

**L'ape millenaria (The millennial bee)**

by mazaher (Sherlock) & Jns (Mycroft)

May 2012

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Title courtesy of Juraj Jakubisko from his film

*Tisícročná včela* (1983)

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Sherlock on pages: 2 - 5 - 9 - 11 - 13 - 15 - 17 - 19 - 22 - 23

Mycroft on pages: 3 - 4 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 10 - 12 - 14 - 16 - 18 - 20 - 21



this is page 1

*Protinus aerii mellis caelestia dona / exsequar*

(Next I'll speak about the celestial gift of honey from the air.)

-- Publius Vergilius Maro, *Georgicae*, IV, 1-2

*Bees are his gate to Dionysian.*

*He was never content with half-measures: all the way to the extreme  
of not-food, of drug-drink,  
of cutting thought and piercing feeling.*



This is a year of swarming.

There were recurrent blights in the last seven years, colonies collapsing. Twelve out of our twenty-one, only eighteen months ago.

But this year, they're swarming.

Twice a week since late March, congregating on the young apricot tree like alien, golden fruits.

When I climb the ladder and puff smoke on them (John holding the ladder steady, grumbling because he insists his leg is perfectly fine and it's his turn to go up now) they stir, they ripple like the surface of water under a gust of breeze, then they begin to sing softly to themselves.

A low hum, a hushed chorus as they flow down into the new hive like slow treacle.

Bees are transparent in the sunlight.



The queen is born  
 an extraordinary bee  
 the workers feed her royal jelly  
 and she serves the hive  
 tirelessly laying eggs.  
 Virgin queens grow to the death;  
 old queens must die naturally;  
 in either case, she cannot leave the hive—  
 all lives end.

ἦσαν δ' ἀκίνητοι σωπαῖ  
 ἦρως ἀντίθεοι πυκινὰν μῆτιν κλύοντες.

\*Ω μάκαρ υἱὲ Πολυμνά-  
 στου, σὲ δ' ἐν τούτῳ λόγῳ  
 χρησιμὸς ὤρθωσεν μελίσσας  
 Δελφίδος αὐτομάτῳ κελάδῳ·  
 ἃ σε χαίρειν ἔστρις αὐδά-  
 σαισα πεπρωμένον

βασιλέ' ἔμφανεν Κυράνα,  
 δυσθρόου φωνᾶς ἀνακρινόμενον ποι-  
 νὰ τίς ἔσται πρὸς θεῶν.

\*Ἡ μάλα δὴ μετὰ καὶ νῦν,  
 ὅτε φοινικανθέμιον ἦρος ἀκμᾶ,  
 παῖσι τούτοις ὀγδοὺς θάλλ-  
 λει μέρος Ἀρχεσίλας.

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Ep. 3.

