**The Covey Collection**

**Introduction**

**Time-Spirits  
2019**

**McAdam Railway Station  
2019**

**Tales from Tara  
2019**

**Scarecrow  
2019**

**Twelve Days of Cat  
2020**

**Lamentations for Holy Week  
2020**

**Vision and Re-Vision***The Art of Writing and Re-Writing* **2021**

**Introduction**

The texts reproduced in this file were all produced by Covey’s on Prospect Street Fredericton, between 2019 and 2021. I have deliberately omitted three texts, *Scarecrow* (2019), *Twelve Days of Cat* (2020), and *Vision and Revision* (2021), from this file. *Scarecrow* and *Twelve Days of Cat*, because they are too large at nearly 20 megs each, on account of their illustrations, their beautiful illustrations, the contribution of my artist friend, Geoff Slater, the line-painter. I left out Vision and Revision so that I could include it as a separate, stand-alone text in another file.

The first editions of these works, prose and poetry, were edited and formatted by me. I took them to Covey’s and they printed me a limited, private edition of each text in a saddle-stitch, 6 x 9inch format. The printed editions are very professional and we are all quite proud of our work.

*Tales from Tara*, incidentally, is the seed from which I developed the larger narrative, *On Being Welsh* *in a land ruled by the English.* A new set of stories, selected from this latter text, won first place in the WFNB’s D. A. Richards Prose Award (2020). *On Being Welsh* was published (2021) by Cyberwit.net (available on Amazon and at the Cyberwite.net site).

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2021

**Time-Spirits**

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**2019**

***Zeitgeist***

*Zeitgeist* is a concept from 18th- to 19th-century German philosophy, translated as "spirit of the age" or "spirit of the times". It refers to an invisible agent or force dominating the characteristics of a given epoch.  
*Wikipedia*

Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

*“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.”*

Poems for troubled times.

**Introduction**

Our world finds itself in an incredible mess right now. Somehow, we have to sort it out. Images and metaphors tie past, present, and future together. We must pick our ways through the difficulties of these troubled times, as you must pick your way through the intricacies of these poems. Many of you will give up. Some of you, the chosen few, will make your way to the heart of each poem.

These poems are deliberately cryptic. Each one is a mind game I am playing with you. I do not underestimate you. I have placed clues throughout each poem and if you follow the clues you will arrive at many of the poem’s hidden meanings. Some poems are more difficult than others, their meaning more recondite. Others seem very straightforward, yet still contain secrets.

This style of poetry has a long history going back to Anglo-Saxon riddles and way beyond, back into the mists of time. Luis de Góngora (1561-1627) and Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645) specialized in similar forms of recondite poetry, often based on metaphor and the *juego alusivo-elusivo*, the game of alluding to something while eluding the act of saying what it is. Jorge Guillén (1893-1984) and Federico García Lorca (1898-1936) also played this game, as did Octavio Paz (1914-1998). In the works of all of these poets, the clues may rest in the poem or they may be found in a generic knowledge of the mythology of the poem’s exterior world.

Always remember that “those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it” (George Santayana). Otherwise expressed, in the words of T. S. Eliot: “Time present and time past / are both perhaps present in time future / and time future contained in time past” (*Burnt Norton*). The seeming anachronisms in these poems suggest that all time is ever-present and that each new day presents us with events that have already occurred on many occasions.

**Scrapes***(Reindeer People  
circa 13,500 BC & 2019)*

so old you can’t feel old  
blood tingles eyes stare  
below you a grassy plain  
where sea waters will  
one day surge and run  
distant that future

here and now   
chalk lines the scrape  
white-shrouds wrap you  
sharp-edged flaky flint  
digs into legs and ribs

arrowheads designed  
to disable and kill  
spear tips elemental  
killers like these clouds  
this wind eternal this rain

eternal   
this sea-gull  
rising high in the sky  
dropping its mollusc  
a bomb  
that one day will bomb us  
back to this stone age

**After the Floods**  
(2004 BC & 2018-2019)

as the crow flies  
so the pigeon  
holding straws  
within its beak  
time to rebuild

who now knows  
the unknown  
perceives the abyss  
beneath egg-frail  
cockle-shell hull

waters recede  
islands re-emerge  
bald skulls of hillocks  
stripped of grass and trees  
water-logged fields  
old bones dug up  
displayed in the ditch  
  
mud walls fallen flat  
warped wooden planks  
water-swollen  
so much stolen  
by water wind and wave

**Pandora***(circa 750-650 BC & 2015-2019)*

yesterday   
a lovely lady gave me  
a birthday present

gift-wrapped  
in a brown paper bag  
no stars no string  
no cake no candle

home again  
I opened the bag

a throw-away plastic potty  
three wooden spatulas  
and an air-dry sample card  
stamped and dated

complete  
with instructions

no way  
once used  
to put them back  
in the bag

**In the Cave***(514-520 BC & 2000-2009)*

one goes on a journey  
knows where one’s been

reality returning  
one tells what one’s seen

shadows dancing  
on night’s silver screen

verbal sketches  
from where one’s been

speaking other languages  
heard not seen

the more one speaks  
the more others think   
‘dream’

a dream for those   
who’ve never been   
where one’s been

**Waste Knot***(6th Century BC & 1948 & 1963)*

finger-nails crack  
red sealing wax  
liberating gathering  
knotted parcel string

broken finger nails  
hard scarlet chips  
blood flash-frozen  
beaded on blade

through underground dark  
clawing for clues  
damp walled  
this cave-walk  
distant the exit  
thin thread leading through

reef knots slip knots  
sheep-shanks bowlines  
bowlines-on-the-bight  
tight he tied them  
used them   
measuring distance  
distancing him from doom

behind him  
the bull head  
boisterous  
bellowing him on

**Maiden Castle***(1st century BC & 2017)*

wild spirits govern this land  
whispering in wet winds  
whistling through   
complex defenses

ditches and ramparts  
rise up and up  
mist-wrapped in clouds  
almost invisible

contoured channels  
false entrances blind alleys  
earthenware dishes  
sides sharp and steep  
death’s cook-pot by design  
vicious and deep

a rainstorm of arrows tumbles down  
mingled with a sling-stone hail  
despairing we flee  
take refuge in our chariots

**Confessions**  
*(397-400 & 1950-52)*

“I’d rather hurt myselfbefore anyone hurt me  
withdraw before anyone  
can throw me out  
cut off my own nose  
before anyone can spite my face  
  
there’s something about   
old men wearing sackcloth   
daubing themselves with ashes  
who make me kneel  
before wood and plaster figurines  
effigies endowed with unnatural life   
magical powers

why did they make me give up  
my name and take another  
I tremble with shame and anger   
as who I am undermines who I was  
and what I may yet be

sackcloth and ashes hair shirts  
continuous flagellation   
learning to love pain  
holy water and candles  
that everlasting flame   
this ubiquitous god omniscient  
an eternal presence  
writing everything down”

**Hengistbury Head***(5th Century AD & 2016-2019)*

safe haven for Hengist  
beached his fleet  
long ships drawn up  
in inner waters  
black now their beams  
sunk deep in mud and sand  
bright then with whale oil

shield wall turned earthen  
ditch and rampart  
sea-walled for safety  
camp-fire drum-beats   
invading hearts pound

riding and raiding  
out into the country’s  
rich gut of churches

abbeys and monasteries  
golden the candles  
fireworks the crosses

warning bells ringing  
the pagan among them  
*Roma Dea* fallen  
Romulus and Remus  
burning now England

**Taliesin***(circa 570 AD & 2018)*

Taliesin has gone  
he has wandered off  
to walk among clouds  
leaving deserted   
woodland and stream

speckled was his wisdom  
summed up by a salmon  
summoned from deep pools  
everlasting snippets  
his bright song-bubbles  
each word-pouch  
floating in flecked water

bottomless arcane ponds   
dappled with sunlight  
freckled the stream-flow   
cold the hand that tickled fish  
each summons a stippled magic

poor stranded immigrants  
who now will sing your praise  
who will raise wisdom   
from dark river-depths  
mark with hymns  
your distant graves

**Aneirin***(circa 600 AD & 2018)*

grey scale   
this world he mirrored  
that pencilled eye brow  
raised in hieroglyphics  
shaping shift and change

chill warriors step forward  
vacant spaces empty eyes  
lords of the manor  
conceived their warbands  
deep in original sin

faces earth dark  
dank-scented their breath  
an underworld   
brought up and out

who calls them forth  
who brings them back  
blind mystery of mist  
dank myth of twilight  
night’s everlasting return

**Geld-[de(a)d]***(9th Century AD & 2016-2019)*

who burnt the cakes  
played on his harp  
plotted a Danish downfall   
under white cliffs  
far from the beaches  
*terra firma*   
forbidden them  
land no foot-hold

rocks in striped sails  
dragon ships sinking  
feeble the swimmers  
down through dark water  
helped by hard iron  
chain mail and axes

seeking the bottom  
acting as anchors  
disappeared those actors  
lost their legacies  
diminished their Danegeld  
gone now their gold

**Eight Deer**  
*(1061-1113 & 2019)*  
  
each night  
they walk through my garden   
raid my bird feeders  
lusting for anything   
to keep out winter’s cold

raccoons   
leave claw-marks  
grubbing for grubs  
dug up like donut  
circles on my lawn

who captures whom  
when the full moon   
descends from the sky  
walks among men  
making them mad

Eight Deer   
visits me in dreams  
his sacrificed body  
preserved in winter’s  
salt and snow   
black and white his birth-bones  
skull emerging drawn by the sun

**Ogmore-by-Sea***(1106 & 1116 & 1960)*

white stone its castle  
tumbled into ruin  
stones in the river bed  
mirror its image  
wind-broken ripples  
shattered fragmented

mud flats and rocks  
stretch out horizontal  
distant the sea  
no swimmers out there  
where tides twist and pull  
Severn mud an obstacle

rock bathing instead  
wind-whipped bare bodies  
blasted with sand  
skimpy the clothing  
bikinis and shorts  
intrepid the wearers  
breathless young girls  
Welsh voices on the wind  
always the wind   
across rock across mud

dinosaurs stomped here  
where we fear to tread  
left tracks in that mud  
now fossils and rock  
creative these words  
not like those footprints  
left on a beach  
un-erased by time’s tide

breeze tickles the nostrils  
gulls batter the ears  
salt stings the tongue  
life on the margin  
a bargain a gift   
sweet in my memory  
her kiss on my lips

**By Any Other Name***hortus conclusus*  
*(1430-1432 & 2008 & 2017)*

don’t let them know  
your origins your secrets  
hide who and what you are  
lest wild dogs howl  
unholy ghosts prowl

a sister-spouse  
this garden enclosed  
walled behind whose house  
anonymous flowers  
roses in abundance  
set amongst thorns

sealed-up this fountain  
its well run dry  
dead leaves in the bowl  
shrunken petals  
echoes of children’s voices  
their faces hidden  
among last year’s leaves

