

Tregonwell's Staircase

I place my writing hand upon the banister
and feel only the ordinary thrill
of polished wood resisting time.
Those who climbed such stairs before us
whom we call founders, ancestors,
to what were they hoping to rise,
in their own age, or this, the next?
Could they sense us in their footsteps,
pausing halfway through a life,
happy to be off the ground floor
yet nervous of the numbered doors?
What now if I opened this one
and there before me stood the man
in terror at my hair and jeans?
– pushing past me, now right through me,
shouting for servants and the dogs?
O Lewis do not be afraid
of this my eager apparition
rushing at you across the sand
with all the proud frustrations of
his town embodied in him – of your town,
as yet a sea-blown spec
of inspiration haunting in
somebody's eye – your own, maybe,
or perhaps that other fellow's,
or else only in history books
further down the fleeting line
we all must follow, leaving behind
our gravestones' toothy monuments
and all the hotels of the heart
and somewhere (open most days) big
museums of the soul's endeavours.

Written for Bournemouth's Founder's Day, 2014

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