

One Move Ahead

Probably he wouldn't have otherwise,
He, a good man, and his girl
Defiled, it seemed, by another man's smile.
But the voice in the dream
Sharp and sure
Like the words in the scroll
Told a different story:
She is pure, she is pure.

Probably he wouldn't have gone otherwise,
He, a good man, and his bride
Eight months or so with child.
Not that far, at least.
Two weeks along the cold, uneven road,
The donkey bumping and jerking its bulging load.

But great Caesar Augustus,
For reasons of his own,
He supposed, chose this time
To number the mortals
Under his divine throne,
Sending each to register
In their natal home

So they went.
Perhaps for a while surprised
That the almighty should require
Such discomfort of his chosen.

But along the cold, uneven road,
Pondering an angel's words,
She, whose humility conceived a king in her womb,
Perhaps did not worry that the journey
Would bring the child too soon.

And he, whose will have been overturned by a dream,
Must have marvelled at the elegance of the divine scheme:
The Lord who had trumped the imperial decree
Would wait til the came to the appointed place:
Son of Joseph in Joseph's town
Son of David come for his crown.

Probably he wouldn't have gone otherwise,
He, a good father, and his wife
So recently a mother,
And the child so small.
When the voice came again:
And this of blood on Herod's mind.

But the starmen had been and left
Gold, frankincense and myrrh,
Portable gifts, easily turned to food and shelter,
And were they not fully equipped
And the distance already half done
For the desert road down,
Down, down to alien Egypt.

He, they realised, was always one move ahead.

By Mark Greene from 'Opening Night'