**A Whiter Shade of Pale**

We were university guerrillas

infiltrating the closed world of Art School

—the flamboyant clothes and wild hair,

the ghostly make-up—in that tatty pub

off South Eccleshall Road. Me afraid to slide

coins into the juke box and stab a button

writing my credentials on the fuggy air.

The words seemed so significant

though we didn’t understand them.

We knew the Miller’s Tale, all right,

and vestal virgins—

we mostly were back then,

our skinny beds piled Zhivago-style

with curtains and Afghan coats

against the Yorkshire cold—

but what were they *about*?

Drink? Yes. Sex? Probably. Cocaine?

I doubt it, the Sixties were LSD,

psychedelia, a spinning kaleidoscope:

Vietnam. Black Power. The Red Guard.

Same sex love legitimized. The old order

was unspooling, the world on the march

and us with it—witness me boarding

the Polaris protest coach. (I abandoned

the cause outside the gates of Cammell Laird,

preferring the safety of a short hop home,

but strolled down to the Mersey

mid-afternoon to watch a sleek cigar

ride the current, could rage as loudly

as the rest afterwards.)

Lonely hearts. A guitar in flames.

A melody echoing Bach; a rock band

named for a Burmese cat. Our music

said it all. Fifty years on, it still sings

of hops sweet-freighted with smoke,

the patchouli I didn’t yet recognize.