

THIS ROPE

This rope
entwining, a kist of stories, a claip of dreams -
from long since to the now.
An umbilical of time binding the then
to the still to come.

This rope enfolds the town in memories and hope,
divides the town to in-bye and out-bye

This rope is Barley town,
the bear and the willow,
Berwici super tweedam, Berwick-upon-tweed
Berwick the stell, the bield

This rope winding up and doon the passeejes,
Spittal to the Castle,
The Shammels to the Lodges,
Czechoslovakia, Abyssinia
Goody Patchy to the Plantin'-
Strands of lives gathered woven to a rope.

Dae ye mind?
visits to the pickters,
pickin wilks,
going for a plodge,
getting the messages down Marygate,
the hoy-oots at the church?
Memory as comfy as a proggy mat,
memory a painful as a spelk.

This rope is a life, straight and true, a beginning to an end.
But the knots are made and given
by those we meet, to make the cloot of living,
be it monkeys fist or slip
sheep shank, half-hitch, bow -
once tied
you are never more than a cable length from someone's dream.

This rope belongs
to the farmer with his crawcrook,
the poacher with his bag net
catching willietuck, whitins and kelt
and the interloupers and heather loupers, who spoach about

Tastes of Northumberland

The Taste of Northumberland cafe on Marygate
Promises chicken curry and lasagne,
Macaroni and burgers, alongside
Butties filled with Pease pudding.
There are American coffeehouses
Selling Kenyan beans,
And a butcher selling local produce
Next to ostrich, kangaroo,
New Zealand lamb and Aberdeen Angus.
Aga eats an Italian ice cream
Outside the Polish food shop.
Jest to przyjazne miejsce,
She tells me.
This is a friendly place.
J'aime venue ici,
Says Monique.
I love coming here.
Fish once were salted here. Then cured.
Things learned from the Scandinavians
And Basques.
Later they waited patiently in icehouses
A trick taught by the Chinese.
Berwick's wealth came from the East
Holland and Russia and beyond.
Each ship brought new delicacies,
New preferences.
Indian tea.
Danish pastries.
French bread.
Almost invisible shipping lines
Tie this place to everywhere.
A town on the edge
Of Scotland and England.
On the edge of the world.
These now the tastes of Northumberland.

Tide and tied

The Tweed

is a rope and
a rope

is a river

A rise

and a fall,

a twist and a braid
an over

and an under and a
turn

its end fray

-ed and splay

-ed

its length bound and sure

flowing to a horizon stretched taut as a fishing line

between sky

and sea

ready to be stepped over

yet the river ties us to this spot

the knot of township, homeship, history

the river calls us to our source

and guides us homeward bound

Wall

Was a wall,
and then a fortress.
Now's a rope.

Gates for walkers,
cows and sand.
Now's a strand.

A wall is harsh,
says go away.
Rope is tactile,
invites to stay.

Stand a while
and remember.
Look through
and back.
Hold the line,
take up the slack.

Each thought a thread
for the living, the dead.
Each thread a link.

A link makes a chain,
a chain a rope.
A rope connects.
And
now's a hope,
where was a wall