**Ghost Dance***(1431-1463 & 1858-1958)*

ghosts that rattled  
silent now   
done their gallows dance  
grisly bones   
white beneath moonlight

beau-jangle tangle  
bones like trombones  
air-hole pierced   
high thigh pipe  
punchbowl flute

crows for cronies  
jolly roger flag  
flapped by black   
wing strokes

who-*hoo* the owl’s  
night time chant  
will seek mercy  
grant forgiveness

wind drops sighs its secret  
swan song singers  
no longer care  
their souls aloft   
winging away  
sea gulls drifting  
blue shifting air

**Trickster***(1520 & 1995-2001)*

bleached bones ancestral gods  
buried in basements no skeletons  
in cupboards just strip-jack-naked  
rib bones torn from dead jaguars

scrimshaw histories of dead heroes  
caged kings and dancing warriors  
a trickster riding vulture’s wings raiding  
sun fire every day warmth descending

everywhere eagles devouring humans  
hearts guts brains liver cancerous  
nothing sacred anymore bull’s eye  
eagle’s eye everything targeted

rabbit’s incisors gnawed moon’s  
pale cheese bringing death  
white skull of a balloon   
cycling the temple skyline

old gods still rule where volcanoes  
blow their tops in sulphuric anger  
demonic surge of a furious thirst  
human blood keeping sun in sky  
  
a sun-tanned feathered god flying  
upwards on a feathered magic carpet  
his wings touched heaven and flared  
fiery flames no Icharus with melted wax  
  
no song-bird no messenger   
just trickster descending with stolen fire

**Orphanage  
*(1562 & 1948 & 2005-2008)***

black crucifix  
ivory figurine  
white walls  
cowled heads  
downcast eyes

holy water  
damp fingertips  
genuflection  
sign of the cross  
*in nomine*

salt tang of tears  
wax-scented floors  
flip flop of leather  
sandals without socks

brown robes  
black skirts  
hair covered  
white wimples  
rattling of rosaries  
telling of beads

musty confessionals  
shaped and shamed  
by shadowy sins

time without end  
dustless and clean  
cleaner than consciences

**Night Light***(1578 -1591)*

quiet now the house  
staircase winds up  
the little wooden hill  
to Bedfordshire  
wait there in peace  
starlight will break  
its light-waves  
over mind and eyes

owls in the gloom  
twin moon-stare gleaming  
a who-knows-what  
what watches  
a godsend now  
this light house light  
its lightning lightening  
enlightening

sudden comfort  
this hand on my shoulder  
these fingers in my hair  
this midnight witch  
bewitching  
my twitching heart

**Omelet***(1603 & 2007 & 2015-2017)*

head tucked  
underneath night’s arm  
this old man   
patrols the parapet

full round rude  
detached silent moon  
an omelet sky-floating   
hanging silken in space

sea-lake-rive- side   
moon no longer climbs  
slides into deep water  
swims rippled to rocks  
lies drowning  
shadowed in shallows  
sky’s starry fishpond

to survive or not  
is that the question  
  
dreams whisper  
their secretive answer  
eaves-dropping owls  
flit dark over roof

***Île****(1604 & 2017-2019)*

a sea-stormed   
stone-ringed rock  
haven for nothing  
waiting for winter

frozen river frosted sea  
canvas tents scant   
protection from chill  
whining winds

crowded quarters  
sickness and scurvy  
giving no quarter  
sparing no body

maggot-filled tack  
weevils freeze-dried  
lesser of two evils  
bark-boiled with leather  
washed down with wine

pallid and thin  
scarecrow survivors  
bear signs of the cross  
ashen this Wednesday  
when warmer winds blow

**Remember, Remember***(1605 & 2015 & 2016-2019)*

eyeball to eyeball  
aquiline nose

swarthy oleaginous  
hands set to powder  
ready with lit match

midnight’s dark light  
hallowed halo   
moon-ring face

Iberian illusions  
brought to these islands  
via Flanders and France

powerful the pull  
Papal authority  
now stirred into action  
Protestant steaks  
burned at Catholic stakes  
and also *vice versa*

gunpowder treason  
people losing the plot  
thumbnail and rack   
spilling all he’s got

gallows await  
beyond Traitor’s Gate  
trap-door and noose  
a drop into space

**Polyphemus***(1613 & 1966 & 1992)*

Davey lamped Cyclops  
his one eye a sun  
caged glowing in his cave  
a songbird dispels shadows  
lights up his life

nocturnal the wolf-shape  
born from the dark  
teeth bared raised hackles  
panicked poor lambs  
lungs black and scarred

Orphic the hymn tunes  
everyone sings  
hope for the desperate  
fleeing on shorn wings  
hoping for sunshine  
and all that it brings

each cage that ascends  
a jail cell with bars  
lifelong each sentence  
black-wigged the judge  
each awaiting his fate  
secret each grudge

**Flicker**  
*(1613 & & 2015 & 2019)*

a watch spring  
this cuckoo-clock heart  
fully wound up  
time’s ticker flickering  
waiting to strike

black hole its beak  
poked the world’s fabric  
shredded into ribbons  
robin’s nest torn storm  
tossed on the lawn

constant this love  
its warm ashes lingering  
searing holes in shoe soles  
soul-sick with yearning  
bright bone-fires burning

metaphor and meaning  
real and imagined  
hammering on chimneys  
territorial flickers  
spring heartbeats drumming

uplifting wings  
light above darkness  
all creature comforts  
a spring need to nest  
an old man’s need to rest

**Footsteps**  
*(1616 & 1987 & 1989)*

where now  
their scathing hearts  
their word-hoard-wealth  
culture and history  
wrapped up in a word

books beckon  
let us now talk with our eyes  
to famous writers  
let their memories tuck  
a warm verbal scarf  
around our necks

long since dead  
they live in these thoughts  
 implanted like blossoms  
in our flowerbed minds

long may their footsteps lead  
stepping across printed pages  
cloud-clearing dreamy skies

**Cogito ergo sum***(1637 & 1812 & 1942-43 & 2019AD)*

I think therefore I am   
what I am but what is that

a man who borrows and buys  
who runs up false credit

runs away from unpaid bills  
and reads fake falsifications

or listens to such things on tv  
talk shows where noddies nod

and shake their heads or smirk  
and grin so much people can

even see them smile while   
talking on the telephone

I am at the center of my universe  
terra-centric heliocentric egocentric

a boiled egg this world cracked   
shell this starry firmament

and me with my silver spoon  
poised to dig into the world’s

riches and stuff them in my mouth  
as I lie in the ripped steaming

horse’s belly behind me a dead city  
the whole world flaring into flame

ahead of me this winter snow my fate  
an albatross noosed around my neck

**Paradise Lost**  
*(1667 & 1979 & 1998 & 2018)*

nobody answers  
bewitched by your knock  
ultimate betrayal  
front door locked

cold finger elegies  
devils descending  
rhythmic drumming  
imps falling like rain

knock again louder  
nobody replies  
ahoy there the house  
nobody’s inside  
memories flutter  
life’s dead butterflies

doorstep-marooned  
look around take stock  
ghosts watch from windows  
sockets open in shock  
that key in your pocket  
might unlock the lock

a mystical place  
between heaven and earth  
land of my fathers  
house of my birth

**Autograph Manuscript***(1603 & 1613 & 1627-28)*

hand-written words  
bones to hungry   
academic dogs  
gnawing the word-knots  
grammar’s gristle  
doubly chewed

ink-acid burns through  
page after fragile page  
*recto* and *verso*  
acidic ink   
meeting in the middle  
star-holed the paper   
held to the light

pin-holes they are   
sidereal time revealing   
a fragmented universe

parched for knowledge  
crisp pages crumble  
under finger and thumb  
when clumsily fumbled

eager this sinister lust  
words of wisdom drawn  
from bone-dry dust-jaws  
remains of writers  
long since dead

**Copperopolis***(1717 & 1804 & 1915)*

mercury madness  
running through brains  
lunatic fringes  
mountains of the moon  
lunar landscapes

scabs scratched  
wounds running raw  
skin blotched red  
eyes blurred  
twitching

wait a hundred years  
grass might grow back  
earth might give flowers  
bay waters might flow free

my father’s father coughs  
his lungs up  
bit by bit

gassed in the First World War  
he’ll never again know  
the scent of flowers  
smell sea-fresh air  
taste oysters from the bay

**Method & Madness***(1729 & 1955-1962 AD)*

song-bird voices  
rise in a dawn chorus  
hymns and arias  
waking the world  
sowing wild Quaker oats  
shaking bread from heaven

Frocester’s old tithe barn  
scything and tithing  
Gloucester a stomping ground  
fresh flowers blossoming  
where e’er he walks

a town mouse wandering open fields  
a dearly beloved  
moved into sundry places  
harvesting blackberries and apples  
gleaning summer seeds  
harvest storage for a country mouse  
ready for winter’s deadly dreams

he collected dusty parchments  
stitched old leaves together  
a many-colored coat he made  
amid autumn’s sheaves

words fell like rain  
formed lines on each page  
turned into tunes  
that bolstered his heart  
method in his madness  
a rage to shape the age

**Jack Pine at Tara Manor**  
(1770 & 1834 & 1917 & 1977 & 2018)

Tara Manor jack pine  
arm-waving Maritimer  
long-past sea-faring  
cult-haired declamation  
poem to a wilderness  
cultured  
cultivated now

you radiate disorder  
flustered  
clicking needles  
clustered  
knitting the wind

lop-sided  
radical forest church  
spired with birds  
crows’ nest crowned  
growing out extravagant

salted the air  
old man’s beard  
sprouting fresh bristles  
old salt sea salt

always a helping branch  
to point the time of day  
each rough-barked limb  
a friendly hand extended

every night  
your black bristling branches  
haul down the sun

**Zeitgeist 1***(1789 & 1807 & 1849 & 2016-2019)*

another song  
sung out of tune  
time passes by  
out of step

an absent mind  
stuck far away  
a theory that’s  
no longer there

heroes all  
priest and king  
poet and prophet  
their praises sing

time splitting  
a fragmented hair  
philosophers  
no longer care

enough no more  
time’s spirits now  
are not as heroic  
as they were before

**Dustbin Alley**  
*(1789 & 1845-1856 & 2015-2019)*

all the dustbins  
dancing down the street  
trying to achieve  
a spring time copulation  
to create more dustbins

you can’t have a revolution  
without dustbins  
dustbin … dustbins … dirty  
dusty dustbins

a sadistic way to look at  
basket-bins full of sawdust  
heading between potholes  
wind-blown bins  
a right St. Vitus’s Dance

him sitting next to me  
knitting a new red cap  
to place upon  
the old dictionary  
me standing  
on Gibraltar’s Rock so fair  
this square in Paris  
*Place de la Bastille*  
where tumbrils rattle  
over cobbles

