

John Goodby

YOUNG AMIES

I

Young Ames was listed
so tell me amuse us
'Wanted - a boy'
O flashing-eyed Phrensre
under November
of charms and the man
an August child
first remembered
though not first meeting
hailed the first passer-by
us across the top of Milburn
4 years old
separated for now
he grinned impudently
past chickenpox and mothers

to write and cipher
in Kingsland Primary
on the stool like a monkey
and different yet drawn
A junior partner
inkwells were full
in the counting room
to be interpellated
up useful knowledge
those times tables times
he disbelieved in the formality
correct to the last comma
thrupenny bronze hair
a nest of clinkers
striped elastic
that snake-buckle belt

Say in media hi-res
how he came to
it's having too many
full of ambition
indestructible strength
his thick-brogued soles

flew the Goa beaches
you're pulling my shirt man
from permanent partying
into conversation

his parentals (plopped
like a peeled potato)
loud son of a louder gene
'this disgraceful disturbance'
scarlet lips slash
deliberate manner of address
unlike IMI Eric
himself in a few words
Anglia and Popular parked
knows about that dicker
oiled his hair
Dominican mahogany
he couldn't discourage him
can only call instinct
where Rough and Winterton meet
Outside of Troy

Young Ames and Goby
two consecutive
through a small fortune
become friends. At least,
listened with amusement
young Ames's visions
opposites almost
(sat on his stool and read
to have no ambition)
the avenue-like openings
'I'll carry you along'
Ames would say
brassy brass-coloured
back on the jerky rockers
the steep breast of the roof
his freckled face
had a dream or two of his own

good companions
if their trains of thought were
towards each other

re-emerging on the bright air
six years ago
its slow work of cranking
more eloquent than any
a loose penny and let
John's heart warmed
parted slightly
could not have misunderstood
and drank in
faultless and opulent
locked above the heads
insides were crawling with
mastered the process
made quite a sensation
too lively for a man of his age
a good fifty-five
so the wanderer returns
camellias blooming, magnolias
'Thanks,' said Young Ames
the counting-room force
a state of the jeebies
how in ninety-seven
three or four times
redder than the thermometer
aroma of unmistakably
when Soros bought Thailand
spasm of spontaneous lunacy
woofed like a dog

That was a tail depreciating savings
\$1000 a week
the shortcomings of his own
and the organ grinder?
(Or chilled fragrance
to stop beside him)
a damned dirty waste
the singular number
sadly shaking his hand

feeling a good yard higher

Here's some money
a self-important swagger
With a Visa card
strutting under his dead
almost insoluble problem
string-and-feather
upright in the shot
he crossed the water into
a fairly defined beam
the little silver bell
a great concentrating wave
premonitory
an idea in his mind
to cut a sleeve
gone crazy (so does
a winding sheet
throw caution to the winds)
Ringgits to Rupiahs
trod an Oriental carpet
trying not to crackle
slip on his own
'Smart fellow' he said
slow hard pound of his heart
a sparkling archipelago
a crack, and drew

deep as his lungs
noon sun was melting
his enormous effrontery
their accent was not his
had never seen the like of
moved on hushed feet to
the crystal knob
found himself confronting
unstable economy
made one desperate circle
in free fall
Jakarta was on fire
70% interest
to quell the buying as
a foreign language

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a creaming cup
of Yankee Doodle Dandies
time to start building
custardy richness!
'My name is Seixas, sir'
an Australian partner
from a fire snapping
the spread of the heavy silk
villa anyar in yahoo

I suppose it's your secret
Goby of the Counsels
'I don't know where you get them'
a memory of 'Lord Jim'
at the Gaumont or Odeon
they took you to
in a kind of paralysis
a tensed aftermath
heavy Dad interrogation
feeling a green prickle start
intoning over tea
in his upper throat
'It's almost as though
he's been told what to say',
or 'pshaw', pshaw'
to kibosh a holiday offer
making a cool rustle
a precarious manipulation
'I'm afraid John's father
is afraid of cars'
surveyed young Ames coolly
'Nasty, isn't it?'

his hands go wet

like a fish on the bank
wholly ashamed of himself
something is amiss
of their aloofness
it wasn't very logical
love to offer
parents apparent
this present Conrad scenario
is appropriated catch-up
secret sharers
finally caught up with himself

He looked at young Ames
impassioned eyes
gave a Welsh welcome
I was taken giddy
over the rim
of their altered aims
Young Ames took it
spoke a chain
rattan stuff and beach bars
Brighton hard labour
stores exporting product
emptied the cup
of Dylan's prosecco

after so many
after such a long
with an easy conscience
and stepped out on the stoop
with a gung-ho capitalist
unscrupulous times
this more Mayer than Almay

