

View from a Tower

by Mick Stringer

Here is the limit of our world.
The blood of our eternal city
Flows this far and nourishes.
Beyond is wind and water,
Barbarous land that never bore the vine.

Standing on the eighth mile tower,
I, Marcus Quintus, Legion Six - Victrix -
Span the cusp of time,
Stretch eyes and mind into the fading far,
Seeking the stone-clad firmness of the square.

The certain road cuts to the midday sun:
Eboracum, then Lindum, through Londinium;
Beyond, our galleys ply the leaden sea
And double lines of legionaries
March to the Forum and the Capitol.

I look back to the golden glow of dawn
When our proud eagles rose
And, with our sturdy soldiery, spread our peace,
Our modest virtues, honour, love of home.
With these we conquered.
For these we spilled our blood.
In the name of these we died.

Then I peer forward
Through damp mists to a cold sea.
The view dissolves in drops
That fall and cling to clumps of reedy grass,
Bending with drizzled beads of dull uncertainty.

I see strange tribes
With mad, confusing symbols on their shields,
Beating before them fire and smoke,
Leaving behind a boiling wilderness.
I cannot see their gods.
They must be terrifying.

Standing on the eighth mile tower,
My plated armour weighs,
The leather chafes, my sodden cloak hangs limp.
But here, I know, in space and time
Exactly where I am.
I am glad of that.