Old Moll in a Moll’s Cap  
toothless fairy  
at a Goblin Party  
afraid of mushrooms  
scared of toadstools  
[*sick*]

**Nightmares***(1797 & 1873 & 2015)*

coming from nowhere  
plucked from nothing  
colored vowels   
a child’s first alphabet

dark recesses  
descending  
invading  
night’s starless  
unenlightened mind

silent owls  
flit in and out  
predatory beaks  
claws clutching  
calling for skull  
doors to open

sticky silk  
this spider-spun   
substance clutches  
clings like plastic  
gluing eyelids  
shadowy lives  
dance on walls  
night’s drugged   
dream cave

endless the gangplank  
stretched over  
troubled waters  
reason’s dream  
producing monsters  
dawn brings no release  
a season in hell

**Tongue-Tied***(2 May 1808 & 2016-2019)*

bottle tops unscrewed  
tighter than the tightest  
oyster refusing to open  
pointed knife and scissors

plastic this many layered  
onion-skin’s pliant defiance  
waging its guerrilla war  
against arthritic fingers

words tongue-twisted  
damning dark mouths  
white picket fences  
midnight the faces  
lightning the teeth

felonious figures  
grimy with grimaces  
Mother Hubbard’s  
cupboard empty hearts

robin redbreasts  
battering heads wings legs  
against stony cobbles  
if only stones could speak  
what stories they would tell  
this city this sunny square  
anywhere

**Stones**  
*(3 May 1808 & 2016-2019)*

stones once thrown  
can never be brought back  
nor words once spoken  
nor the bullet  
once released  
from musket or gun

here lies who knows who  
face down in the dust  
shirt soaked in blood  
body pierced with lead

nor water time nor love  
can ever flow back  
beneath that bridge

some kneel some pray  
some raise their eyes  
to uncaring skies  
every one of them dies  
shooters   
those waiting to be shot

even the soldiers  
reloading their guns  
never understand  
how time’s tide runs  
ebbs and then flows  
until everyone goes

this you  
lying face down  
on cobble stones   
well know

**Grand Finale***(1812 & 2015)*

world-viewed  
through a monocle  
stand to attention  
be-whiskered faces  
small narrow minds  
wine glasses raised

survey the battlefield  
muskets primed  
three shots a minute  
cities burning  
hamlets and villages  
gay colored uniforms  
dazzling decorations  
marvelous medals

balloons blooming  
gaudy their globules  
pins at the ready  
no flash but big bangs

tintinnabulations   
glorious martial music  
church bells ringing  
carillon and cannon  
magnificent the music

written cryptic  
recorded alive  
heard played seen  
in memory’s mind’s eye  
again and again

**Palsy***(1817 & 2010-2019)*

starts with a twist  
a palsied twitch a nod  
more movement

slow loss of grip  
bottle-tops won’t open  
things fall to the floor

twist and twitch  
turn into shakes  
bad vibes not good

words tripping  
on not off tongue  
stumbling over teeth

vitality extinguished  
a dullness in the eyes   
a cork-screw turning in

bland the writing  
both erased   
chalkboard and page

dry honey tunnels  
yellow calcined skull  
empty hexagonal cells

this lone bee searching  
for something special  
it can no longer find

**Starry Night 1**  
*(1829-1833 and 1889)*

Hokusai’s *Great Wave*  
crests on canvas  
reaches out meets  
greets swirling stars

Milky the Way  
walking overhead  
pacing parallel  
St. James’s Road  
leading to Compostela

continuing now  
this starry night  
its wave light linking  
star to star  
distorted by  
the artist’s inner eye

celestial fireworks  
Catherine wheels  
Roman candles  
spurting volcanic   
burning the night sky  
bright as bonfires  
carved into old bones

below it  
an idealized village  
its spire aspiring  
a whole world   
dreaming unknowing  
crowing cresting anew  
far from crow-filled  
corn fields  
resting in peace

**Starry Night 2***(1889 & 2019)*

last night I saw stars  
never thought to see them again  
first time in years  
a riot of bright lights  
no black spots floating  
no black bars blunting  
vision’s edge

just layer upon layer  
star fields like buttercups  
littering the sky  
I had forgotten their names  
forgotten how many existed  
immortalized in myth  
celebrated in song  
smiling frowning down

daylight broke waves  
an ocean of sunshine  
untying night’s knots  
sharp black and white memories  
shifting to corkscrews of color

two refreshing rain drops  
four times a day  
a never-to-be-forgotten face  
seen once again in close up

**Explosion**  
*(1893 & 1917 & 1941)*

a rainy day  
things went wrong  
traffic stalled  
stuttered in streets  
cobbling cobbles

a lack of subtlety surrounded  
these white buildings  
no banker’s arch back then  
just windowed balconies  
torn apart in the blast  
later black-clad widows  
survivors of what exactly

today  
the café is full  
men and women  
damp-haired  
sleepy eyed  
gray the drab day  
sleep-walking through  
anonymous lives

black mushrooms of umbrellas  
grey dynamite dust  
reflected  
shop windows  
pavement puddles  
rain and more   
piddling its cats and dogs  
onto wet pavements

pitchforks  
spearing down  
never let your brolly  
out of your hand  
they say though  
it never rains in the bars

**Samaritan***(1890 & 1966-69 & 1919-71)*

I lived with him  
he treated me well

to him   
I was the other  
yet he fed me   
when I hungered  
gave water   
when I ran dry

I fell ill   
he cared for me  
nursed me back   
to health

he taught me  
his language  
culture history  
traditional skills

he loved me  
never forced me   
to forget myself   
and be like him

he made me  
what I am today  
a discerner  
between  
light and dark  
yet always the other

**Shipwreck**  
*(1914 & 1994-1996 & 2014)*

they came for the burial  
more civilized than  
ritual burning

bodies on the beach  
black and white frames  
scarred for all time

stark their weird  
bones bleached  
among sea-weed

relentless actions  
wind sandpaper sea  
tear-filled skies

high tide mark  
carapace charred wood  
rusted iron

sea-polished skulls  
long dead skeletons  
slow lick of tides

one by one  
victims gathered up  
held in one last hug

empty coffins  
stood in rows  
waiting to be filled

done the deed now  
coffins filled  
lids nailed down

**Entrenched***(1914 & 1918 & 2017-2009)*

scars will close  
but never go away   
wounds so deep  
blood just wants out

pop went the weasel  
so many good men  
manning the lines  
going over the top  
never to be seen again  
  
bayonets fixed   
broken ranks charging  
charging unbroken wire  
shredded into rags  
flags of flesh

dry rattle of bones  
bone-shaker the wind  
mud-filled potholes  
frozen over at night

wandering shells  
lullabies of strife  
rage against friends  
gouged early from life

**Operation Merciless**  
*(1916 & 2008-2009 & 2019)*  
  
we raise our eyes  
to silent skies  
sing hymns and arias  
“Is anybody up there?”  
another brick another wall  
  
lambs to the slaughter  
bleating as we march  
we must do our duty  
our bleeding hearts  
plead for release  
  
this earthly bondage  
a bandage over our eyes  
decimated we will be  
one in ten of us  
  
ten percent of everything  
we own docked  
a spaniel’s tail  
a boxer’s ears  
I cry out why  
as I lie on this gurney  
hoping to hell  
I will not die

**Chronos***(700 BC & 1933)*

tub-thumped these clouds  
grey-framed skylights  
gathering sky

corralled on coral  
this ship’s figure-head  
mouth open to speak   
a foghorn  
her bare breasted   
Scylla & Charybdis  
lighthouse lights

goat-legged beach-comber  
wandering a lug-worm beach  
avoiding those places  
where the sea-weed

water the father  
earth the mother  
false union  
engendering an egg   
waves breaking over  
their broken marriage

cyclical the sickle  
ticking rocks to sand  
time personified

**Joy & Love**  
*(1936 & 1969)*

sunbathers sunbathe  
swimmers don’t swim  
except for one silly fool  
in a clear patch of water  
swept clean by the current  
towed under by the undertow

swimmer fights back  
goes against the flow  
tires so swiftly   
raises his arms  
throws up goes under   
comes up throws up

a beach ball thrown  
misses the target  
kicked with more accuracy  
a soccer ball heavier  
lands by his side  
he grasps it hangs on  
kicking more slowly

sun-bathers sprint   
across sand to the shore  
linked hands a life-line  
reaching out through the waves  
to rescue the swimmer   
no longer fighting back

summer-sun kisses  
resuscitation  
sun-bathers victorious  
this great chain of being  
restoring humanity  
sweet victory of man

**Rushing Roulette**  
(1789 & 1936-39 & 2019)

yesterday's   
visual banquet  
bluebell primrose  
clover and cowslip  
gone all gone

cuckoo survives  
emerges every hour  
calls from cuckoo clock  
skylarks lie buried   
within vinyl grooves  
no more to rise  
unless the magician   
waves his wand

who loads the gun  
points the pistol  
pulls the trigger  
fires at lions tigers  
elephants leopards   
pushing them off the ark  
sliding them into oblivion

soul’s dark night  
land’s desolation  
all covered by rising seas  
Noah spins his wheel  
steering space-ship earth  
humanity’s house-boat  
onward into who knows what  
a roulette wheel of fortune  
onward she goes  
where she’ll stop  
nobody knows

messieurs et mesdames  
les jeux sont faitsrien ne va plus

**Courbet***(1866 & 1944 & 1974 & 2014)*

a deep moist cave  
moss-grown cavernous

casting from night to day

asynchronous memories  
ascent descent blood scent  
ejection rejection

tumbling down falling  
insidious angel  
no room at the inn  
trapped no escape

anonymous swarm  
black-winged devil flies  
cloud tormented red skies

factory and furnace   
foundering foundries  
mysterious birth myth  
turned into lies

virgin berth  
borne with tweezers  
 untouched the canal  
from dark to light

**Eden 1***(1945 & 1956 & 2019)*

mushrooms  
cremini oysters pearl  
love them

love them not  
garlic mushrooms  
flash-fried  
in atomic frying pans

nor magic mushrooms  
nor radioactive fungi  
spores parachuted down  
mushroom grey  
clouds

built this berth canal  
an umbilical cord  
birthing oceanic links  
not division  
nor destruction

Eden’s Garden  
a walk in the park  
an earthly utopia  
closed to many  
open for a few

lost now  
that projected paradise  
not much room  
four manoeuvres  
all things vanished in a flash  
horizon’s banana  
split in an instant  
everything lost

**De[con]struction**  
*(1945 & 2012 & 2019)*

daylight regenerates  
a stuttering roar  
life bursting into noise

ladders and supplies  
earth to sky rise  
verbal angels

loud voices  
barn dance on raw rafters  
uncovering hidden layers  
replacing worn-out tiles

ascending descending  
Jacob wrestling with  
his heavenly burden

no crows on patrol  
cats long gone to ground  
chaos and commotion

leave taking  
a ritual shaking   
rough stained hands

a brave new world   
rebuilt by three   
less than wise men  
in less than three days