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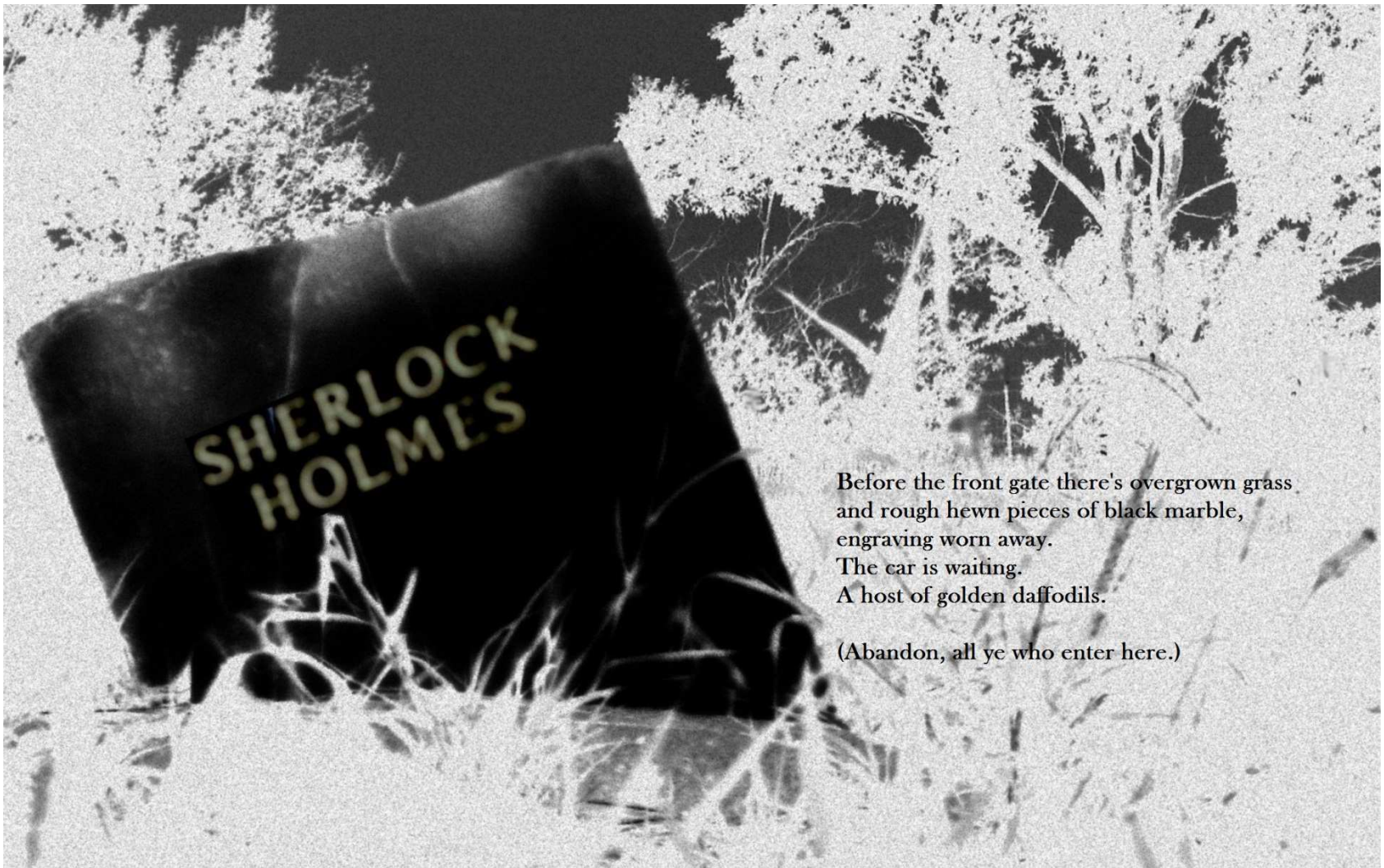
SHERLOCK IS A BEEKEEPER, CONTENT. HE SETS OUT TEA AND CAKES IN HONEY, MAINTAINING A CONSTANT STREAM OF IDLE CHATTER, SOMETIMES FALLING TO SILENCE TO HEAR THE SWARM BUZZING. THE BREEZE SWEEPS HIS HAIR. THERE ARE WINDCHIMES, ODDLY. HE LOOKS AT ME TWICE, TO STUDY, MAKES NO COMMENT ON QUEEN AND COUNTRY.

"COME SEE THE ORCHARD JOHN'S LAID IN."

THERE IS A SMALL GROVE OF TREES BRIGHT IN THE NOONDAY SUN. JOHN IS MAKING HIS ROUNDS, TOUCHING EACH TRUNK, PUSHING AWAY MEMORY. HE HAS FORGIVEN, BUT I AM FAMILIAR WITH THE NEED FOR SANCTITY.

"PERHAPS NEXT TIME."

SHERLOCK NODS, DOES NOT STAND. IT FORMS A TABLEAU.




Before the front gate there's overgrown grass  
and rough hewn pieces of black marble,  
engraving worn away.  
The car is waiting.  
A host of golden daffodils.

(Abandon, all ye who enter here.)

Manip inspired by a photograph by Wade of Oklahoma at [hyyp//www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)





*Togeather all the y quietly doo l ye,  
Togeather all the y to yll with equall might:  
And in the morning foorth togetber fl ye,  
And bome as fast the y come aga yne at night.  
Where as the y lay their weery lims to rest,  
And trimme their wynges, and set  
their legges in frame:  
T yll ever y one him sel f bath thoroughly drest,  
Then synging at their doores a whyle they game.  
T yll one geves warnying for to goe to bedde,  
Then downe the y lay to rest the yr sleepe head.*

--- Conrad Heresbach, *The whole art and trade  
of husbandry* (1614)

