

Digger

The Humongous Brian
funded by gravy bacon
farted expansively

The fire cast its nothing
over dinner in the deep
brown room

The Pig
and Abbott in Abington
Pigotts

a secret droplet
beloved of the Pied Piper
three centimetres proud
of the North East fringe
of the greensand ridge

It was the late 1640s

Light shone in our eyes

Brian - have you enjoyed
the restful properties
of lavender this summer?

No

That is not how the story begins

King William, King William

that outlandish bastard

and Henry the First souls
of himself and his family

How the story stutters

off

carving the body more neatly
up, dairy lives on farms
the graveyards
for cattle heads
buried by
mechanical excavator

Ha!

Ha!

for the hot hogs
of utopia

I followed
Brian's finger and beheld
the murderous spectacle

A suckling pig all red and
smoked going round and
round, futures skewered
into the back of its mouth

There were
flecks of spittle and froth
on Brian's chin

Hush, Brian

hush

else the beetles
will come spindling in

the caterpillar-lawyers

saying insinuating things

like

when do you want to
start transferring money
to the Colombian account?

No

No

Go again

Jauntily from the tunnel
into Amberley Museum

Here

the hospital of tools

here

the husbandry of arcane
telephones, the memory
of Grace Jones, May Day

of bus engines burning
kneecaps, of macadam

tarmac, asphalt, cement

of limestone cooking
backwards

the even
shoulder-to-shoulder
resolve of type screwed
into formes

The hologram
of a lobster-tail pot helmet

faltered over Brian's head
as he laughed and sank
deeper into his armchair

A helmet a helmet till the head no longer

an idea

We were in the car and
Warren Zevon was singing
about horse-leech lawyers
guns and money and as we
raised our voices in chorus
our heads intermittently
exchanged themselves for

Rutland Water

Lincoln Cathedral

The Wash
gone under
for ever

A mournful family boating
on the Norfolk Broads

Suddenly

you could see
a long distance

I made out a smattering
of gondoliers animating
the last outcrops of Venice

A rig twinkling in enclosed
water by a sheet of heavy rain

Every shade of grey
falling, flowing or floating
over the hills that hour
sliding green to black

The two of us
in the Mustang
in a droplet of clear day
singing send lawyers
guns and money and
get me out of this

Furnace raging
savage orange behind
a cut-out in the clouds

Brian stirred

We were back in the Pig

Mould of the old start-up

The depressed cafetiere at its wit's end

A coin proffered open-palm
from places of profit

Brian's eyes deep as tubes
through time burnt out as
desperate stars over some
dark English field in
the late 2010s

The story
dead in a ditch

A failure
of the Protestant imagination

Stonehenge a pipe organ
used by druids
to aggravate Punch and Judy

Repetition compulsion

No new erected business but
a thing of ancient standing

Religious for the bag

Back to the root out
of every foot

The black gard

Stone only grown more soft

That fabric brings out the face
in your face

said Brian

unkindly

O yeah, you mean
the Turin shroud I had for a tea
towel, for a cloth to sling in my
heavy head, hands up and
flowering into a white map
under my face bent floorwards
on the toilet in the bathroom of
interrogation by seven squares

the walls, the floor, the ceiling
and the door?

My chest heaved

But Brian

I break like a wave on your face

And what we
watch is the landscape
get shaggy

on the Great
Western Railway, long
barrow of a sunset

Hill
rises so hands beyond
hands itching later

Careful as shepherd's huts

Mycorrhizal
lamping network

Subsistent array

Look

Brian, look

Forget that
Zevon chant

Here comes
the living room of certain
unassuming shades

Every quadrat rich with
low-watt
luminous for a different
beginning
sum of me which is
saith

Go again

Go again and again

So

It was the 1640s
it was not midnight nor
was it raining neither
Joe and the Humongous
Brian sat and slapped
their thighs in Pig and
Abbott, beer and
liver

This, aaaah *this*

No when, the clerkish
when, but *this*, O this

But *this*

Door open
and the strange light
in the fields again

More light, more
light in here, in
Bedford, Cambridge
Buckinghamshire

What old pike in
the corn hidden

But this, aaaah *this*

That fielding glow
this radiance we
have had before
this plotment that
we patchwork know