**Swans  
at the   
Vetch Field** *(1950-1955)*

Saturday afternoon  
leaving the farm  
following the swans

white their plumage  
sharp shooting eyes  
folded angels’ wings  
black-booted feet  
paddling urgent  
driving them on

skilled and silky  
each swift lunge  
capable of breaking  
arm or leg

all white ghosts  
those swans  
bodies and spirits  
their earthly dance done  
long since gone  
flown to the sky

anonymous  
constellations spread  
milky feathers  
winged like swans

**Eden 2**  
*(1956)*

wet rags of dirty washing   
hang on the Siegfried   
line’s barbed wire

flesh rent ripped  
broken-glass anger bottled  
blood-mottled concrete

bones mixer-crushed  
blood sacrifice a keep-safe  
ash-cross camouflage   
stretched sketched  
over grime and crime

heavy the spike-toll  
rooted the rock  
chips off old blocks  
these flint flakes flying

faceless this sphinx  
inscrutably smiling  
over Egyptian sands

ample ammunition  
silent beneath the apple tree  
flat-footed lame-duck walk  
goose-stepped post the expulsion

walled now this garden  
to lock what in or out

**Survivor Guilt***(1960-69 & 2015-2019)*

in spades  
my friend  
you survived  
but to what end

three brothers   
abandoned at birth  
brief minutes spent  
upon this earth

questions float  
butterflies bright  
angry wasps and bees  
stinging on sight

you pack your bags  
thinking to start anew  
but when you unpack   
the past still follows you  
those sibling spirits  
live in you

you discover new   
and empty places  
but you fill   
them with their names  
but not their faces

**Querencia**  
*(29 August 1947 & 2018-2019)*

heavy snow all winter  
starting in November  
continuing through

neighbor plowed us out  
arriving as each storm left  
sometimes he came in for tea

we became good friends  
now he is moving out west  
to be with his grand-kids

when he moves we may  
be forced to sell up and go  
winter snow too much for us  
  
*querencia*  
it’s a bull-fighting thing  
there’s a spot in the bull ring  
where each bull chooses  
to make his last stand  
  
it’s his chosen place to die  
as this is mine

**That Wall**  
*(1953 & 2008 & 2017)*

build that wall  
top it with wet cement  
place bottles in a row  
sign it date it  
carve the barrier in stone

when the cement sets  
break those bottles  
impenetrable barriers

walled now this garden  
its interior holy of holies  
a paradise for the chosen few  
peace and roses only a dream  
glimpsed from the outside

a climber climbs  
rips flesh shreds clothes  
mottles concrete with blood  
wet washing hung in fleshy strips  
a red flag now this Siegfried line  
its shattered barbed-glass  
its see-through brittle anger  
excluding all intruders

walled this garden  
this monument   
my grandfather’s last clause  
to block what out  
to lock who in

**Al-Anon***(1978-1987 AD)*

waking in the night

wandering the house

banging into chairs  
tables walls and doors

snorting snoring

naked on the floor  
an empty bottle  
held teddy-bar tight  
heaving chest  
whisky-wallowed carpet  
soaked in vomit

borrowed money  
bare fingers  
rings and watch   
pawn shop IOUs

a leaden albatross  
drags foam-tipped wings  
 shell-shocked the body  
amniotic waters

cockle-shell hero  
rocking on endless seas  
sea-sick-green   
each morning  
reborn each day  
sunlight and stench

**Spirit Animals***(1980)*

spirit animals  
drawn from your body  
holed up in your skull  
nesting in your heart

a budgie bouncing  
between bars  
chirpy cheeky  
full of energy

a puppy  
eyes closed sleepy  
snuggling for warmth  
seeking solace  
teat’s warm comfort

a hibernating bear  
nocturnal adventurer  
soon to lumber out of slumber  
stolid slow solid

spirit animals   
admirable their beauty  
sacred their secrets

**Last Kiss***(1987)*

swift-flowing   
arterial blood  
irrigating  
flesh and skin

deserted room  
filled with dust  
filtered onto flowers  
dry silk rustling  
artificial leaves  
electric ceiling light  
barren the bulb  
  
wind-blown ashes  
dehydrated lips  
drawn taut   
a last kiss  
brushed brazen  
across my face

waves over rocks  
a grinding down  
shingled pebbles  
turning into sand

**Genie in a Bottle***(1987-1989)*  
unable to escape  
grim secrets  
skeleton dancing  
stored in dark cupboards

harsh the harness  
strung the strings  
silent the dance steps  
aerial the puppet  
  
shady the shadows  
lurking in labor  
never aborted  
awaiting rebirth

hidden the hideous  
dormant the debris  
door-matted and dangerous  
dogged and dogmatic

tight the velvet fist  
inside the iron glove  
that pounds   
the Sunday breast

*mea culpa  
mea maxima culpa*

but it was never  
ever my fault

**Dark Night 2***(May, 2015)*

candlelight   
stole the moon’s halo  
moth sputtering to its death  
this owl high-flying

dish and spoon   
dance  
cats and dogs  
rain golden  
milky the way  
earth’s   
thirst is quenched

blind hands  
deaf fingers  
no longer deft  
voices breaking   
waves over  
an unstrung   
guitar of sound  
  
the cat tears out   
mouthfuls of hair  
swallows  
spits out a hairball  
swallows   
steal it for a nest  
  
fire will one day  
claim us all

**Dark Night 3***(June-July, 2015 AD*

dark the whale-belly  
instant night  
machinery whirring  
a clockwork universe  
suddenly set on fire

raised the iron bed  
heavenwards  
winking stars  
radiating bright  
spot-light pin-pricks

clicks and whirrs  
metallic sounds  
grinching of gears  
fear in every breath  
  
no Christmas this  
something stolen  
beaten battered  
painless at first  
bashed out of sight

yet sacred   
this pilgrimage  
this temple where  
masked men and women  
always wear white

**White Night***(2015)*

measure it   
teaspoons of time

darkness a liquid  
silver-star-stirred

doze for ninety  
wake up and pee

go back to sleep  
repeat the above

count fingers sheep  
blessings scars shadows  
until three a.m.

this is the hump  
uphill so far  
downhill past four

moon   
shadow on wall  
light under door

wake up to water  
drink it with pills

**Baby  
it’s cold outside***(2016-2019)*

damaged and diminished  
no longer great but grating  
gritting grinding worn-out teeth  
stamp collection of small islands  
seeking annihilation

no leopard no lion a cat’s paw   
drifting a rudderless craft   
without captain or sails  
crew abandoning ship   
ruling no waves  
  
a disunited kingdom now  
untied not united  
Freudian slip  
so many between cup   
and shipwrecked lip

Tug Turmoil towing  
drifting and shiftless  
a common weal of festering  
failures and faithlessness  
flighty flying enterprises

an old lady threads needles  
a wheel-chaired cripple  
stealing through the streets  
stooping to conquer  
a hollow centre that won’t hold  
though she can’t stand up straight

**Fire Storm***(2017)*

forests burning  
can’t see wood for smoke  
dust ashes piggy-backing  
clouds sweeping down

smoky greyish walls   
a tall ship’s canvas  
mushrooming  
a mountain mounting  
forked thunder skies

westward eastward  
firmament afire   
rising clouds   
chilling water to ice

hailstones  
big as moth balls  
one in each hand  
a gigantic moth

down the sky’s  
steep ladder they tumble  
star-struck windshields  
flowers white-scythed

hay wain this thunder  
rumbling its tumbril  
a guillotine this hail  
chopping things down

**Zeitgeist 2***(23 March 2019)*

broken-winged I batter at books  
peck at pages shuffle my feet  
each word a thorn   
plucked from my heart  
a beam extracted from my eye  
a playing card bleeding from pen

lady luck spins the wheel  
each poem a lottery ticket  
making its own way  
forging my fortune

I long for the agent who’ll sell   
film rights to my sonnets to some   
Hollywood director  
for so much money  
I’ll no longer want to write

watch on wrist   
my life ticks by  
measured by the time of sky  
*semper mecum* metro-gnome  
ticking stanzas till I die

**Carnival***29 March 2019 AD  
12 April 2019 AD  
25 June 2019 AD*

house of cards  
jacks and jokers   
twos and threes  
running wild  
vacant faces  
loaded wallets  
crowded rooms

dry bones  
wizened teeth  
tongue-tied cheeks   
feet shuffling

tiny corkscrew  
worms gnawing  
through what passes  
as a brain  
  
high-wire tumble  
into this tumbril  
wheel-of-fortune-barrow   
plentiful cornucopia  
copycat horn of luck

clock faces blank  
no numbers no hands,  
egg-white circles   
stuttering uttering  
cluttering   
flustered minds   
meaningless circus sounds

**Aye, aye***(8 April 2019)*

I am my eye  
this eye  
my left eye

rapid heartbeat  
shallow breathing  
tautness in chest  
this is all about  
my eye

frozen with gel  
disinfected  
bathed in iodine  
it nestles in a nest   
loitering with intent   
within a blue tent  
filled with oxygen

three bright lights  
surgeon’s fingers  
surgical instruments  
moving shapes  
this eye my eye  
sees them draw near  
then fade away

machines hum  
laser beams bite  
extract then implant  
more liquids  
face patted dry  
dark glasses appear  
smiles all around

this eye  
is not an eye  
because you see it  
it’s an eye  
because it  
once more sees you

**Senseless  
*(****19 April 2019 AD)*

taste my words  
lick them from your lips  
feel the roll of your tongue  
creating saliva  
vanilla vocabularies  
lemon librettos  
gooseberry grammar  
cranberry choruses

diminished are those  
cheated of their senses  
who cannot sample  
savoury flavours  
nor taste the aroma   
April flowers  
  
cancer perhaps  
chemo-therapy  
Parkinson’s stealing  
memories away  
childhood tangs  
chocolate unwrapped  
a Christmas orange peeled

aren’t you pleased  
your taste buds  
are still teased   
by such presents

grieve for all you’ve lost  
all you are losing  
sooner or later  
everything will go  
last dregs of meaning  
draining from your cup

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Roger Moore

La Torre de Juan Abad

Island View

New Brunswick

E3E 1A2

Canada

**McAdam Railway Station**

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trove of information that unlocks the doors to the past. These are doors which they open with the keys of their knowledge. They are also dedicated to Elsie Grey Carroll and Frank Carroll who shared their intimate knowledge of the station with me, and Geoff Slater, inventor of line-painting and the muralist whose work at McAdam opened my eyes to the beauties of the station.

**Introduction**

Geoff Slater invited me to see the mural of his painting at McAdam Railway Station on Sunday, 28 April, 2019. Since then, I have travelled to McAdam on four more occasions to witness the progress of the mural and to talk with Elsie Grey Carroll, Frank Carroll, and Geoff Slater.