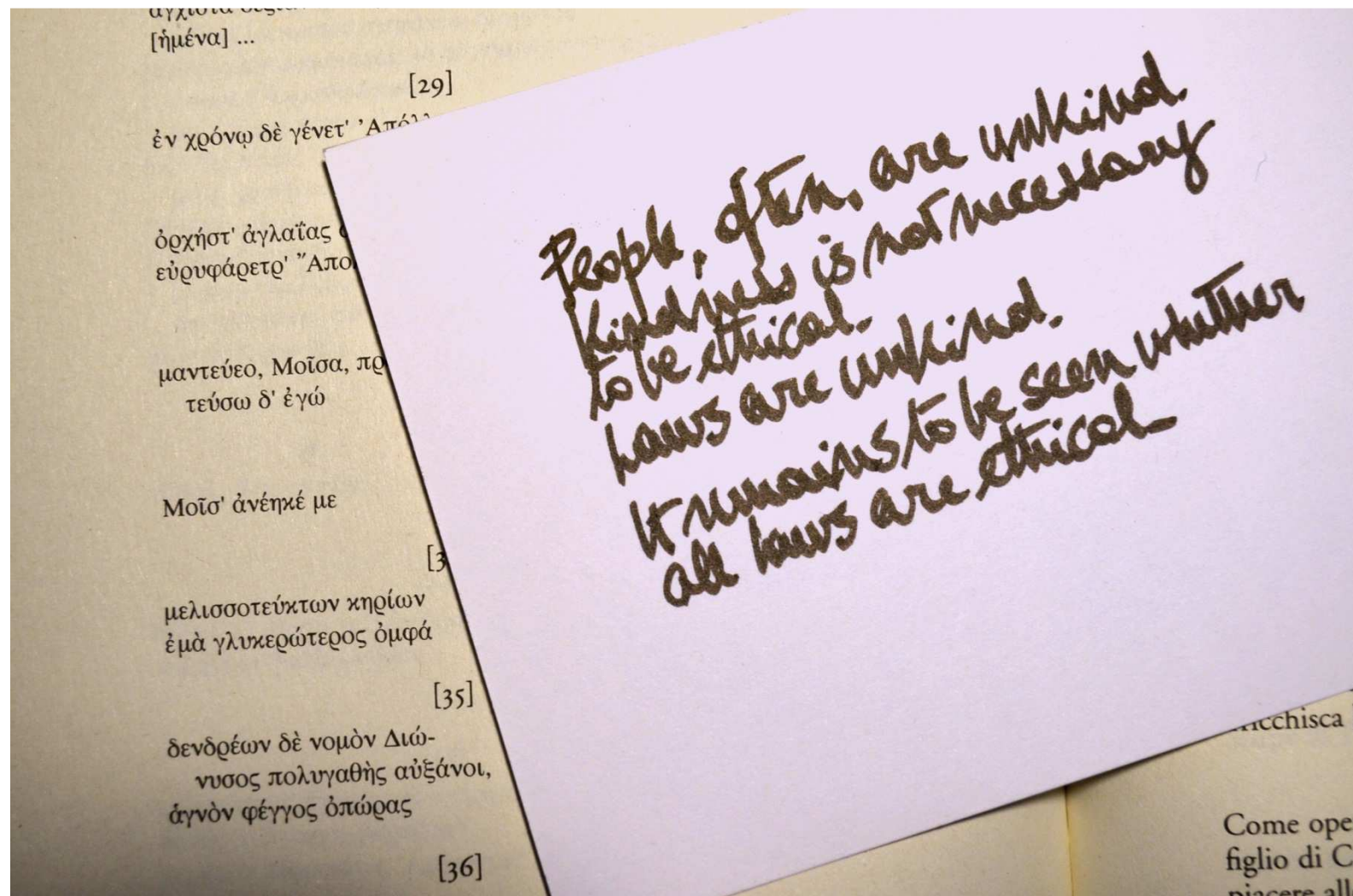
When I came back from the dead,  
I really thought he'd sock me one.  
(I couldn't forget the one time  
when he had.)

**I was ready to take it,  
and then explain.**

Instead he said:  
"I'd rather have you here and not know where you've been,  
than the reverse."

John famously punches Sherlock prior to their home call to Ms. Irene Adler (*A Scandal in Belgravia*).





PINDAR, *Fragments*, 34

Beekeeping and tending orchards came as a surprise to them both. The extent of Sherlock's experience with insects had been maggots in necrosed tissues, the flies gathered around fermenting bodies. John once helped his grandmother plant tomatoes. Now, he plans ambitious winter gardens.

They have found that conditions favour generosity or dearth. Human responsibility lies in touch, to keep balance. Sherlock names his queens Phillip, Adriana, Vera, Gregor, Ioanna for no particular reason. John names his trees "the apricot with a silver knot," "the pear that made brilliant cider," "the cherry on the far side of the western wall."

They've begun to keep jars of honey, preserves, and Sherlock's experiments in spirits --his enthusiasm for chemistry never having diminished-- like fine vintages of wine. It remains to be seen whether time is kind. Certainly bees and orchards are ethical.

