

Peter Hammill, Flight

"i) Flying Blind"

I always forget how crazy things are
so sometimes it catches me off my guard
when they make sense.
The line on the road trail the arrow in the sky,
I search for the mote in my brother's eye
beneath the pence...
a time of blunt instruments.
Still uncertain when I've woken
or what constitutes a conscious mind,
though the thought remains unspoken
I know I'm flying blind.

Breaking into cold sweat on the white-hot coals
the pennies from heaven drop through my soul:
it don't relent.
At the back end of dreams I'm amazed to awake...
I offer my theories but just can't shake
that seventh sense
to which there's no defense.
It seemed the time was for action,
it seemed so cool to be that kind...
my tongue writhed to form some retraction
but I knew I was flying blind.

I want things to be fast, down to the power-dive;
I want the zero-gravity heroes to play dead,
but stay alive.
We want it to be slow, all the way to stall;
we talk about a thousand things that never change at all.
No, it never change...

It was then that I knew I'd been thoughtless,
something had slipped my mind:
I'd strapped myself into the Fortress
but the Fortress was flying blind.
We got full clearance,
so someone down there ought to know
the truth of our disappearance -
If even that still shows it accuses and blames me,
but nothing was quite what it seemed.
Sometimes things work out so strangely
that it might as well all be dreamed.

"ii) The White Cane Fandango"

The White Cane Fandango in Morse code,
try to shake through the message,
shake the load;
only venial sin, running on the spot
till the dance begins.

Where does a man go when the muscles cramp?
Try to write out a postcard on a postage stamp
with a drawing pin punching out the Braille
for the whole within?

Upset the contango on your future stock;
paying backwardation, hold onto what you've got -
such a sideways grin!
Some day you may need
to trade that in.

If we ride this right
the future will fall in our hands.
If we survive the flight
the future will work out -
nothing's that black and white.

"iii) Control"

The colour-coded charts are spread,
but we're still gliding deep into the red,
the radio is dead
every valve blown open.
The radar screen flicks monochrome,
air traffic controller wants to get on home,
waiting for a phone call
to release him from responsibility.
Nobody goes to see him any more
except for the man from the ministry.

He wanted to be, he wanted to be
the man at the helm, in command of the flightpath;
he's flying a chair, quite beyond control;
he's going to have just one more chance
at a barrel roll.

All in a dream, all as a dream,
the colours too bright, the music too deafening -
the black-out world has just begun to show.
These cracked-out words I offer...
but I still don't know.

Cool blue suffuse the colour gun -
oh come in, come in number one:
your time's nearly run.
Speed-freeze the frame,
the present and the past hold fast....
It's too fast, the thing don't,
the thing won't,
the thing don't last.

"iv) Cockpit"

The rolling dice clash together, never make up the score;
that old device, the ejector seat, glued to the floor.
Everybody waits for everyone to make a show,
no-one wants to be the first, admitting that they know
how anythings that's gone down here
could fit into an analytic groove.
Wait for the tactical move,
wait for some action we all can approve.

Too much to drink, for the cup reaches down to the sea;
too much to think, the barometer pressuring me.
Rolling down the weather for an Easter parade,
reeling out the Maydays in the hope of being saved,
but the radio ham's out giving blood -
no, no, he's not listening.
The cricketer knows his "Wisden",
the pilot has got his "Jane's",
but the sum of this factual wisdom
don't help us to fly the plane
(no, and it never will...)

Beneath the tartan two-piece something rips undone...
Wait for the ladder to run
wait for the snake that the ladder becomes.

A passenger hits the cockpit, willing to chance his game:
pulls out his gun and cocks it
in the hope that it all might change.
(Oh, but it never will...)
A fly-leaf from the library shows others have been here before,
tried, failed and kicked out the door;
the aircrew don't care anymore.
Now they just wait
for the beat of the silk-worm wing,
wait for the heat to come down on us
full force of the law.

"v) Silk-Worm Wings"

Full force of gravity pulls me down,
I'll be better off out of there;
aerobatic spin around,
I'll take my chances in the open air.

Sycamore silk-worm wings
or Roman Candle to the ground,
there's only one thing for sure:
when the balloon goes up
the aeronaut calm down.

"vi) Nothing is Nothing"

He say nothing is quite what it seems,
he say nothing is quite what it seems;
I say nothing is nothing.

"vii) A Black Box"

Softly, the angels sing their time and space refrain:
there's something in everything if you can only pin down its name
Aerobatic thoughts at the back of my mind -
Is it nothing but the looping line we all follow?
Nothing but the spiral twist of DNA?
There'll be no looking back from tomorrow on today.

So the wire is tripped, split-seconds defect to their successors;
the umbilical cord is ripped -
here we all are in free fall.
I stall where I am, as if to see where I've been,
only running down the looping line we all follow,
only chasing down the spiral twist of DNA.
There can be no looking on to tomorrow from today.

Life/death/night/day...
cold breath will surely fly away.
Is the empire of sensation locked in a black box
deep in me, encoded there somehow?
It fires the imagination to fly on a wing and a prayer
through my life. Is that how it is?
(There'll be no looking back on this....)
This is now, which will be then?
Is this the means?
All I know for shure is

this is the end.

No looking back from tomorrow,
no, there'll be no looking back on today;
better be looking on to tomorrow...
better think on today.