These poems are the direct result of those conversations. All three told me stories about McAdam Railway Station and their words echoed through me. Each of these poems grows from a specific tale or memory offered by one of those mentioned above. In addition, some of these poems have grown from my own experience of McAdam and from what I have witnessed there. I also accessed the web page of McAdam Railway Station and used their notes to expand my own knowledge of this National and Provincial Historic site, a designated Heritage Railway Station.

On 30 June 2019, Geoff Slater’s mural was unveiled at McAdam Railway Station in a public ceremony. These poems are for all the volunteers who have worked so hard to develop and maintain McAdam Railway Station, one of Canada’s architectural masterpieces.

**Call Girl**

“She came down from Montreal  
to look after all the railway workers.  
We called her the Call Girl.”  
The men in the room sit up  
and pay attention. The women  
look rather expectant.

“She was a great worker,  
performed her duties willingly.  
Up at four in the morning,  
out into the streets,   
knocking on the men’s doors,  
waking them up for work  
with her morning call.

We called her the Call Girl  
because it was her vocation.  
she was called to call.”

**Fourteen**

“Fourteen years old, he was.  
Left school to work at the station.  
Pushed brooms, did the cleaning.  
  
Walked into the men’s washroom  
early one morning to give it a clean.  
Found a man hanging there, dead.

Took out his pocket knife,  
cut him down, called for help.

I met him at the station  
when he was ninety-three.

He told me all about it,  
shrunk in size he did  
as he told his story, shrunk

until he was the same size   
he was at fourteen.”

**Gymnast**Balance beam,  
not wooden, polished,  
four inches wide,  
diminished now:  
 this old, rusty rail.  
  
Mount, split leap,  
back hand spring,  
full turn, round off,  
somersault,  
back tuck, cartwheel,  
preparing for dismount …  
  
… concentrating so hard  
she never felt  
the tremble beneath her feet,  
didn’t see or hear  
the oncoming train …

**A Three-Year Old Girl**

“I often see her, walking around,  
standing in a doorway,   
looking into a room.

She’s very curious  
but never says a word.  
Doesn’t ask questions.

She’s not scary at all,  
like some of the others.  
  
There are rooms here   
where visitors won’t go  
if they’re alone.  
  
But they mean no harm,  
these broken ghosts.

They’re lost, nowhere   
else to go, I guess.  
Just missed the last train."

**Defenestration**“It’s a funny word,  
I had to look it up.

When I first saw the window,  
I wanted to go up to it,  
to stand there, to look out.

She must have been desperate.  
Rejected by her lover,  
who knows what state she was in.

She went up there one morning,  
opened the window,  
and threw herself out.

The word *defenestration*?  
Oh, it’s from the Latin:  
*de* means out from,

*fenestra* is the window,  
*fenêtre* in French.  
She just opened the window  
and threw herself out.”

**Master Clock**“It came from the Empress Hotel,  
in Victoria. It won’t work here,  
I’m afraid. It’s the clock  
that runs all the clocks   
and keeps them on time.  
  
It needs a network.  
ten, twenty, thirty clocks  
that it can control  
from its central circuit,  
keeping them all on time.  
  
Just like the railway.   
The trains were always on time.  
Except, just like this clock,  
they don’t run anymore.”

**Volunteers**Only the old in body  
and young at heart know  
how to cook like this.  
  
The soda fountain stools,  
the horseshoe bar  
from the old Royal York,  
  
they merit only the best.  
Simplicity rules. Stews  
like grandma made them,  
  
lining the ribs,  
defying damp and cold.  
Railway pies, recipes  
  
a hundred years old, or more.  
bread rolls that melt  
into the butter knife,  
  
coffee to kill for. No wonder  
the old ghosts walk around  
feeding off cooking smells,  
  
sad, gentle eyes, watching us  
as we eat, refusing to leave.

**Shunting**So many memories  
cling like hobos  
to freight trains.Tracks as always,  
sleepers, steel rails  
an optical illusion,  
  
joining in the distance  
where the miles  
between now and then  
  
knit themselves together  
and we are young once more,  
riding the rails,  
  
dreaming of towns  
beyond this town,  
dreaming of the future,  
not the past.

**S.O.S.**“Dozing in the cab, I was.  
Smelt a different smoke.  
It wasn’t my engine’s.  
  
Looked around.   
Saw flames. One, two,  
three houses on fire.

Steam was up. Yessir.  
Three short hoots I gave.  
Three long. Three short.

S.O.S. Mayday. Mayday.   
S.O.S. S.O.S. Kept going   
till lights came on.

People running. Leaving homes.  
Jumped out of the cab.  
Ran out to help them.

They thanked me.  
Said I had saved their lives.  
What else could I have done?”

**Hospital**“I was here the day they  
took the hospital away.   
I gave some writing workshops.  
Teachers upset, students in tears,  
everywhere, fear and despair.  
‘I was born in that hospital.’  
‘My grandfather died there.’  
‘Where will my child be born?’  
  
I helped them write down  
their memories and fears,  
their hopes and dreams.  
My lesson plans vanished  
when life’s rising tide broke   
into their daily living  
and opened new wounds.  
  
A weakened community,  
diminished by its loss,  
they took me into their hearts.  
Their loneliness wrapped me.  
They wrote down memories,  
tear stains on every page.”

**Faces**

“White at windows  
when trains pass through   
in June on their way  
to summer and sand.

Wind-tousled, tanned  
at summer’s end  
returning home to  
Boston and Montreal.

I remember them  
waving their hands,  
flickering white hankies  
as they went by.

This station is a ghost train  
that travels through time  
instead of space. Stand  
still as silent stone. Wait.

Look: there’s someone,  
waving at us now  
from that window  
on the second floor.”

**Murals**Painting a mural,  
inside, interior  
wall, knowing it will  
stand time’s test.  
  
Viaduct broken,   
a tumbled engine,  
Canadian workers,  
railwaymen all,  
some from Macadam,  
pebbled the floor,  
handrail, radiator  
camouflaged for war,  
part of the painting.  
  
Depart from the station.  
Turn right. Straight ahead,  
flaked peeling paint.  
So sad, this outside   
mural, exposed to winter’s  
snow, frost, winds, and ice.  
So vulnerable, so ephemeral.  
Such a butterfly-on-a rock   
summer, over in a day.

**Tracks**“Put your fingertips on the rail,  
see if you can feel its pulsing beat.  
  
No heart rail rhythm now. No tremble.  
Kneel. Put your ear on cold metal:  
  
nothing but silence. No murmur,  
however distant. Blackfly gather.  
  
No-see-ums flit. The train track’s  
buzz of harmony is lost and gone,  
  
replaced by careless nature. Listen  
to the wind whistling in the woods,  
  
hark to spring sounds, so subtle,  
grass growing, rust accumulating,  
  
sleepers turning over in their graves,  
silent, rotting beneath forgotten rails.”

**Mannequins**“He startles the unaware, that man by   
the door, in uniform, with his youthful   
looks and old-fashioned peaked cap,  
  
fingers poised by his silver watch chain  
ready to pull out his Waltham pocket watch  
and check the time against the master-clock.  
  
Two ladies wait in the waiting room.  
One wears winter robes of red and black  
while the other wears velvety green. Both  
  
are motionless, one seated, one standing. Yet  
if you watch them from a corner of one eye,  
you will see shadowy gestures as their lips move.  
  
Overnight they have changed into summer  
clothes, gauzy, almost see-through, flowery  
patterns, light-weight wedding boots, laced,  
  
restful, cool, thin-soled. ‘Are you for real?’  
I ask the standing one, for a joke. When she   
nods and winks, chills settle on the room.”

**Artifacts**Mind, dreams, pond: all dredged to make  
artifacts emerge from the depths.  
  
Bottles: embossed Coca-Cola, applied color  
Seven-Up, Sussex Mineral Springs,  
treasures hauled from the pond’s  
jewelled hoard by local divers.  
  
In the news stand, now restored,   
a display of Ganong’s chocolates  
offers extinct pink and white mints,   
beloved by those who hand them out  
on flattened palms to expectant horses.  
  
Hat boxes stand in the hall. A coal scuttle,  
still full of high-grade railway coal,  
hides behind its protective glass.  
  
Each room contains a treasure trove,   
a piece in in time’s jig-saw puzzle,   
a footprint soon to be lost unless ageing  
minds are unlocked to bear witness  
to so much that fades away, as ephemeral   
as timetables, tourists, tickets, and trains.

**Clackety-clack**Stopped carriages make no noise, even when  
the steam engine grunts, groans, and puffs out  
white smoke, cinder, and ash. Thirsty, it drinks  
noisily from the nearby pond. Station master  
  
waves his green flag. Porter cries “All aboard,”  
opening and closing doors. Young children  
race back to their seats, press faces against glass.  
The train lurches forward with a loud choo-choo.  
  
Huffing and puffing it hauls those carriages  
clickety-click, clickety-clack, down the track.  
Telegraph poles walk past windows, wires  
dipping and rising. The train speeds up.  
  
Clickety-clack, clickety clack, the wheels  
move over the tiny gaps between the rails   
with a rhythmic sound that, once heard,  
will never be forgotten. Clackety-clack.  
  
City and suburb fade into the distance. Sun  
shine, summer and sea coast beckon. We’re  
going on our summer vacation and we’re  
never coming back. Clackety-clack-clack-clack.

**Antique Desk**Piebald where the original oak grain  
shows pale through stained, cracked  
darker wood, wrinkled with age, hard  
working utility transformed into beauty.  
  
Secrets everywhere: pigeon-holes for papers  
long-since disappeared, tag-ons for tickets,  
a forgotten busyness haloed in hallowed  
wood. We probe for secret compartments,  
  
for a finger hold, a clasp, something hidden  
that will give us entry to the magic lands  
such desks conceal. No locks, no keys,  
no false drawer bottom, no early ending  
  
with a panel hidden behind the wood.  
For over a hundred years this desk  
has laboured. Now it rests in peace.  
If the drawers those tourists leave open  
were only tongues, what tales they could tell.

**Spider Webs**Strands a-tremble,  
 moth a fluttering,  
spider a-scuttling,  
 bind, inject, wrap,  
not in that order.  
  
Struggles slow, cease,  
 until movement stills,  
web falls silent,  
 its siren voice  
quieted until next time.  
  
History’s horror movie:  
 watch it again and again  
in summer re-runs,  
 predator and victim,  
nothing changes.  
  
Time devours all,  
 turns all to dust.  
This earth, a mote  
 afloat in sunshine,  
the sun spider  
 sat there, waiting.

**Juke Box**

When guides and visitors go,  
the turnkey appears and opens  
all the locked interior doors.

The Fairy Godmother waves  
her magic wand and the juke box  
turns into a ballroom band.

One by one, the shadows come  
alive and turn into flesh and blood  
once more. They descend from  
the hotel on the second floor  
and dance in the dining room.

