

Christopher Bernard

King Ludd

... am I, throned on a wreck of looms
and other fabrications of our doom,
in Manchester, in England, pleasant land.
The seahorses are dead upon the sand.

A king without a kingdom, and yet my might,
invisible, is strong as air and light.
They mock me from Birmingham to Sunnyvale.
“They works – see, admire!” I wail.

The sheen upon the ocean, like Joseph’s cloak,
the black glaciers, melting as they soak,
the whitening coral, pale and frail as brains,
our touch upon the walls, the tough stains.

A toy, the world’s our toy, when not a weapon,
an intricate device, the pretty sun,
poetic moon, the disappearing stars,
the green world the picture of our desire.

I rule the world that shadows the one that is,
a world that never was, in a mirror’s ice:
in this world my sceptred orb’s a rattle,
my crown is a jester’s cap. My soldiers are cattle.

My kingdom is a slow one, in its courses
nothing moves much faster than its horses.
The only webs are the ingenious spider’s web,
the woven fishermen’s the only net.

Pods are for peas, the cars are carts: we’re hopelessly
backward, the glaciers’ ice will long survive us.
The people are mostly peasants, the mud’s their
bed.
The future, like the past, belongs to the dead.

On and on it goes. The sun falls,
the sun rises. The world appalls no one.
We’re weak as babies. We wake beneath the stars,
our only fears are disease, death, wars.

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