Peter Hammill, The Play's The Thing

How could he know so much?
How could he bear such knowledge?
How could he dare to write it in the plays?
What is it Shakespeare'd say
if he came back today?
Surely he'd recognize these mortal coils.

How do we carry on?
No-one knows where they fit in,
no-one knows who they are or where they've been.
What does the writer mean?
How do we play this scene?
What didn't Shakespeare know that we do now?

Stiffen the sinews,
wear hard-favour'd rage,
all history's drama,
the world is a stage.

""There is a history in all men's lives,
figuring the nature of the times deceas'd;
The which observ'd, a man may prophesy,
with a near aim, of the main chance of things
as yet not come to life, which in their seeds
and weak beginnings lie intreasured.
Such things become the hatch and brood of time...""

Oh, but the show goes on,
on through the seven ages
That of the world must mirror man's, in fact.
Here comes the seventh act,
see how the mirror's cracked,
here comes sans everything for humankind.

To capture the conscience
of nations and kings
all history's drama
The play's the thing,
the play's the thing,
the play's the thing.

How could he know so much?