Midnight comes and goes.  
Candles flicker. Shadows waltz,  
strip-the-willow, climb the great  
St. Bernard as Sir Roger de  
Coverley smiles discreetly and takes  
the hand of the sweet, young girl  
down from Montreal on summer  
holiday. You know how one step  
can lead to another, and behold  
how exotic is a new-fangled tango.

**Instant Recall**Why do they come back here, year after year?Is it to track down childhood’s elusive dreams?  
Who knows? Yet McAdam is a magnet,  
its railway station drawing travelers in  
to wander, gossip, take a photo or two,  
selfies now, with mannequins and scuttles.  
  
Perhaps they come here to remember the old  
days, so much better than these, when they  
could stand up straight, walk, free from pain,  
old age’s baleful bane. Railway smells release  
the iron horse that pants through ageing brains.

We recall steam engines, their winter warmth,  
coal-fires, flames flickering in the grate, fore-  
telling the future, and our fate. Never underrate  
the steam engine’s power, the smell of smoke,  
the hiss of steam, that well-remembered urge  
to stick our heads out of the window, to feel  
the wind on our faces, to taste cinder, smoke, grit.  
  
Paradise all of this, for those who traveled every  
where by train, or rode the rails, or listed engines,   
recording their numbers, timed them on a wrist  
watch to see if they arrived early, or set out late.

**Keys**“Thirty-four doors and a key for each door,  
sometimes two, and that’s only for the outside.   
No master keys back then. A key for each lock,  
if you please, and each door locked every night.  
It’s still quite the task, a real responsibility. They   
kept a turnkey, in those days, a full-time employee  
whose job was to keep the keys and remember  
which key fitted each door. Was it a double turn,

a single turn, a dead-bolt? The turnkey knew them  
all. He also understood the interior doors and had  
to wind the clocks, open and close cabinets, cloak  
rooms, kitchens, desks, cupboards, drawers.

Others kept their own keys, but he was the key  
to everything. A locksmith too, he could remove  
locks, take them apart, grease and replace them,  
cut keys, no job for a flunky. It took a smart man  
to be a turnkey. He needed training, patience,   
skills, knowledge, strength. Huge carriage keys:   
he knew how to look after them as well. Have you   
seen the size of those old, brass carriage keys?”

**Vision**

Vision appears from nowhere,  
holds you in its hands,  
molds you like putty,  
play dough, or plasticine,  
till you bend to its will.

Is it a conundrum  
like chicken or egg,  
the final product  
laid out in all its details?  
Or is it a process  
step by step along the way?  
Even the artist cannot always say.

Maybe it happens each day  
in a different way.  
A power descending,  
an angel entering  
a vacant mind as if it were  
an empty room.  
Or maybe it’s Lorca’s *duende*,its spirit alive and well   
and thriving in McAdam.

**City Camp**

“Can we come in?” “May we visit?”  
“Can we look around?” “Of course.”  
Tourists, travelers on a day trip, curious,   
with time to kill, asking the usual questions.  
Volunteer guides, packed with information,  
walk with them from room to room.   
Outside, tourists slap bare arms, necks,  
mosquitoes, black fly, always the blackfly.

“McAdam, McAdam. This is McAdam.”  
The train shuffles to a halt. Children open  
carriage doors, climb down, run to the central  
building, choosing one of its thirty-four doors.  
Inside: newsagent, Ganong chocolates, soda  
bar, dining room, snacks, drinks, everything  
a city child needs on holiday. Hotel above.  
A day room booked. Much better for first-class  
tourists than the common waiting room.   
Better, an overnight stay. Take the next train.  
Refreshments, a break in the journey. Porters  
ferrying suitcases upstairs, stacking luggage.  
“Quite nice.” “So primitive, my dear. NQOC.”

Outside, the children slap bare arms, necks,  
mosquitoes, black fly, always the blackfly.

“Is this McAdam?” “No, sorry. It’s City Camp.”  
“Where’s McAdam’s Camp?” A finger points   
to a faint trail leading through thick dark woods.   
“How long?” “Couple of days, on foot. Depends.”

Woodsmen all, they pick up their packs  
ignoring the blackfly as they walk.

**Q. E. D.   
  
Problem:**  
  
A thriving community. A railway station.  
Trains running. Railwaymen working.

Trains, tickets, and tracks. Tourists.  
  
**Subtraction:**  
  
Now take away trains, tourists, station hotel.  
Add unemployment. Watch young people leave.  
They go to Fredericton, Montreal, Toronto,  
Calgary, Edmonton, settling out West.  
  
Watch the station, abandoned, crumble.  
Now take away hospital, school. Threaten to bus  
remaining children to Harvey or beyond.  
No doctors. No teachers. No jobs. No money.  
A dwindling population. Town diminished.

Watch the community leave, grow old, despair.

**Solution:**Heal the community. Bring back jobs.   
Rebuild. Invite new people to be citizens.  
Offer them land. Benefits. Sow new seeds.  
Apply nutrients. Watch them grow. Restore  
the railway station. Heal old wounds. Bring  
the people back together. Restore their pride.  
Their belief. Tap their memories. Allow them  
to tell their stories. To rebuild their town.  
  
Easier said than done.  
But McAdam did it.

*Quod erat demonstrandum.*

**Tales from Tara  
*in   
a manor of speaking***

**Roger Moore**

**©**

**2019**

For

Geoff & Ginger  
&  
Lucinda & Shelley

without whose help, support,  
and encouragement,  
this would never have happened.

**Once upon a time …**

Once upon a time, there was a man who carried a large round rock upon his back. It was huge and heavy, like the globe that Atlas carried. One day he felt tired, laid that rock upon the beach at Bocabec, waded out into the Bay of Passamaquoddy, and was never seen again. He left the rock there for my friend to find. My friend called it Magic Rock, but what he did with it and thought about it is his tale to tell, not mine. I must tell another story.  
 Once upon a time, St. Patrick arrived in Ireland. He celebrated Easter on the hill above Tara, the royal palace of the ancient Irish kings. Then he walked down the hill to their palace and tried to convert them to Christianity. But that is another story, and it is not mine to tell, even though the name of Tara was given to the red and white house of another friend of mine, red and white, like the Red Hand of Ulster, and the dogs and cattle of Ireland. But that’s not my story.  
 Once upon a time, a rich and powerful man came to St Andrews and built a summer home on the hill above the bay. Later, another friend of mine purchased it, painted it red and white, and turned it into a wonderful home for guests and visitors. I wanted to tell her story, but it’s hers to tell, not mine. I can only tell my own story.  
 Once upon a time, my friend who lives on the shore at Holt’s Point, walked on the beach outside his house and found an enormous, metal ball, weighing about two hundred kilos. It was almost as big as Magic Rock. It lay there, on the shore waiting for some one to find it. My friend found it, went home, drove back to the beach in his truck, winched the ball onto the flatbed, and brought it back to his house. What he did with it is not my tale to tell. I must tell my own story.  
 So, what is my story? What tales do I have the right to tell? And how shall I begin my tale? Well, once upon a time, in Pen-y-bryn, a white and red brick house on the Gower Peninsula, in Wales, a little boy almost wasn’t born … and that is my story … but I will not tell it here and now.   
 Instead, I’ll tell you another tale, and it begins in the online courses of the Creative Writing School of the University of Toronto, my *alma mater*, so to speak … my *alma mater* … but that’s another tale, too, and I won’t be telling that one here either.

**Thin Red Line**

How do you paint a story or tell the story of a painting? My friend sits before his canvas and traces a thin white line, here, there, everywhere, between bright colors. A river delta, it has a single beginning and a single end, but here it meanders, this way, that way, bifurcating, never crossing. This white line is his narrative, his tale to tell, and I cannot tell it for him, because he tells it in paint.  
 I recall the painting in my grandfather’s house: *The Thin Red Line.* It shows Wellington’s regiments, drawn up at Waterloo, forming a thin red line at the edge of the scarp. Below them, Napoleon’s troops mass, preparing to charge the high ground of the hill. Fear was their major weapon. The tramp of a battalion, formed into a wedge, six thousand men, stamping their feet as they marched, making the very earth tremble, chanting *“Vive l’Empéreur!”* A wedge, driven by a sledge- hammer weight of numbers, to skewer that thin red line and emerge victorious on the further side. The thin red line stands its ground. Soon it will snake itself round the head of that advancing column to pour volley after volley, three shots per man per minute, into that helpless mass of men. But that is another story, a story that begins and ends with crimson on the morning clouds and scarlet blood flooding the horizon at dusk.  
 My own story begins *in media res*, in the middle of things. All the Irish boys were there, at my mother’s funeral. I didn’t know them by name, but I recognized their faces: my grandfather’s face, my father’s face, my own face when I see myself in the mirror each morning as I brush my teeth and comb my hair. “It is the map of old Ireland, engraved on our faces.” And is that my story?  
 Or does the story begin when my daughter stands on the loo, dips the shaving brush in the soap, and lathers my face so I can shave? Oh, the mystery of masks and the sigh of diminishment as the mask of the clown prince is stripped off and the realities of bone and skull emerge. And that is a story in itself. But there’s more: now my grand daughter stands on the toilet seat and shrieks with pleasure as she stuffs soap in my eye, my ears, and up my nose. I begin to shave. She jumps to the ground, jogs my arm, and a thin red line spreads out through the soap, flowing like a river, meandering through bubbles of white, turning them pink in the early morning light.  
 And is this my story, this tale of a thin red line, as red as blood, that joins us, known to unknown, a line with a single beginning, that seemingly has no end, as it flows like a river, meandering here and there, trickling out, staunched, flowing again? If so, it is a tale, composed of words, with many a beginning, but who knows how it will end.

**Milton Acorn and the Jack Pine**

I met Milton Acorn in the photocopying room of the university in which I taught. I didn’t know who he was, but I soon found out.  
 “Oy! You,” he waved his strong, carpenter’s hands, and stabbed me with a gnarled index finger.  
 “Are you Milton Acorn,” I asked. “The poet?”  
 “Yup. Make this machine work.”  
 “I’m meant to be taking you to lunch.”  
 “Got this job to do first,” he pointed at the machine. “Turn it on.”  
 I typed in my code and the copier leapt into life.   
 “Now go away. I need to be alone.”

A few minutes later, I returned to find him lying on the photocopier, eyes shut, face pressed against the glass. Lights flashed, the copier whirred, and a copy of his face emerged. He descended from the machine and added his face to the pile of photocopies that lay at his feet.  
 “Tape,” he said. “I need tape,” he again stabbed me with his finger and held out his hand.  
 “I’ll go and get some.”  
 I went to my secretary’s office.  
 “What the heck is he doing in there?” she asked.  
 “I haven’t got a clue. But now he wants some Scotch tape,” I held out my hand and she handed me a roll of tape “Thanks,” I said.

