

# LUSTRE

Poetry by John Siddique

Manchester Literature Festival  
&  
Manchester Art Gallery

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Poetry by John Siddique

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Commissioned by Manchester Art Galleries and Manchester Literature Festival

All work inspired by  
Exporting Beauty: Pilkington's Pottery and Tiles

Books by John Siddique

Full Blood (Salt) (April 2011)

Recital — An Almanac (Salt)

Blackpool — A Poet's View (Blackpool Council)

Poems from a Northern Soul (Crocus)

The Prize (Rialto)

Four Fathers (Route)

For Children:

Don't Wear It On Your Head, Don't Stick It

Down Your Pants (Salt)

[www.johnsiddique.co.uk](http://www.johnsiddique.co.uk)

John Siddique was jointly commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival and Manchester Art Gallery to respond to the exhibition *Exporting Beauty: Pilkington's Pottery and Tiles*, featuring over 100 pots and tiles made by the world famous Pilkington's Tile and Pottery Company between 1893 and 1938. The resulting poems draw inspiration from the exhibits and the craftsmen and craftswomen who lovingly fashioned them; channelling nature in all its glory, from the elements that forged the clay to the animals at Belle Vue Zoo which one of the artists used to visit as part of his observational process. Like his muses, John Siddique has created shining things of beauty: poems that embolden the spirit and fire our aspirations in these times of austerity.

Cathy Bolton

## LUSTRE

Gold, silver and copper as reflection and as light.  
Symbols of the dream life, the good life, as myth.

To never dim as the hands of day pass on into time.

A question for beauty, are you truth? Are you home?  
Earth formed into a vase, a vessel for the spirit.

The art of beauty - I shine for you to catch your eye,  
to wake your soul, with cupped hands which  
close around the hands of day.

Transmute the colours of elements.  
Place copper against red.  
Place gold against blue.  
Take fire from the wet earth.  
Burn a butterfly in brightness.

The artist as alchemist, breathing soul into clay,  
shaping love and beauty, learn them with your hands.  
Learning how to live them, day after day.

Heat and time brings the colour,  
to know beauty is to know their gift.  
Place a vessel of spirit into their hands to become  
undimmed against the fading,  
- against the closing of the day.

**TRUE ROSES OF ENGLAND**  
**(After D.H. Lawrence)**

Where are the true roses of England?  
Those who freely offer their faces  
to the air in all complexity. Offering  
their scent  
- the essence of sun, rain and soil.

True roses of England, making the garden  
alive with presence. Not just a pretty  
decoration or some undisciplined thing.

The courage of the true rose to gift its beauty;  
such Godly wildness contained in your flowering.  
Daring to give yourself fully in a world,  
where sentiment has overtaken feeling.  
Beware the shallows of thornless years.  
Offer your openness with no thought of loss.

## **CARP**

Glide in the still pool,  
desiring courage and love  
– Leap the dragon's gate

## **LEOPARD**

Skin of eyes watching.

Ferocious stillness waiting

- Flash of claws and teeth.



## **EAGLE**

He is the sunbird.

Untamed, flowing mercury

- Bright kiss in your soul.

## **DOG**

Faster than the wind.

Chase away the dark winter

- Friend of fire and sun.

## **DRAGON**

Chase the flaming pearl.

Serpent and bird as one life

- Understand the price.

## CYPRESS

A tall cypress watches over us.  
A centurion keeping out corruption,  
stationed in the garden, crowned  
by sun, shadowing the hands of day.

Tonight a high cupola of stars over us.  
The night wind moans. The treetops move  
to speak in the black-blue light.  
There is no death.  
There is no death,  
only life not fully lived.

A gust of rain from the night sky.  
How can it rain from a clear sky?  
There must be higher winds above us.  
The trees know - autumn is coming.

## SWAN SHIP

Behind glass, behind time; she is god or mortal, steering her swan ship at full sail.

Protected by feathers she is faceless

- everyone, no one
- nameless and forgotten,

except as decoration in glaze and glass.

She has always been called by the sea, by the wave and the rhythm – her swan ship more than a means of travel, it is a way to life. All other days are dark and too full of questioning faces.

As she sails she is emptied and refilled.

Song of the wind. The names of desire, Gulls take her words into their mouths, eat them as hungrily as if they were bread cast on the water. Words fixed in time, behind glass, behind glaze. Water caught in its swirl as decorative art.

She points at forever and nowhere

- onwards in red and gold.

## FOX AND GRAPES

Red as fire he steps through the green.  
Loving the wetness after the rain.  
The silvered ground, the last drops  
and that moment that happens now  
that everything is silence.  
He wants to taste the life of the green.  
- Flame and moisture.

Looking up at the vines.  
The grapes have reached their fullness.  
All the sunshine. All the gardener's love.  
All the days of rain. The richness of the soil.  
- The fox and the grapes.

Just out of reach.  
Just a little bit too high.  
Just...  
    Just...  
        Just...

Even when he stands on his hind legs  
and leaps like a boy he cannot reach them.  
He cannot climb, he is the fox.

Oh for a taste of them.  
    Oh for the juice of them.  
        Oh the green of the grapes.  
The sweet unmade wine of the year.  
- Frustration and desire.

Fox walks on into the forest,  
on into the morning.  
There are some chickens along this road,  
easy pickings for his appetite.  
I never liked grapes much anyway.  
He walks on towards breakfast.  
- The mind of hunger.

## **BELLE VUE NARRATIVE**

The giraffe would bend its neck over  
the high chain-link fence, to look down  
at a small boy and his sister,  
our eyes and his eyes full of love.

Putting my open hand, palm up. I would  
reach for the sky. The rough tongue would lap  
there to taste sweet and salt expectation.

Mother and father stand back watching  
in black and white. Mum cradles baby Ann,  
while dad smokes a pipe of cherry tobacco.

A keeper walks by guiding an elephant;  
it carefully carries six children on its back.

We come early and leave late  
– to make the most of the day.  
Watch the lions in their pride and listen  
to music and screams from the amusement park.

The carriage on The Water Chute flying  
along its track, hurtling down to splash  
the water in waves against the glass screen,  
everyone jumps back and laughs.

The last treat of the day,  
a drive on The Monte Carlo Car Ride.  
Turning the wheel of the little car, driving  
away from my parents. A few moments of life  
to myself. Then excitement to see them again  
on the inevitable returning loop of the ride.



## John Siddique

John Siddique is the bestselling author of *Recital – An Almanac*, *Poems From A Northern Soul* and *The Prize*. He is the co-author of the memoir *Four Fathers*.

He has contributed poems, essays and articles to many publications, including the *The Guardian*, *Poetry Review*, *The Rialto*, and *Magma*.

*The Prize*, published to wide acclaim in 2005, was nominated for the Forward Prize. His children's book *Don't Wear It On Your Head* was shortlisted for the CLPE Poetry Award in 2007.

On publication in 2009, *Recital* was called "One of the most important British poetry books of the last twenty years" (Lauri Ramey, CSULA), and "The most astonishing and mature work of his career to date" (Dr. Claire Chambers, Leeds Met).

John Siddique was The British Council Writer-in-Residence at California State University, Los Angeles 2009. His recent commissions include pieces for Manchester Art Galleries, The City of Canterbury, Blackpool Library, iMove/London 2012.

His new book *Full Blood* will be published by Salt in 2011.

[www.johnsiddique.co.uk](http://www.johnsiddique.co.uk) for more information on books, events and how you can make a philanthropic contribution.