*Governments are lawful.*

*We have sent John to war  
and Sherlock to terrorist cells.*

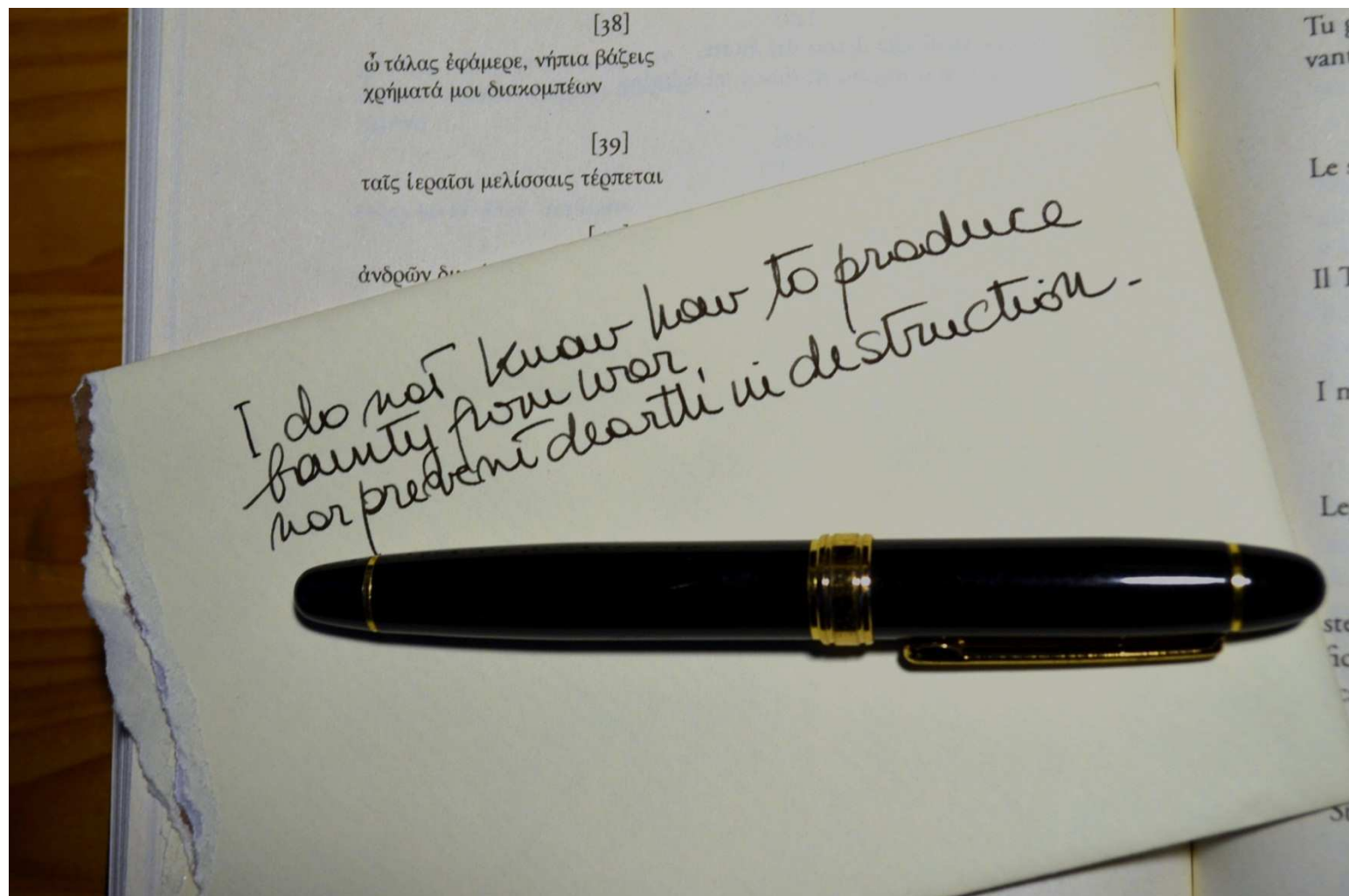
The unexpected kindness of time has produced hives and harvests. They have honeycombs and hearts of cauliflower.

JUDAS!


★

PETER  
VAN  
GREENAWAY










*Drowning bees may be revived if placed  
in warm ashes of pennyroyal.*  
— le Grand Albert, *Secreta Aegyptia*