I gave Milton the tape and watched as he taped the copies together. He had photocopied his whole body, arms, legs, back sides, feet.   
 “Me,” he said happily. “That’s me,”   
 Triumphant, he showed me his work: a self-portrait, shadowy and cloudy, still warm, with him all whiskered and worn, smelling still of photocopying ink,  
unique, unmistakeable, uncouth, unseemly, but the real Milton Acorn, a jack pine sonnet self-grown in his own poetic image.

**Jack Pine and Stars**

Sitting on the porch at Tara Manor, measuring the evening shadows as they lengthen and thicken, I study the jack pine’s wild, extravagant growth, the way it reaches out to reject the commonplace of ‘tree’, as Milton Acorn rejected the commonplace of ‘poet’.   
 The jack pine grows in radical disorder, sprouting here, there, anywhere the sea wind blows and its capricious nature dictates. Each limb of the jack pine bears a thin layer of salt, borne in from Passamaquoddy Bay by thin fingers of air that sow salt on land and branch. Brown broken branches, untidy crows’ nests limb-tangled like grim, bedraggled hair sprouting out from on high. Lower down the tree extends a branch, held out towards me like a welcome, helping hand.   
 Charcoal shadows fill in the gaps between darkening trees. Shy deer emerge, step by cautious step, drifting their sylvan ghosts, delicate, across footpath and lawn. Wrapped in a scarf of peace, I forget the city’s hustle and bustle. Stars poke peep-holes in the dark. I try to name each constellation, as it traces its new-to-me path across the indifferent evening sky.   
 I look around: more jack pines, no two the same. How could they be? There’ll never be another poet like Milton, another book like his *Jack Pine Sonnets*, no talelike his own tale told in his own inimitable way.

**Jack Pine at Tara Manor  
*(1770 & 1834 & 1917 & 2018)***

I am fascinated by the jack pine. Today it looks like an arm-waving mariner drawn back to the Maritimes after his sea-faring is done. It has become a cult-haired declamation, a poem to a wilderness, where weeds and wild seas raged. It is cultivated now, but lupins still litter the highway’s edge where civilized tarmac, pot-holed and less civil in spring, trims ragged edges that proclaim that moose and deer, stray dogs and coyotes, wildness and disorder, the wonderful and dangerous, are never far away.  
   
 “Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
 when wealth accumulates, and men decay.”   
  
 Oliver Goldsmith, the uncle wrote those lines in his book *The Deserted Village* (1770). His nephew, also called Oliver Goldsmith, was the Anglican Vicar in St. Andrews and followed in his uncle’s footsteps as priest and poet. He watched the building of St Andrews and wrote *The Village Restored* as he watched the construction of St. Andrews in 1834.   
 According to Wikipedia, jack pines are “the most broadly distributed pine species in Canada.” Tom Thomson (never a member of the Group of Seven) completed his painting of the Jack Pine in 1917, the year of his death. It is one of the many portraits of jack pines that he attempted in his career.   
 Wild and wonderful, the jack pine radiates disorder with its flustered, clicking needles that cluster together to knit the wind. They are lop-sided, radical, crooked, church spires, crows’ nest crowned. They wear, on the East Coast, extravagant old men’s beards that flaunt fresh bristles like a salty old sea-dog sprouts salt- flaked whiskers. Each rough-barked tree limb stands out like a friendly hand extended in greeting.  
 At night, through its black, bristling branches, awry like an old ship’s rigging, you can imagine Milton Acorn, heaving and straining at the ropes as he hauls down each day’s sun.

**Omega**

Sometimes when the west wind blows, there is no story to tell and we drift from day to day, wordless. Sometimes no wind blows and we are stuck in the doldrums where slow waves lap against the boat side and sails hang limp. Water everywhere, but scarcely a drop to drink. Where then is the story when the main mast is a jack pine and crows now nest where an albatross once perched? There is no story, I say. Just the sound of silence, of rumination, of long deep thought, the bottomless ocean below, the unclouded pitiless sky above.  
 Ghosts of memories flit across our decks. Grey shades of times past, portending now times future, shake empty fists and threaten. All time is bound in this time, in this precious moment, this split second when a finger descends to a key and the key board responds. With what? A letter. A single letter. Each descent, a letter. Each wavelet, a letter. Each ray of sun, a letter. What anonymous mailman will deliver all those letters, and to whom? And this story, that is no story, will it still be lit up by the sun like clouds on the morning horizon when the fingers that typed it have long turned to dust?   
 Clouds: will they predict rain, foretell squalls, prophesy a story that may or may not arrive? Hesitant, the albatross I hang around my neck. Tentative the crow that may or may not nest in the jack pine or perch in the rigging of the flagless mast. Each stroke of the finger across the keys yearns for those magic flying fish, long-awaited, that may or may not finish their flight path and land on the dry boards of this sun-shrunk deck.  
 Each stroke, I repeat, a letter. Each group of letters, a word. Each word, singular, gathered into shoals, like fish that crowd together, to form schools. Each school of fish, an image, a metaphor, a sentence, or sentences that gather into paragraphs. Where now is the story? There is no story. Down is up and up is down. Clouds linger in Monet’s lily pond. Bright fish swim among drowned clouds. The man with the white beard and the Panama Hat wears a frown one day, a smile the next. Today, he brandishes his paint-brush like a pen that is mightier than any sword. Each grain of dried paint is a world in itself. Each raindrop that casts a ripple in the pond is a solar system. Each shooting star is a new born baby come to brighten this earth.

“Grandpa,” she says, climbing on my knee. “Tell me a story. Please.”  
 “Once upon a time,” I begin. “There was this little girl …” She wriggles and giggles.  
 “What was her name?”  
 “I don’t know.”  
 “Yes, you do.”  
 “Don’t.”  
 “Do.”   
 “Was it me? Am I that little girl?”  
 “You can be if you want.”  
 “I want. How does my story end?”  
 “I don’t know. You’ve only just started it.”

And so it continues, as it always did, and hopefully always will, with a presence, a presence that turns into an absence. Words form an absent story that is told in a desert where flowers bloom unseen and nobody listens. Words blow in the wind. Words have no beginning and no end. Words will never, ever be anything other than what they are: words, seeds from the dandelion clock, words without a story, words without a beginning, words without a middle, words without an end … amen.

**Alpha**

In the story’s beginning was its end, and both end and beginning were marked by the rock-sharp teeth of the coiled sea-serpent. When the serpent laid her eggs, she invented stones, and the world’s first words were carved on those stones. Mother Earth’s old bones, retrieved from the amniotic sea, grew into mountains. Rivers ran downhill to escape the sky wrath of the sun by day, and the moon and stars by night. They hid their watery treasure in the oceans, but that is another tale that someone else must tell.  
 Today, round stones like bowling balls or the white skulls of immigrants, lost in the desert, litter the land. An unknown man wears a white coat and carries six stones in his pocket, three white, two red, and one black. He shifts them from hand to hand and, unsighted, he plucks one out. A judge, he gives judgement: not guilty, guilty, and death by fire. Now the moon is a dead stone in the sky but the sun is a living ball of flaming gas.   
 Each cast stone is a stepping stone in a rippled rivulet leading people onwards and across. Through hardship to the stars, upwards, onwards, and outwards across rivers and seas. Yes, the road winds like a ladder uphill all the way, but some times it snakes downwards. That downward road is paved with good intentions. Not all carved stones carry words of ultimate wisdom to a world that waits for stone tablets to descend from the mountain where they were carved.   
 Slate stones, uncarved, but quarried in Llanberis, drop downwards, assisted by gravity and greed. In the passes above, the glaciated mountains wear sheep stones, *roches moutonnées*, a necklace of sheepshanks, moored to corrie, cwm, and cirque, that tie the hillsides down.  
 In Spain, *Verracos*, Celtic boundary stones, show where wild bulls roamed and sheep and horses grazed. The *Toros de Guisando* still stand on guard over sand pastures within their walled enclosure. Roman legions carved graffiti into their flanks and Castilian kings and queens swore oaths of office, pledging themselves to keep their word while upright before those dumb, silent stones.   
 At Kingsbrae, stone statues vie with metal shapes and wooden carvings. Living waters flow past the Old Dutch Mill, filling pools and ponds, spreading life among taciturn, not-a-stone-left-unturned, faced and faceless statues.   
 Sailors on a ship of stone, congealed surface, molten core, we spin through space, strung up by strings of gravity, discoursing on board with our own place and time, and reaching out with helpless, hopeful hands, to others also suspended in our shared stories.

**The Story of Stones**

You find these stories everywhere: the story of the stone in the horse’s hoof. It forces out a nail, and the horse is lost, and the horse cannot run so the king is caught and king and kingdom are lost, all because of the absence of a nail and the presence of a stone, such a little stone. But who will tell the stone’s story, the who, what, where, when, and why of how it came to be there in the first place?  
 Stones are everywhere and each stone carries its own story. Standing stones in a field, stone balloons, thrown up in the air to land heavily, stony-faced on anything below, stone circles, Gorsedd stones outside the National Museum of Wales, *Amgueddfa Cymru.*Inside the museum, in the converted wing, an escalator ascends three stories to bear visitors up from the point of the Chinese Brontosaurus’ tail to the tip of his fossilized, stone cold nose.   
 Stones in car and bicycle tires. Stones on a highway, shot out from under truck tires and sent clattering into wind shields, shattering dreams, gouging sharp-edged stars.  
 Stones are intruders in our shoes. They make us limp. Sea stones and shingle, coarse, wet sand in our shoes sand-papering our toes, forcing us to hobble, reminding us of our childhood on summer beaches, Pwll Ddu and Brandy Cove, both seshores pillowed with sand and cobbled with stones.   
 Some politicians we know behave like stones in the universe’s shoe. They make the whole world totter and shake. We would be better off without them, but sometimes, we cannot shake them off and, green and sticky, they cling to our fingers like, well, you know what.   
 Santiago de Compostela: stone steles descended from heaven. Stars, falling like stones, led Cluniac monks onwards to the Apostle’s Tomb. Parallel roads, the terrestrial *Camino* below and the celestial *Camino* above, whose road is paved with sharp-pointed stars twinkling at night like gemstones and leading us on.   
 Stars and Stones. Octavio Paz’s *Piedra de sol*, the Mexican Sun Stone, an Aztec clock that ticked away the days of their lives and foretold the arrival of bearded white men and the conquest of Tenochtitlán. Stones that count months, seasons, and years. Stonehenge, Avebury Rings, stone age computers that tracked the summer solstice, mid-winter, the year’s beginning and its end, nothing too small to measure, not even a sparrow.   
 Spring sowings, Fall and Harvest, Time’s Moss gathering on Rolling Stones that no longer roll. Magic Rock, Tottering Stones, *roches moutonnées,* plucked and stossed, markers all, pointing us to new realities. Grave stones, tombstones, milestones that lead us back to the future, forward into the past. Who will tell the tales written on and by all those stones?