II

Sipping his matutinal
milk monitors both
filling the deskboxes
unaccountable, unjustifiable
as cautious as treacle
on a frosty morning
going to pieces
of lallygagging and loafing
alphabetically
on their two wires
returned to his desk
going down the long slide
side of the playground hut
he clattered down the stairs
sky like lead
querulous, swung low
a big wind making up
squaked tight on the new snow
with its bones bare for the wind
Young Ames leaned on

the chalked blackboard framed
(thought of that episode)
in front of class (never
easy for a young man)
a black and white sky
from Fireball XL-5
sang all alone
bones bare for the wind
I wish a was a spaceman
shivering a little
through his jacket
'A Tower of Strength'
like Frankie Vaughan
And I'd walk out the door
some tidy fortunes started
times, remember
stiffened his sandy hair,
and amusement heroically

neatening the curb
eyes that ran in the cold
'You're a twig, you are'
attempted bonhomie
money on the waters
watched him go with a wide grin
with opaque dark eyes
followed the stiff figure
didn't lose his cockiness
all that rigmarole
Young Ames gave a gulp
OOOH! OOOH! Nestor-like
shabby waistcoat to
much imagination
he tarzaned the gully

alike in their determination
'Have you gone crazy?'
they dug dirt holes
got news of a jump in
cried excitedly
swung from his tree
wove a den of privet
his voice became heated
if anything is up
Matchboxes in mud
'To-morrow's Sunday'
to carry her in
'better hurry,' said young Ames
to blow up already
held his breath
there may be nothing
exultant go-carts
bring the papers
and the seal of the firm

What is bubble and squeak?
eating spray at every dip
it terrified him

arguing the toss
his Mom decrees
just the spinach and potato
of a well-danced minuet
spasms of impatience
not that we eat it
consider wildgoosical
yet Jean was adamant
with short, stiff, deliberate strokes
it could be bits of everything
any old leftovers
Pay attention to me
wrong but right
gob a Woodbine dangled
Bargain, beat down, haggle
don't give it up easy

his face was stiffening
it almost within his hand
young Ames had the feeling
materializing out of nothing
small and mournful
to empty the scrapbaskets
ink, pens, and paper
the hairs in the man's ear
had ice on them
a foghorn bellow
Incredible as it would have seemed
sweating with fear
like a part of a machine
As she asked Goby
'Do you go by trump?'
red face was back
in her red hair
to wait out the squall
'Or pump? or blow off?'
Fancy not remembering.'
Now he nearly cried
Such a clever boy too
an anaemic gleam of sunlight
low and dun-coloured
like cuttings of white paper
down diagonally

like a sidestepping
on that eternal barque
suddenly into
a clear grey clamour

heads turned towards Young Ames
lime-juiced hogbottom
like a hound's slaver over
bitch Gina *on heat*
must be kept indoors now
down under her belly-button
feeble as a duckling's peep
to say tummy to me
to contrast cool white walls
sunflowers and salt-glaze
a miracle in the crack of doom
with a green 'Chinese Girl'
mantlepiece of bric-à-brac
heaved lustily on
a cabinet ornate on it
using words like *Get*
She's a leggy wench

By dint of practise
rose as the side went down
unprecedented among peers
the two came together
a precise compression of time
to win the 3-legged race
fending off
in some fantastic manner
steep companionway
on one school Sports Day
a crackajack
to start that summer
magically triumphant
give us a corner
in recognition of
fast passage
Yet in winter
He tightened his muffler
ducked his head
from the oldest pipe in the cellar

outside in the Narrows
mostly young Ames's idea
dead set to go
to snowball the traffic
he said coldly
inveigled in bad
outraged snorting breaths
The weather is thickening
down by Kettlehouse
a little bit scared
to his dying day
very nearly embalmed himself
scrammed along Norbury
a driver giving chase
sneezed, gasped
crawls under a car shut
the door blindly
He drew a deep breath
in hot terror
snow making snakes

The excitement was over
6d with the crowd
as far as his own part
smelling like a sheep
A Hard Day's Night
his dark face grew thoughtful
chamber pot for one leg
on the teetery chair
a memory of Bandywood
inching her way in
Hartley Road or Banners Gate
in our hip pockets
I wish I had a thousand
he'd as lief had liquorice
Spangles Milky Way
Mars gobstoppers flying
saucers Spanish Gold
a sugar economy
cross The Mecca threshold
wasting your substance
on worn mosaic letters

(Shiver premonition
sex love death
chilled faint perfume
of piss of cack
and smell the sharp smell
his hand touched
pink carbolic in the Izal bogs)
and silently through
but often together in circle
to call *Bottle of poison!*
and scatter
hop rice or flirts
But at the next light
he didn't know any other words
boldly with older boys -
engulfing them both
accepted his hand lightly
watched him toe-poke
a goal mischievously
awestruck but unseen
the imposter turned into
conquering hero

to both swing down the playground
joyful at break
by centrifugal whim-wham
not to conform
to the tall elm by the gate
those ancient cubicles
chant *Ten - Park - Drive - Kill!*
on the box
words took hold in his brain
for some future stage
you mustn't lose the distance
willing to go
standing in the door
please understand, Mr. Ames
he burst out laughing
infected by them
my heart would be a
fireball *a fireball*

John Goodby

[**John Goodby** is an academic, editor, poet, translator and arts organiser. He is the international authority on the work of Dylan Thomas and the author of *Irish poetry since 1950: From stillness into history* (MUP, 2000), *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Under the Spelling Wall* (LUP, 2013), and *Discovering Dylan Thomas* (UWP, 2017); he also edited the New Casebook title on Dylan Thomas (with Chris Wigginton) (Palgrave, 2001), the centenary edition of the Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas (2014) and the *Fifth Notebook of Dylan Thomas* (with Adrian Osbourne) (2020). His poetry collections include *Illennium* (Shearsman, 2010) and *The No Breath* (Red Ceilings, 2017), and he has published translations of Pasolini, Heine, Reverdy and the Algerian poet Soleiman Adel Guemar (with Tom Cheesman). He is the editor, with Lyndon Davies, of *The Edge of Necessary: innovative Welsh poetry 1966-2018* (Boiled String / Aquifer, 2018) .]