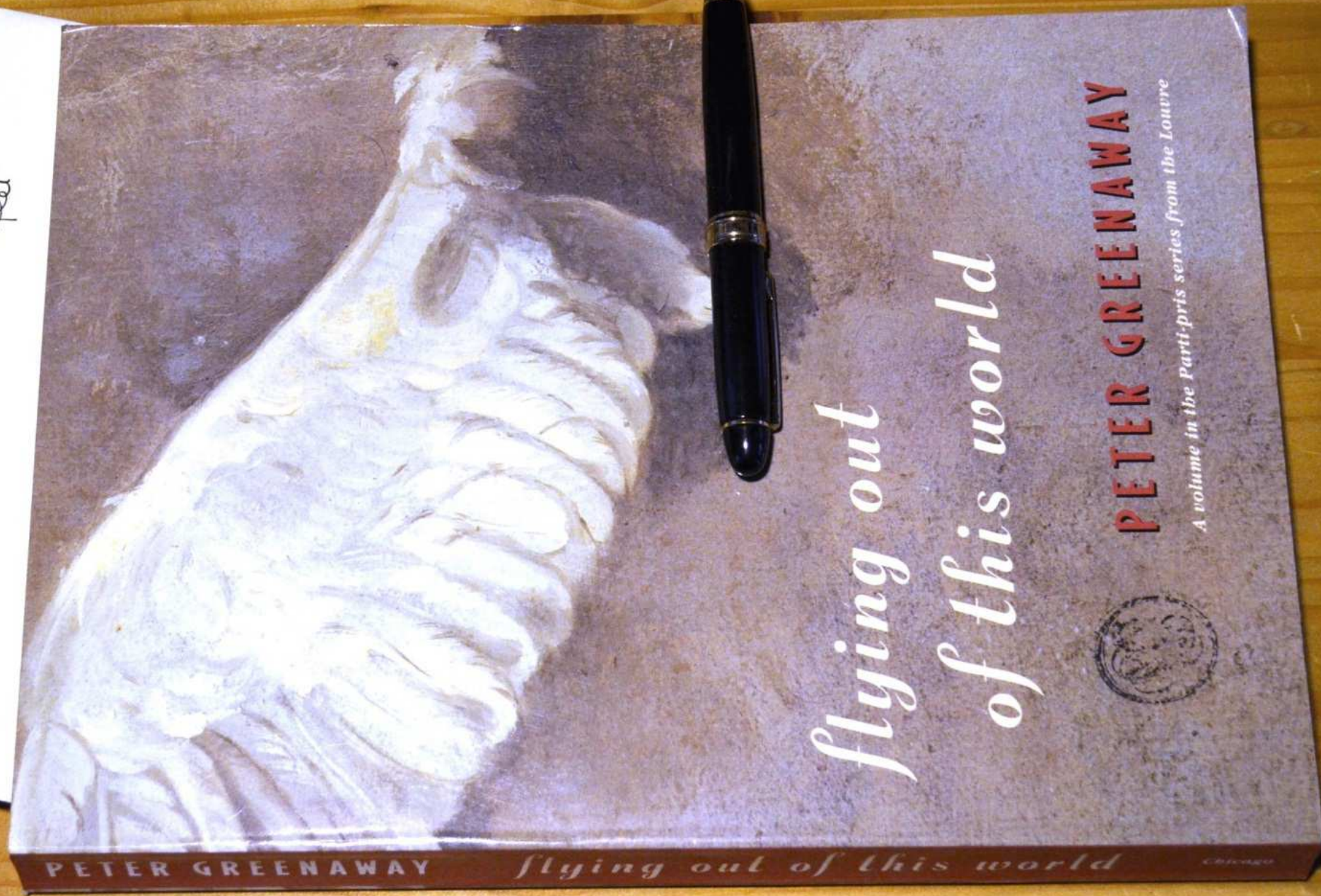
I saw him dipping his finger into the water trough  
(chilly water, not good at all for his aches)  
and fishing out a half-drowned bee.  
He pulled a paper tissue from his pocket, slipped it under  
the soggy little body, and watched while it revived as water was absorbed.  
In half a minute it started wiping its antennae. Then its legs.  
137 seconds spent between tissue and sunlight, and it took off, as good as new.  
I asked him why he did that. One bee doesn't make any difference, I said,  
and it's not like it can ever reciprocate.  
He answered: "I don't believe that *whatever you send around will come back to you*.  
That's not how the world works, as we both know. Freely given help is not supposed  
to be automatically available even in the direst need.  
But I believe against evidence that it should.  
That's why I do it."

John does that, saying or doing things--  
unexpected things that surprise me.





(Flight has a strange hold on human imagination  
my brother flew  
and seems to have grown wings and feet  
afterward)





*Nonne vides, quos cera tegit sexangula fetus  
melli ferarum apium sine membris corpora nasci  
et serosque pedes serasque adsumere pennas?*

(Don't you see how the offspring of the honey bees, concealed in waxen cells  
hexagonal, at first get life with no limbs, and assume in time both feet and wings?)

--- Publius Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses*, XV, 382-384

Yesterday Harry came to visit. She asked to be shown  
the apiary. John's leg is acting up and he remained  
inside.

When we were out alone, she told me: "I  
passed for the strange one in the family, but  
ultimately John was less conventional than  
me. Even so, I'd never thought you'd make  
him happy. I was wrong. I apologise."

He's been very much loved these last forty-  
four years. As much as I've been able to do  
(sometimes a bit beyond). But I wonder how  
he can make do with so little when he  
deserves so much.

It took so long for us to get limbs,  
develop wings, and fly.





