

A poem by Bob Beagrie and Andy Willoughby
in response to City Status



When The Infant Hercules Comes of Age (*Citius, Altius, Fortius*)

When awe-struck Gladstone spotted him
Through Empire's smoke & fire, *Behold!*
He said, *the hero of the coming age!*
This infant Hercules born again on river banks
In the land 'tween cliffs, Domesday's terra wastea.
But from what is he made? The Great Orator asked.

The booming infant reaches from his cradle
Burly arms like bridges span the boiling Tees
Shakes the slither of life from snakes
Sent to strangle him at birth, hissing viciously
'Thou shalt not be! Thou shalt not be!'
Those serpents of Self Doubt and Temptation
Known to those who dare to be a hero.

He flings one wide across the hills
Where it rolls into the Trustee Drift
Where shed skin whistles in the wind
'You'll never make it son! Outside this ring of iron!'
The other falls from chubby, clanking grip
Into the muddy water of the Tees
Where the bubbles sing the song of
'Drink this my son, forget it all.
Pop a few of these, lets have a ball!'



On this day when the flame is passed
From the Middle Kingdom to Blake's Albion
To the Great Smoke in the South,
Still underpinned by girders from our hills
We'll answer Gladstone's question
To find what we need to make us strong.

And silence those snakeskin voices
To find the heroes of a thousand faces
Still living on these thriving shores
Who know when you have given everything
You may still need to find a whole lot more,
To meet the daily sacrifice,
To travel beyond the end of Self,
To dig deeper for endurance,
Leave easy pleasures on the shelf.
To find the strength of mind
To rise before the dawn, still knowing
Without the Luck of the Gods
Triumph may never come.
To know that struggle itself is reward
And not the gold that it may bring,
To go faster, higher, stronger
For the sake of taking part
Not the victor's bauble on a string.

So from what are we made?
Not just iron, steel, rail tracks, ships and chemicals,
Out of dreams and struggles from across the world
That drove the diaspora, built the booming baby
That will take us to the highest bar, the longest leap
To drive us on to breast the winning tape once more.



We are made of a pinch of spice from a Lascar's pocket
A Cornish charm on the wrist of a miner's wife
The scientific institute's finest minds
The defiant roar from a Boro red riverside
The horsehair tip of Lowry's brush tackling the old town hall
The innovation & chips of the digital city
Cartoons and games transformed into pixels
Proms in the Park and AV Festivals
A rousing tale of Finn McCool's fight against the giants
The flowers to Our Lady from the Catholic parade
A straw dolly from the Broads to bless the harvest
A crescent moon and a hundred flags
Sakura trees donated by the Japanese
A Scots hammer and a Stevedore's hook
The rhythm of a poem from a Rabbinic Burns book
Jammed on in a slam in a poetry cabaret
David's Star rescued from a pogrom, brought in on a train
A hungry Kerry song to keep the devil's teeth at bay
A bhangra dance in flashing sari on modern Mela days
A recipe carried from Mirpur before the dam was built
A Kurdish shamshale and an African djembe
The tip of a Rhondda red dragon's wing.

The adult Hercules draws strength from all these things.
Now the smoke has cleared and he will come of age

We will be! We will be!

Higher, faster, stronger.

Meet the future, write a new page!



**acity
atheart**