

# Peter Hammill, Four Pails

Four pails of water and a bagfull of salts.  
That is all we are, that is all a man comprises,  
chemicals alone, with no spirit, soul or ghost -  
nothing so bizarre.  
No amount of faith disguises  
what is true is what we fear the most  
Nothing can survive  
save the things men leave behind them.  
Any other case would be really too absurd -  
if thoughts remained alive  
surely modern science would find them?  
No, the soul is nothing but a word.  
All the wonders Man achieves  
emerge from cerebral tissue.  
Chemical reactions' ebb and surge  
form that Thing that is you....  
It's a sad philosophy,  
but better sad than wrong.  
Face the truth instead:  
when you're dead you're dead,  
when you're gone you're gone...  
now she's gone.  
Four pails of water and a bagfull of salts.  
That is all she was, all my lover represented -  
that sounds just as mad as saying she will never die.  
Fools may clutch at straws  
but truth must not be circumvented:  
as the tree falls, so must that tree lie!  
Now that sounds so odd...  
once I would have preached it brightly.  
Now questions appear I rationally can't ignore...  
Nothingness or God,  
Which of them seems more unlikely?  
Once I would have answered clearly,  
now I only think I'm nearly sure.  
(Chris Judge Smith)