

1. (b)

THE LOST HERITAGE

Coreopsis, saffron, madder¹,
daily we tread kaleidoscopes of colour,
on Persian rugs we set our feet
blind to the woven threads and dyes,
5 the intricate patterns that shape our lives,
while our minds are indelibly printed by one another.

Like a man whose past and present are folded
into one whole, we inherit more than we know
from the dust and bones
10 of those lying under the Churchyard's stones,
who sweated their lives in high summer
to the rhythmic clatter of treadle and shuttle
or flinched as cold fastened on fingers,
winds shuddered and knived through their looms.

15 Where the wind once tore at the flames
of tallowed rushes,² pressing and printing
their blackened tongues on to beams
we hang our quiet landscapes,
tipping and tilting them till we achieve
20 an uneasy marriage, for the oak beams long ago
bent to the flailings of heat, cold and rain.

Was the child with hands outstretched to the blaze
less constrained? Taking her place
on the trampled earth floor with lambs
25 brought in from the cold bitter springs
till the air quickened³ and the windows
gathered the sunlight in.
Then vigorous stirrings in field and hedge
encouraged the comings and goings in household and barn
30 the snuffle of starlings under the rafters,
whispers and laughter of serving-maids
braiding their hair for the Whitsun-tide fair⁴.

35 We have nailed down our carpets over the past,
but the young child is lost in a forest
of towering adults, their arms waving glasses
like a strangle of branches
sway backwards and forwards over her head,
their tongues unload fear at her feet.

Heather Buck (1993)

- ¹ a small prolific garden bedding flower giving a carpet-like appearance of yellow and red-brown; a plant producing a yellow dye, also used in food; a plant producing a red dye
- ² rushes dipped in animal fat to make cheap candles
- ³ became alive
- ⁴ the public holiday associated with the festival of the Christian church, the seventh Sunday after Easter