But *this* is how

the story

Go

Royal Engineer

Starting uphill I lift my head to judge
 the rise a gentle slope and striking elm
 two white men in its shade the table laid
 for tea and on the white cloth marmalade
 a sunset flame and in the marmalade
 inch-high a soldier caught head over heels
where have you been our blue-eyed son?
 I have been walking fathers over Oxford
 in the school inspector's dreams examining
 the hedgerows tender burdock trespass
 sometimes for the fire-black shades of God
 to stare down at me pin me to the bridge
and some young piteous murdered face
 to pass reflected on the glassy pond I cross
 to tread among the estuaries the Thames
 the Medway Chatham Rochester
 where Bishop Gundulf first King's Engineer
 looks on with blank and acid-eaten eyes in stone
 the White Tower of his memory the Board
 of Ordnance twinkling in his inch-wide eyes
 the view from French *is ordered or ordained*
 terrain that is surveyed is owned
 the first rule of the conqueror sweet William
 Bastard William Rufus Henry Uno
 chain of knowhow province of the engineers
 the hill to Gillingham is sapper-swarming though
 I cannot touch the bodies of their countless dead

I walk into the Royal Engineers Museum
 a row of Bosch heads looking shocked a line
 of targets used to harden eyes against
 the human look how long an inch-long bullet
 trail hole I tread the galleries between
 the sightless eyes exhibits are the plunder from
 the Arrow War the Summer Palace
 in Haidian Beijing
 its knives and pipes and inch-high deities
 including Vaishravana god of wealth
 triumphal banner in his right hand
 mongoose spitting jewels in his left
 no trace of violence but the stuff itself
 the mute a mile an inch
 across the map the very catalogue that cultivates
 an inch objects all quiet at the V&A
 and in the same museum going under
 Gundulf's sightless eyes all white
 the Ordnance Survey coming true
 the Highlands under detail under order
 Prestonpans but then Culloden
 Lord Lovat *off shovel* into mapless childhood
 mountains men the mirror of the barren

and impassable the Ordnance Survey
 born exterminating Jacobites *we do not sleep*
in whole skins Watson Roy
 one inch a thousand yards a stare
 the map of the estate
 we know it now you will not get it back
my pipe is lost but south from Manchester
 the Arrernte Gangalidda Garawa
 Nyamal and Yawaru are returned
 their sacred objects without reservation
 suddenly the land slopes downwards and towards
 the right how would the contours show it
 somewhere it is hard to find a decent map
 the sea and reach the downs of Picardy
 where every Tory flashback starts and fathers
 in their whites become their blood
God help us if we fail to pay our debt in fullest full
 proceeds the doggerel it's Beaumont-Hamel
 folks *a Fokker a Snipe and a Bentley Camel*
 mangled feet walk all day long head bowed
 and cut wire by the apple tree silhouettes
 ran up to die *some tempestuous morn in early*
 July one shoulder forward in the different hail
 as though Newfoundland's kindly blizzard not
the year's primal burst come with the volleying
 no way not lolling high from Hinksey to the hill
 but mud shot through with a blossom of eyes
 and later Chinese Labour Corps recruits collected up
 inches of bone and tatters of the uniforms
 of rotted young perhaps not there
 and died themselves Noyelles-sur-Mer Shi Zaoji
these friends and colleagues incomparable
 the corner of a field and summarised
 for inspiration Captain Truelove studied
 hard Chinese exhibits in British Museum
 sightless eyes where do you really come from
 never been the gravestones with their Chinese
 characters their inch-long do not understand
 I make these links because they make themselves
take up our quarrel out of me
 you can't keep circling the point false star
 you give an inch they take a while
 no point or if there is it's something
 four dimensional in three those spaceships
 Liu Cixin describes expiring in a foreign frame
 or then again the prospect when
 you step from three dimensions into four
 translated by a Reddit user from the Mandarin
in the fragment of an inch
the depth has become limitless

Joseph Minden is a poet based in Brighton, UK. He is a member of Punch and Judy supergroup ‘The Beam-Eye Babies’, the duo ‘does Paddock make me a witch?’ and the NEU. Some of his poems have recently appeared in Carcanet’s *New Poetries VIII*. These were written prior to meeting Brian, with whom Joseph spent much of 2020 – an experience worked out in the poem ‘Digger’ above, the book-length pastoral poem *Backlogues* and Poundbury, Dorchester’s bacon-fragrant suburb.

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