

Heavy metal

It never sang you to sleep, only
drummed into your dreams.
At seven years old, my lullaby
was iron clang swing of night-
shift down at Kirkstall Forge.

Seemed natural as the leaves
on Bramley Fall Wood trees.
Hammer soundscape to a stage
industrial-scaled. In its wings, we
kids played *kick-can-and-hop-it*.

The dark thud seemed eternal,
vortexing all into its domain,
beating out unseen shapes,
nurturing our West Leeds patch
through its nightly opera.

But there was no Wiotan,
no ring of gold and I was no
Brunhilda. Just school dinners
and fish 'n chips on Friday night.
Better pass the 11+ or else.

My father was an engineer not a god.
His world of crankshafts and creation
hung up a no entry sign for girls
(except for page 3 girls behind doors,
sellotaped in his Works' locker room.)

But once I saw into the welding shed
and its unstoppable kiln of energy.
Metal transforming by magic,
teaching how flame and light
can fashion out anything.

Later the Forge closed forever.
Now it's just a station on the line.

Its metal music is over, out of date.
Yet how many of its children still
dance to it in their dreams?

Helen Shay

Every Age has its own Gods

Every age has its own gods.
It's in with the plate glass,
out with the outdoor lavvies,
binary code dry docking barges.

Today, men only break sweat
jogging down the towpath,
or rowing in the gym.
Not stripped to the waist
working nightshift at the Forge
stoking the furnace,
faces all planes, casting
long shadows on the shop floor.

They were the makers of the world
those Waylands and Smiths,
melting, moulding, pounding,
all heat and wham, bam, bam,

thrusting levers and watching dials.
Life had bells and whistles,
clang of metal, machinery
and making.

Bee Smith

Vulcan

Fled Rome as Christianity conquered.
For a god of the underworld, hiding
comes easy. My migrant path led me
footsore through night marches
over European borders, northward.
Stowed away at Calais into your island,
mist-ridden and heathen. But too good
to last. The monks came here too -
even to Leeds. Only now I decided
to stay, biding my time.

As humble smithy, accepting
their 'charity', I worked
their church forge. Watching
them come and go. De Lacey's
Domesday Norman land-grab.
Cromwell's later monastery-grab.
Alone by the river, I lingered.
*'Sweet Aire, run softly while
I spit out my song'*. And again
I stayed, biding my time.

Until at last came the revolution!
Lung-blasting scent of smelting.
Iron, steel and Yorkshire brass.
Industry becoming my orchestra
and you all dancing to my tune,
in war after war after war.
But now noise and lustre
run out of steam. Axles
grind to a halt. Yet still
I stay, biding my time.

For men will turn to me again.
Remember of what I was god.
Arms, not alms. So beg me stay
and no more biding time.

Helen Shay

Alloyed

Steel is a mix
 made in a furnace
a one thing on the way
 to being another.

Fear walks into the furnace.
 A tank rolls out. Vickers smoothly called them Cruiser,
Valentine, and that Matilda kept waltzing
 all the way to Berlin.

She kept twirling eastward,
 following the morning star,
the sickle shaped crescent moon
 fired by an idea,

(ideas being a sustainable energy source)
 which some call 'freedom'
(like brass, never unalloyed)
 one thing on the way to being another.

Bee Smith

Alloys

Allied and alloyed
to this iron city.

Proudly its daughter
smelted of its metal.

Milled ancestry.
Grandfather foreman
living to see me
first t'University.

We belong here,
pale-eyed Anglo-Saxons,
our porous pink skin
drinking its soggy clime.

But dismantle the girders.
Find one flange is Welsh, another Irish,
amidst re-inforced beams of Viking.
Mixed as most migrants, and stronger for it.

Helen Shay

Alchemy

A forge was once less complex
before the Industrial Revolution.
Leather aproned, shirt sleeves rolled
the smith took you incandescent,
orange glowing and ashen edged.

He took his hammer to you
flattening and bevelling
a new shape for you entirely,
making you something useful,
like a horseshoe. Or a weapon.

The beauty revealed once flung
into the deep of his oaken barrel.
As fire purifies, so water restores.
Form following its function.
The many magicked into one whole.

Bee Smith

Kirkstall Forge Metal Gods

(with apologies to Judas Priest)

You took your old gods for granted.
Left all us Norse gods alone.
When industrial revolution was invented,
Kirkstall Forge became our secret home.

Dancing in the streets,
while you were between the sheets.
Drinking booze and playing darts,
hellfire in our hearts.

Thor's drop-hammer riff was perfection.
On drums, Loki panel-beat at ease.
Like a bat out of Valhalla, hun'.
we made the music we please.

Hiding underground,
Heavy Metal's what we found.
Having time of our lives
away from all our wives.

***Metal Gods -
Kirkstall Forge Metal Gods!***

So *Metallica* move over.
We old gods are the new band.
We won't take any boover
now Odin's back in command.

At midnight we have raves.
Valkyries are easy lays!
But avoid the crystal meth.
Snort lines of iron filings in one breath.

***Metal Gods –
Kirkstall Forge Metal Gods!***

Helen Shay

Leading Leeds

The past is always present
real as the footprint on the towpath,
the long ago pilgrim's pause at Monk's Bridge,
that last lap to Kirkstall Abbey,
that one step further to salvation.

Those monks made the first Forge,
a corn mill at Kirkstall,
faith and millstone grit magnetising all comers -
pilgrims, brigands, robber barons,
migrants every one and all,

each dreaming big as that Mr. Marks
and his Briggate penny market stall,
empires beginning and ending
in curry houses and corner sweat shops,
making brass from whatever muck

that whichever God gives you,
the one god of chapel, mosque or
Cistercian abbey,
or those trickier old ones like Loki,
and before him – them -

down the Aire came the Brigantes
whose Brigid still holds High Court here,
although they put her sacred bears behind bars
on Cardigan Road - but even so
you never can cage goddesses.

Verbeia snakes her insidious way
down the dale, powering and flooding
as ever was and shall be.
The rivers are our oldest gods
always leading Leeds life.

Bee Smith