

Strawcraft i

In corn there is
A mechanism,
A falling to
The ear;
If straw is twisted
Lawfully
A copper heart
Appears.

In clockwork too
A mechanism;
A hinge inside
Each hinge;
Internal to
The algorithm
Infernal logic
Springs.

Obby Robinson
February 2021



Strawcraft heart made by Fred Mizen for the Festival of Britain, 1951 (MERL 52/79)

About the poem

This poem was written in response to strawcraft items and images held at The MERL, especially the work of Fred Mizen. I lived in Essex for many years, and my poems often engage the folk (and magical) traditions of that county. I found it easy to get inspired by Mizen's work.

The poem consists of two brief stanzas, and is built around a twist or reversal. It begins with the problematic, 'stalking horse' idea that agriculture and craft follow laws in a way that is simply 'mechanical'.

In the second stanza, I introduce items that are more obviously mechanical (clockwork, a door, algorithms), and the idea that there is also perhaps a mechanism internal to their mechanism: the mechanical as weird, uncanny excess. Thus even if we *were* to think of strawcraft as a mechanical

technique, there is within it an intangible, animating mechanism or law. We might call this spirit, art, tradition...or lore.

About the poet

I am Obby Robinson, a poet from Lethmachen, the Most Haunted Town in England. My work celebrates, questions, and freely improvises upon established folkloric and magical tradition. I have previously worked with The MERL on a number of occasions, including the recent 'Glow Late' online event.

I published my first poetry collection in 2014. In it, a candle sprouts hair, the ghost of a black dog is worryingly present, and, in a minor public school, a great snake stares and stares... Digital copies can be downloaded from [my Ko-Fi webpage](#). I can be seen [reading two poems from the collection here](#).

I am working on a new collection at the moment, centred round a long poem concerning lithics: an ancient arrowhead, under glass in a museum, is in fact travelling ever closer to its target...



One of Obby Robinson's inspirations for this poem was this portrait by John Tarlton, showing Fred Mizen beside the strawcraft Lion and Unicorn he made for the Festival of Britain, 1951 (P TAR PH1/3/3/7/1).