

This is the first draft of the first of the 'Stalker' poems, 'Poet' (a stalker's name) placed near the end of the 'Realization' section of 'Judas Jon', and the initial rough for the second one, 'Roadside Picnic', mirroring it, which will open the final 'Resurgence' section.

Poet

[After Andrei Tarkovsky]

He'd taken his brother into the Zone
Where time runs haphazard, topography drifts,
Promising never to leave him alone
Between orientations and continuum shifts.

All went fine till the Meatgrinder,
A tunnel whose warps pitched and tossed,
Where he blinked for a second as pathfinder,
Then looked again: His brother was lost.

At the Zone's very centre a room could be found,
Said to grant what one's heart really wished;
He entered here and with no pause or sound
Knelt, begged life for a brother so cherished.

When Poet got home he opened the door,
Expecting his brother to meet him;
A letter instead lay there on the floor
With the following message to greet him:

'Congratulations! We've been trying to call—
Perhaps you could soon get in touch.
You've won twelve million on Multiball—
The first time it's paid out so much!'

He folds the page, stashes it in his coat,
Then burns all his verse in the fire,
Sharpens a knife and slashes his throat:
His innermost, truest, desire.

DAVID MANDEVILLE

Roadside Picnic

[After the Brothers Strugatsky]

When the roadside picnic is over
And the world peeps out at last
From an eternity under cover
The scene bequeaths a blast

Of fresh-charred earth from a Calor stove
Of grass now burnt and shrivelled,
The once thick branches of the grove
Half leafless and dishevelled.

How space and time and action
Lie broken on this ground
Whose pall now holds a fraction
Of the assurance once there found.

From nettles squashed and trodden spurge,
Blinking in the putrid air
Mice, birds and insects now emerge
Puzzled by the new things there.

They look for meaning in the trash
Scattered far and near,
The empty packets, stale fag ash,
The crumpled cans of beer...

If they were human they'd form a cult,
Pray for more signs to appear,
Erect a temple in the holt,
And kneel in trembling fear.

DAVID MANDEVILLE