

## The Same Inside

The mirror shows me puckers, blotches, stains  
A pallor and a drooping sponginess  
The eyes still bright, but tired and looking down  
A thoughtfulness from passing through the years  
A figure, never slim, but softly round  
A me not recognised, nor wished to see.

Awake in narrow bed in narrow room  
At five years old, well swaddled beneath sheets  
My eyes in semi-darkness dart around  
Not black for fear that I might yet go blind.  
I hear some muffled voices from below  
Or joy, smell bath salts from the steamy room  
Where Mum is pampering just once a week.  
And now, the restless nights are with me still  
External crone envelops inner child.  
The same fears linger, with them death and pain  
With no delight from Mother's presence close.

A party at sixteen – a neat blank page  
In psychedelic dress and ruby shoes  
Hide my deep fears 'neath curtain-refuge hair  
All worries at the surface of my self  
How freakish and peculiar am I  
How much I want to hide away from this  
Not to talk and mingle with the crowd.  
And now, the timid mouse is ever here,  
External hag envelops inner youth  
The same doubts linger, with them un-success  
With no self-sanctuary below my fringe.

A wife, a mother, teacher all grown-up  
New barriers are broken every day  
And fears incompetence will soon be found.  
My old self-worries now expanded out  
Sheltering others in the caring zone  
Finishing days in panic and fatigue.  
And now, all aspects of that life remain.  
External frump envelops inner Eve  
The same dreads linger, with them loneliness  
No carapace of office to support.

Scared child, gauche teen, uneasy adulthood  
Yet, still inside the same despair persists.

Yet wait – crone, hag, frump, one sees outwardly -  
But inside old wise woman full of tales?

“Live in the moment” (very hard for me);  
“Love who you are” (also a tricky thing);  
“Be kind to all” (and that includes yourself).