



POETRY

## Poems About Borders

Adam Horovitz

### About the Poems



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In 2022, I was commissioned to write poems that explored the deep history of the English county of Gloucestershire, as seen through the lens of the pre-history gallery of Corinium Museum at Cirencester. This gallery is one small room in what is otherwise a museum given over almost entirely to the county's history of Roman occupation, but I became quickly entranced by the fluidity of borders from the Neolithic period to the late Iron Age and with the multitude of methods the migratory peoples of pre-history used to mark where they had been or where they might stay, be it riverways or cairns, flattened mud desire lines that evolved into roads, or symbols on coins that mutated as they travelled across Europe to suit the tribes that used them. The pre-history gallery may be small, but under its surfaces, deep in the soil and stone, arrow-head and bone of history, I was delighted to discover traces of, and hints at, the fossilised map of thought that led disparate peoples to fix upon immutable (but still imaginary) borders. For more information, visit <https://www.adamhorovitz.co.uk/>.

### About the Poet



Adam Horovitz is a British poet based in the West of England with an abiding interest in the relationship between humankind and the landscapes they inhabit. He enjoys letting his writing cross artistic borders, often collaborating with musicians and artists. He has published numerous pamphlets and four collections of poetry—*Turning* (Headland, 2011), *The Soil Never Sleeps* (Palewell, 2018), *Love and Other Fairy Tales* (Indigo Dreams, 2021), and *Slow Migrations* (Indigo Dreams, 2025)—as well as a memoir, *A Thousand Laurie Lees* (History Press, 2014). He was featured on the Cerys Matthews/Hidden Orchestra album *We Come From the Sun* (Decca, 2021).

## Place in the River

The human story is cyclical  
as water. It changes boundaries,

evaporates, comes back as rain,  
falls in unexpected places,

rushes through everything  
unstoppable as a river.

So much is changed by it. Made  
myth beneath water-turned earth.

What is needed of myth is truth  
and, out of truth, fact.

Of fact, we require a narrative  
that leads us to a history

so that from that history we  
can make stories, deep truths

that are reasonable enough  
to explain a mythic world.

Work carefully with earth and water.  
Let it run through your hands

as if they were sieves, delicate  
instruments for divining particles

of things unforeseen. Each tiny  
piece of the past, right down to dust,

has a meaning. A place in the river.  
In the endless course of us.

### **An Early History of Money**

In the long days before money,  
we traded need for need,  
the song of want  
bound to our tongues  
with subtle harmonies.  
*Have this, if it will serve you.*  
*Make fire / axes / dig your stone.*  
*A measure of food?*  
*Yes, and shelter.*  
*Two nights at least*  
*before we travel on.*

Then came bronze.  
From alchemy, commodity  
scoured from the deep earth.  
Pretty grave goods,  
godheads, weapons,  
decorations for the hearth,  
for structures that settle  
into homes. New forms  
rose from its smelting.  
Bronze travelled, mixed  
till all trace of its origin was lost.

Iron next. Found everywhere.  
A weaker weapon but an easy trade.  
Kept in sword-length strips,  
metal cut to the required size  
for weights of grain.  
Worth divisible, of use  
to all people. Unlike coins;  
gold and silver was for chieftains,  
ritually exchanged for passage  
across land, through markets.  
A border stamped with a king's face.

## Horse/Power

i  
White horse carved  
    on the horizon  
as guide and totem.  
    Signal for travellers.  
*In their pockets, coins*  
    *stamped with echoes of a horse.*

Way-marker for the well-worn  
    track connecting tribes  
in straight lines above difficult terrain  
    to places of commerce  
where people met and symbols  
    changed their dress.  
Took on aspects of the tribes'  
    deep-rooted needs, desires.

ii  
This is how money arrives.  
    Pressed into the heads of men  
in need of a common tongue,  
    who press ideas out  
into silver, gold. A Macedonian horse  
    made strange by new eyes,  
the limits of a carver's skill.  
    Imagination trapped in metal.

iii  
*What do you know of horses?*  
    That they are wealth.  
Power rests on the back of them.  
    The old trade roads are long.  
Printed deep with hoof-marks  
    and human movement.  
What we recognise as money  
    began with horses, travelled  
with horses, echoed in the hills  
    of many countries, cantered  
in the wake of Philip of Macedon  
    across countless borders.



iv

Take the idea of horse  
and change it by increment.  
A charioteer's hand shifts  
into a crescent moon.  
Armour becomes eye. Tails  
are triplicated. Horses  
real and unreal proliferate  
to suit tribal visions.  
It is all money. All horse.  
Power rests in pockets.  
Before long, the horse  
learns how to ride the man.