

(No More) the Sub-mariner

Peter Hammill

In my youth, I played at trains: now all steam is gone. In my dreams, brief shelter from the rain, I try to catch the fireglow ... with Dinky Toys, I thought that I was Stirling; with cricket bat, I saw myself as Peter May; now, with all these images returning, I wonder who I am today? As a child, I refought the war, with plastic planes and imagination: I sank Tirpitz, blew up the Mohne dam, these and more, I was the saviour of the Nation! Oh! To be the captain of a ship of war! The pilot of a Tempest or a York! To hold my trench against the Panzer Korps, instead of simply being one who talks, and reminisces of his fantasies, as though life was nothing but to lose... these only antecede the knowledge that, eventually, he must choose....

It's a hallmark of adulthood that our options diminish as our faculties for choice increase, till we choose everything and nothing, too late, at the finish.

In my youth, I held belief: my faith and thought were strong. But now I'm stripped of every leaf, and it robs me of the sight of right and wrong. Oh! To be the son of Che Guevara! One unit in the serried ranks of black! A Papist or an Orangeman, a eunuch... then doubt would never cast the dagger in my back. Oh! To be King John or Douglas Bader, Humphrey Bogart or Victor Mature! Which one is false and easy, which one harder? Of that, of this, of me I'm really not too sure