

Martin Robertson

The Green Children of Woolpit

Over beyond the river
the children said
was the shine of sunlight,
on their side was shade.

Sound of church-bells
was often in the air.
It was a Christian country,
of that they were sure.

This came later.
When they were found
at the bottom of the pit
hand in hand

blinking upwards,
they did not speak.
It seemed that they must die,
unable to eat

anything put before them,
till someone saw the girl
nibbling a hard green
cast-out shell.

Coaxed into feeding
with raw husk and stalk
they lost some of their wildness,
learned to talk—

the boy less than the girl.
The boy did not live,
went down where they came from
through the pit of the grave,

while greenness receded
from his sister's skin.
She grew up, and married
a man from Lynn.

But whether with the green
the memory
of that country faded
the story does not say,

nor whether her children
were common girls and boys
or brought shimmering shadows
to the griefs and joys

of life in the flat fields
under the sky's breadth
from their mother's dark sources
past that laboured earth.