine forgetting.

FOREST FAREWELL

I'll never say goodbye to the pine-trees
but the pine-trees will say goodbye to me:

“Our silhouettes will not be diminished
and our resin will still smell resinous.
We won't notice leaving you far behind.”

SOME THINGS GREAT AND SMALL

Alive, in its way,
a cactus, tiny
as a push-button
and chasms beneath
the attention of
upper pine-levels.

At my own level
my eyes are too big
to see eightsome reels
whirled by particles
in the solid rock
I think I stand on.

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