

The Carpenter and The Thief

for Charlie Peace and Edward Carpenter

Listen
learn from history
two dead men in old Fargate
in 1878
getting up to fight

One in sandals
one's a scandal
one asks why
one why not
one's a poet
one is not

But what can we learn from history
now everybody's dead

One's tall
one's Trinity Hall
ones Darn-all
one was a vicar
one was a nicker
one wrote books denouncing the boss
one goosed a wife up a jennel at old Banner
Cross

You say your poem's set
In 1878
then these dead men
could never have met
in old Fargate

I say ask who makes the history
is it the teacher in the schools
where they teach you how to stutter
and teach you poems must rhyme
all the time
and that history is for the old
and you must never ask
whose histories don't get told

One played classical piano in his kitchen for
vegetarian swingers
one played skipping fiddle with his only three
fingers
one died in Leeds jail
no surprise
after saying he'd finish his breakfast bacon if
the hangman didn't mind damn his eyes

one died in Surrey
no surprise
forgetting the words of his *England Arise*

There's no according to history
let's change history
don't read history
write it

One believed in redistributing
one redistributed
one couldn't marry, it would have been a crime
one usually had two wives at a time

History does not record
that Ted and Charlie ever met
history does not record
most of our lives
and yet –

See here together
the gurning burglar
and the naked vicar -
the Thief and the Carpenter

History does not write itself
to be left for ever on some dusty shelf
someone's paid the piper

So be weird
sport a beard
be in and out
and wave it all about
wear Jesus' boots
booze
steel yourself
steal, yourself
dream, yourself

dare not to fit in sometimes

and your poems don't have to rhyme or reason if you don't
want them to and they can go all over the page and you don't
even need to understand them yourself or have capital
letters or punctuations or lines that line up because you can
be like walt whitman (or edward carpenter of course) and just
keep writing till you want to stop because you don't have to
make sense if you don't want to any more

Get in there
strip to your underwear
proudly share
Your family jewels
and your Sheffield thywels
hear the voice of changes everywhere
(for a change)

who decides history has to be true
who decides what happens next

and who decides how long a poem must be
before it can stop
and start again

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Rony Robinson