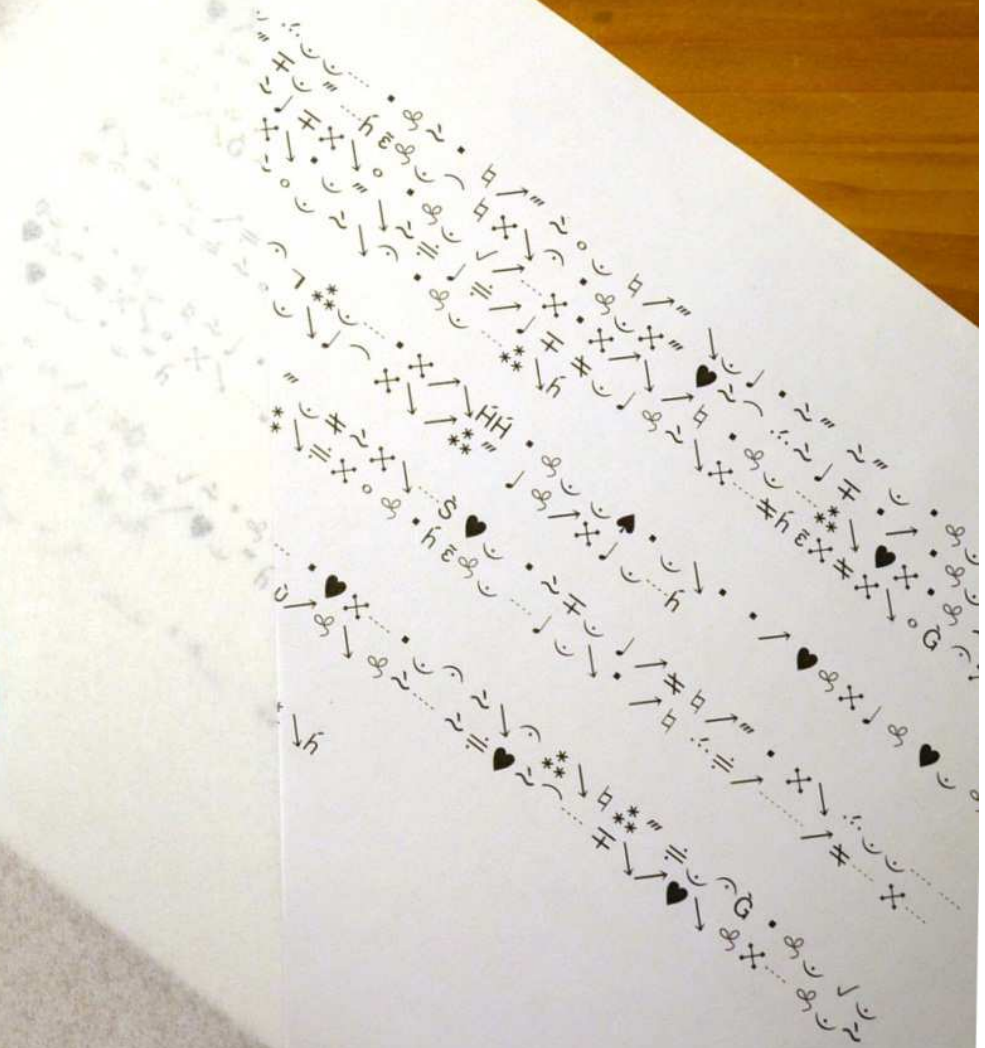
The bees that forage for nectar are the oldest workers. They find their way back to the hive by tracking the position of the sun with a delicate internal clock mechanism. Timing, direction, age and the sun.

An age old question-- the extent to which we hold real agency in our choices.

Yet the fact remains: we take comfort in bees swarming in sunlight. The scent of blossoms is sweeter.

Sherlock's paths twisted and unfurled, the petals of a flower. John has always known his heart and home.

I'd like to see the sun.





ἐχ' ἅ-  
πλῶς μὲν τοὶ πάσας ψυχὰς  
εἰς χύεσθιν· ἴκσας μελίσας  
ἔλεγον· ἄλλὰ τὰς μελλού-  
σας μετὰ δίκηςσύνης βιο-  
τᾶειν, καὶ πάλιν ἀνασρέφειν  
εἰργασμέναις τὰ θεοῖς φίλῃ·  
τὸ γὰρ ζῶον φιλόστροφον, καὶ μά-  
λιστ' αἰδέσθαι δίκην, καὶ νηφαντι-  
κὸν· ὅθεν καὶ νηφάλιοι σπον-  
δαί, αἱ διὰ μέλιτος· καὶ  
κυάμοις οὐκ ἐφίζανυσιν·

(All souls, however, proceeding into generation, are not simply called bees, but those who will live in it justly and who, after having performed such things as are acceptable to the Gods, will again return (to their kindred stars). For this insect loves to return to the place from whence it first came, and is eminently just and sober).

-- Porphyrius, *De antro nymphaeum*



I used to get drunk on deep  
red wines with Victor,  
before he tried  
his power plays on me.  
I understand why he couldn't  
resist, there were reasons.  
(He once said: "There are  
two dragons, the red one  
fights for power, the blue one  
for freedom").  
But I was not his to order about.  
We drank, and talked, and  
at times I surprised him.  
We always were at cross-purposes,  
but on the cross  
something took depth.  
In the end, I found my home  
in freedom,  
not in power.

