

Wigan Wife

1973

She waits for her man by the hill	Dm C D
And lets everyone know who she is	Dm C D
And when he comes blackened with coal dust	Dm C D Am
She smiles like a newborn bride	C G D

Her hands show the red of the weather
And her body is bent before its time
But she walks like a queen through a graveyard
And the bosses dare not meet her eye

There are men who have waited a lifetime	Em G D
For a smile like she gives to him	Am G Bm
They will measure the hours in silver and gold	Em G D
Till the scythers pack them in	Am G A

She lives with three children in motley
And the youngest is picking out the slag
But she wants not your pretense of comfort
Their room is the envy of kings

Though her kingdom is not of this time or this place
She awaits softly smiling her due
There are secrets that laugh in the face of the coal
That are hidden from the likes of me and you

When the earth shakes its brethren loose
And there's linen and lace in the fire
She will walk past the bosses in motley
Give them lessons in grace as they die

Wigan is a coal-mining town in northern England whose people's hardscrabble lives were vividly described in George Orwell's 1937 book The Road to Wigan Pier. More than anyone else, Orwell formed my consciousness as a political being.