

By David Barber

What if it were possible to vanquish  
All this shame with a wash of varnish  
Instead of wishing the stain would vanish?

What if you gave it a glossy finish?  
What if there were a way to burnish  
All this foolishness, all the anguish?

What if you gave yourself leave to ravish  
All these ravages with famished relish?  
What if this were your way to flourish?

What if the self you love to punish —  
Knavish, peevish, wolfish, sheepish —  
Were all slicked up in something lavish?

Why so squeamish? Why make a fetish  
Out of everything you must relinquish?  
Why not embellish what you can't abolish?

What would be left if you couldn't brandish  
All the slavishness you've failed to banish?  
What would you be without this gibberish?

What if the true worth of the varnish  
Were to replenish your resolve to vanquish  
Every vain wish before you vanish?

Source: *Poetry* (March 2013)