::



There are few things I hold sacred in this world -  
My brother  
(ass-eyed, knock-kneed, wild-haired and laughing)  
is one of them -

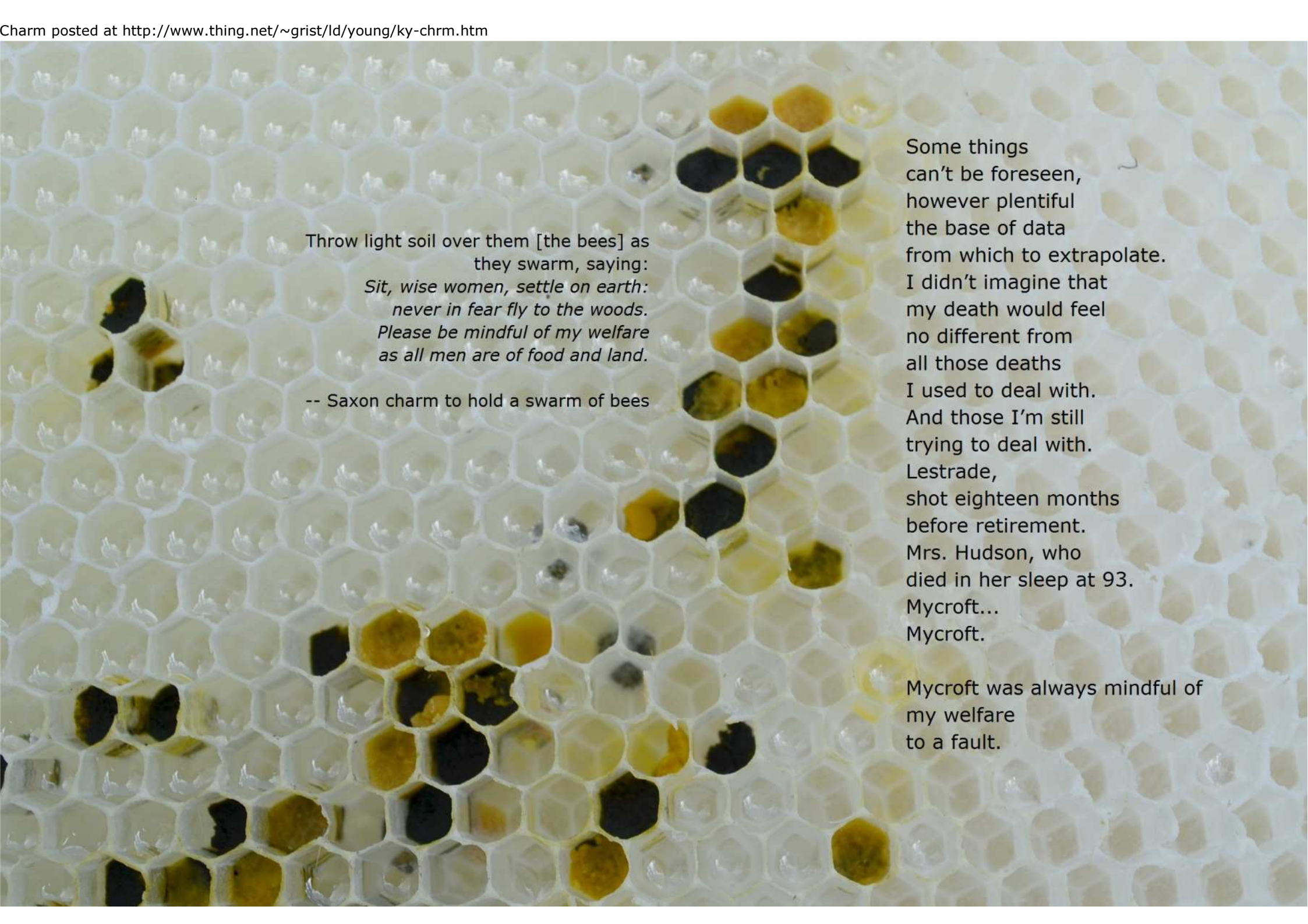
ψυχρᾷ φλογί, πρὸς δ' Ἀφροδί-  
τας ἀτιμασθεὶς ἐλικογλεφάρου  
ἢ περὶ χρήμασι μοχθί-  
ζει βιαίως ἢ γυναικείῳ θράσει  
ψυχὰν φορεῖται πᾶσαν ὁδὸν θεραπεύ-  
ων. Ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τᾶσδ' ἔκατι  
κηρὸς ὥς δαχθεὶς ἔλα

Ant.

ἰρᾶν μελίσσᾶν τάκομαι, εὖτ' ἂν ἴδω  
παίδων νεόγυιον ἐς ἧ-

Ep.





Throw light soil over them [the bees] as  
they swarm, saying:  
*Sit, wise women, settle on earth:  
never in fear fly to the woods.  
Please be mindful of my welfare  
as all men are of food and land.*

-- Saxon charm to hold a swarm of bees

Some things  
can't be foreseen,  
however plentiful  
the base of data  
from which to extrapolate.  
I didn't imagine that  
my death would feel  
no different from  
all those deaths  
I used to deal with.  
And those I'm still  
trying to deal with.  
Lestrade,  
shot eighteen months  
before retirement.  
Mrs. Hudson, who  
died in her sleep at 93.  
Mycroft...  
Mycroft.


Mycroft was always mindful of  
my welfare  
to a fault.

John understood that -  
He also understood:  
There are many ways  
Death can consume  
only one way to consume Death:

eat  
drink  
love  
and breathe free







I have eaten in the sunlight  
the uneatable food of the inhuman,  
fresh clear honey from the newly-made hives,  
thin as water, flowery, indigestible,  
as the bees hummed their song before all time  
and I felt what I am, a single seed  
floating on the fast brook of time,  
and nothing matters  
because life is so long before and after.

(...honey is considered a symbol of death, and on this account it is usual to offer libations of honey to the chthonian Gods.)

-- Porphyrius, *De antro nympharum*

πεπoίλωται ἤδη τὸ  
μέλι καὶ θανάτου σύμβολον·  
διὸ καὶ μέλιτος σπονδὴν  
τοῖς χθονίοις ἔδουν.

It is a tremendous gift,  
the ability to eat  
peacefully, painlessly, and with company.

Towards the end, I lost weight  
and could not remember  
the taste of honey apricots.

Yet another thing  
I am sorry for.



ἐν δ' ἐτίθει μέλιτος καὶ ἀλείφατος ἀμφιφορῆας  
πρὸς λέγεα κλίνων  
(...and Achilles sat therein two-handled jars of honey and oil,  
Leaning them against the bier of Patroclus.)  
— Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 169-171

We are old, the both of us. One or the  
other is sure to be going soon.  
Not yet.  
But soon.



We've been discussing what to do, when.  
Which means are realistically available for home-made death, given that we are equally uninterested in attending the other's funeral.  
Neither of us finds it practical or desirable to leave home: for one thing, from this point onwards it may be objectively hard to move about unassisted; for another, the Sussex countryside is distinctly lacking in tall (enough) buildings.  
I don't think I could do it again anyway. John also had a small moue of distaste when I mentioned the idea.  
Guns are also impractical: he has arthritis, I incipient Parkinson.

John walks me through his grove of trees. They have the fresh confidence of those who've been well summered and remember stoic winters.

"I planted this one fourteen years ago. Temperamental, but it had a bit of a rough start. I found her like a weed on the side of the road. The first three years, she gave us sour little buggers as hard as acorns."

He smiles up fondly. I look up, then look at him. He shakes his head.

"There was an old elm tree at Grandda's-- once, Nan told me that Grandda had loved the tree so much, he'd had it moved from the house they'd owned before. The arborist said that there was a fifty percent likelihood that the elm wouldn't survive the move. It almost didn't."

John has that peculiar stance he always takes when he's saying something too close.

"Nan said that Grandda spoke to the elm every day for two years. Two years, before it began budding again."

He touches a branch, grips his hand along the bark.

"You know, I used to climb that elm every Saturday. It had branches thicker than me."

John looks up, hand slack on the cherry tree.

Sherlock is laughing, there are bees.

John shakes his head, smiling openly. He continues introductions. Later, there are biscuits and honey apricots.

It is not an easy rejoining, but it is bounty, and more than I thought. A kindness.

I have found that laws and ethics are dischargeable and insufficient, yet kindness one cannot repay. It is free and freely willed:

Why caring can never be an advantage, why ambrosia is a nectar.

"Come see us soon."

They lean against each other as the car pulls away and I will always remember that tableau.

*(They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude  
And then my heart with pleasure fills-- )*



His grave they laid  
with daffodils.





He argued in favour of the softer, if slower, opiate + plastic bag method. He tried to dissuade me from the use of corrosives, but given my personal history, I doubt of my responsiveness to opiates, even after such a long time.  
As a result, we each have a compress of cyanide, carefully preserved in separate hiding places.

But today it's a splendid morning in late April, John is softly whistling to himself in the kitchen as he bakes cheese-and-honey cakes biscuits, and the hives are singing in the sunlight.



*Globos sic facito. Caseum eum alica ad eundem modum misceto. Indé  
quantos voles facere facito. In ahenum caldum unguen indito. Singulos  
aut binos coquito versatoque crebro duabus rudibus, coctos eximito, eos  
melle unguito, papaver infriato, ita ponito.*

(Cakes to be made thus: mix cheese and emmer as above; make as  
many balls as you want. Put fat in a hot bronze pan: cook one or two at  
a time, turning them frequently with two sticks. When cooked remove  
them, coat in honey, roll in poppy-seeds, serve.)

– Marcus Porcius Cato, *De agri cultura*, 79