**Teller of Tales**

Stonehenge is not my story even though I speak its language of lintel and capstone, of bluestone and dolerite, magicked by Merlin from Mynydd Preseli in Sir Benfro, Wales. I also speak the language of sweet wind-words borne on soft breezes and woven along with grass tongues beneath the feet of grazing sheep.   
 Badbury Rings is not my story, although I have been there when the sun sinks towards the horizon and horizontal light flows its milky river of rising mist. I have seen grey ghosts sweep down from hill and rampart to drive shivering tourists from these sacred lands.  
 Westbury White Horse is not my story, even though I have stood on the round, green circle of the horse’s eye and watched the Severn mists rise up from the vale to conquer the hills. Here, too, age-old warriors emerge from barrow and mound to clutch the traveler’s trembling heart in icy fingers. No lands these for the faint of heart, at eventide, when shadows grow, defenders defend, and day is swallowed up by chancy night.  
 My own tale almost didn’t begin in Pen-y-bryn, in a sunny land, a long time ago. Yet begin it did just as the clock struck eight, that Sunday night, in January, *mis Iawnor*. I know it’s my story but the beginnings are hidden in a misty past that tells of a lack of awareness, a search for the meaning of shape, color, and form, the realization, however slow, of the need for language, words, a map, a direction, a slow growth of the seed from baby hood to boyhood, to manhood, and beyond.   
 I don’t remember much about the flight. They told me I was flown in by a meandering stork that just happened to pass by our house, at eight o’clock that night. Our dog, called Paddy, after St. Patrick, of course, and all the Paddies who worked the Paddy fields in Ireland and Wales, had been exiled to a neighbor’s house until after … after what?   
 After the delivery? Were they afraid the dog might frighten away the stork? Who knows what they thought back then? In Galicia they still throw stones at storks to keep them from bringing babies to houses. It’s cheaper than contraception which is illegal there anyway. Paddy, curious and maybe jealous, turned herself into a stone, threw herself through the neighbour’s front window, and rushed home barking. Frightened, the stork dropped me, plop, right down the chimney, and as I woke up, I started to scream.   
 How do I know all this? I don’t. I merely repeat what I’ve been told. Simpletons at heart, poets and babies believe so many things, myths and legends, fairy tales, tall stories, the stories of stalks … can you tell talk from mutter or Stork from Butter? I know I can’t. But it’s my tale to tell, even though I don’t know how it began (Alpha) nor how it will end (Omega).

**(Be)longing**

A cool breeze winging in from Passamaquoddy bears essence of damp seaweed. All my boyhood, trapped in the wet tidemarks of Wales, comes rushing back to haunt me and once again I am alone on a cold, mid-summer beach, damming one of the tiny streams that leak out from the rocks and slither away down the beach to the sea.  
 A five-year old engineer, I know that sand alone will not hold back water. I scour the beach for stones, sea-weed, slivers of wood. Then I place the stones in a half circle, using them to support the wood and sea-weed that will hold the sand firm. Next, I dig the coarse wet sand from the inside of my barricade and watch the waters as they slowly build into the pool in which I will eventually paddle.   
 Masterful, this building, this creation, this tiny barricade. I leave the beach and wave it good-bye. When I come back next day, time and tide have swept away my dam and I must begin again from scratch. I turn away and begin my eternal search for wood, sea-weed, and suitable stones.  
 Here, in St. Andrews, waves crest and fall, shift shingle with the whisper of Victorian silks in vanished ballrooms or the rustle of fallen leaves crushed underfoot in the twilight. A young man, here on holiday, walks out from a caravan and takes his yapping dog on beach patrol. Ducks float their idle flotillas, bobbing along on choppy waters. Eiders chug close to the shore in their black and white *crêches*, defying time and tide, as they have done for centuries. Rocked in the bosom of Passamaquoddy, they vie with the occasional wind-blown white caps churned up by the breeze. Duke of York ducks dabble, in their never-never land of neither up nor down, but half under the water and half up in the air, just like the Old Duke himself, so noble.  
 Red sandstone outcrops march out from land to sea. That small boy anchored in my mind, an old man now, tosses aimless pebbles, targeting nothing in particular. The tide rises over warm sand and rocks, and the sea-weed floats again, reaching out, combing stone fingers through a mermaid’s hair.   
 Behind me, three *wapiti* wake up and walk. They munch leaves, each crunch a footstep, echoing. Curious, indigenous, they, like me, like the bay itself, have been waiting for this sunshine moment ever since the world began.

**Stone of Destiny**

A Stone of Destiny stands on Tara Hill, by An Forradh, in that dear land across the Irish Sea. Some sages think it is Jacob’s Pillow transported to Ireland by Merlin the Magician. Others call it Arthur’s Stone and believe it once held the royal sword Excalibur for *rex quondam rexque futurus*, the once and future king, who plucked that sword from this stone. Is it the Stone of Destiny, then, or the Blarney Stone, or the Stone of Scone? Opinions differ. Anyway, what’s in a name? A rose by any other name, they say, and names will never hurt.   
 When I walk to the South porch at Tara Manor to eat breakfast in the early morning, I hear gravel sigh beneath my feet. It sings me a song of the fish in the sea that swim all the way from the Rio Grand to the Fundy. It sings too of salted cod, smoked salmon, unfolded kippers, and those blue-nosed fishermen who sit on fog banks, walk on the backs of swimming fish, and brave wintry waters in search of the sea’s silver harvest.   
 It also sings of the winds that whistle on wild Welsh beaches, Pwll Ddu, Pennard, Penclawdd, Rhossili, Caswell, Oxwich, and Langland. Do the cockle-women still wear their tall black hats? Listen to the wind as it whispers its lisping legends of Swansea Market where *bara lawr*, laverbread, despised by all but the Welsh, who call it caviar, once sold at three pence a pound. Alas, it is a sad song, for the laver has gone now. Destroyed by oil spills and pollution, it fled to the west coast of Ireland, where it survives, protected by rock and stone. So many links to a magic world of memory.   
 Over breakfast in the sunshine, my friend and I talk about the meaning of absences, of positive and negative space, of things that are not said and remain undone, of our own inner spaces. We speak of those blood red depths within our heart, where words have no wings, yet fly like kites on the winds of faith and hope. Here, things are felt before they appear to us in different forms, colors, and shapes, magic creations produced from what seems at first to be negative space.  
 One year, at the summer solstice, I closed my eyes and stood between three tall, polished stones at KIRA. I imagined Avebury with its broken circle, Stonehenge with its Blue Stones, sarsens, old leaning stones, and all its secrets. I thought of Magic Rock, the Flower Pot Rocks, statues, monuments made some times by mortals, some times by gods, often carved by erosive elements, ice, sand, waves, rain that still breathe life and meaning into their stubborn presence. One day, I thought, those stones will whisper their stories to a passing wind that will gift them to an artist who speaks their language and will listen, understand, and carve their tales in words of stone.

**Mysteries of Mist**

The grey sunless morning fumbles for a handhold in the Fundy fog. It wants to part the curtains, climb the sky, but the fog falls apart beneath its feet and it vanishes back into night’s waves. Through a glass, darkly, a beachcomber and a dog. The dog sniffs, lifts a leg. The beachcomber stoops, sifts sand and seaweed, searching for who knows what. How many unworthy people have walked this beach gathering this worthless mist that plains and purls priceless tendrils of hair, creating silver locks? A finger draws misty pearls on a smoke-thin mirror and a new tale is born.  
 Morphed the world, all form and shape changed into a metamorphosis from Ovid or Kafka. Gauzy garments gift wrap words and meanings. The bay’s flimsy visions seems diaphanous, yet not quite see-through. A flattering disfigurement, a pipe-dream contortion of flickering forms that emerge, then disappear. Grey scale rules this wizard-world of shifting shapes. Mist: no cutting edge, just a ghostly wrap that weaves lace clouds through trees, blunts pencils and pens, dampens paper, blurs thoughts, deeds, and especially words scratched on moist paper.  
 Who or what lives now on the quay? Pale shadows of ship masts, wrecked on time’s reefs, dangle ghost canvas that hangs limp in this mist. The world is distant, unfamiliar, damp to the touch, glistening at the edges where muffled sounds, buoys in the bay, the dip of a kayak’s paddle, a slap of feet high-stepping on boardwalk, cease to ring out, their sounds meandering, directionless, unclear. Our eyes dowse themselves in dead men’s dreams of nothingness and empty crows’ nests, especially when the mists descend, the fog banks build, and nobody climbs the main mast, for a sailor ain’t a sailor ain’t a sailor any more.  
 Inland, each spoken word is a glimmer of an impression that wanders in search of lost horizons, treading the Ghost Road with its forgotten moose and deer all diminished until that sudden loom from the wayside ditch that heralds panic and the too-late screeching of brakes. Grass no longer sparks and sparkles. It waits in silence for the sun to break through and warm meadow and mound where slow and silent revenants stumble into slumber.  
 Where, oh where, are the three wise men? The sacred salmon sleep deep in the fish pounds. Three old women dance on the heath. Muffled incantations. Half-drowned threats. Wit and wisdom. Steam from a witch’s cauldron. The poison apple well prepared. And where are those pearls that were his eyes? Oh, the ancient mysteries of mist.

**Mounds**

Raths were moundsin the Old Palace of the Royal Irish Kings at Tara. They filled the ancient grounds. Scientists from Israel came to the Rath of the Synods. They believed that the Ark of the Covenant, by miracle transferred to Ireland, might lie hidden under the green grass of the Emerald Isle. They were wrong So many ideas turned into myths that vanished in the early morning light and disappeared with the dew.  
 Small mounds, large mounds, anonymous mounds, named mounds: Rath Chaechon, Rath Righ, Rath Laoghaire, Mound of the Cow, Mound of the Hostages, so many treasures buried beneath the turf and devoured, like the great Irish Elk, by peat bog and earth.  
 Mounds. We visited them when we were in school: Hetty Pegler’s Tump, Uley Long Barrow, West Kennet, Weyland’s Smithy, the Caldrum Stones at Trottiscliffe, so many mounds. So many people buried and forgotten.   
 We studied tumuli and mounds in Geography. Map Reading 100: (1) locate the *tumulus* at this location (they gave us the map references on the Ordnance and Survey map provided during the exam). (2) Can the *tumulus* at this setting be seen from each of these locations (a second set of three map references was provided)? (3) If not, explain why not in full detail and with map references.  
 Funny things, mounds. Gran had a Bronze Age Burial Tomb in her Garden in Wick Village. It was her duty to protect and care for the quarter of it that was on her land. Each week she would mow it and after a rain or wind storm, she would groom it carefully and make it look nice.  
 Middens are also a sort of mound. My friend has some on his land at Holt’s Point. They served as beacons for the indigenous who traveled the Bay in their birch bark canoes, following their ancient water-roads under sun, moon, and stars, but those are not my paths to paddle, nor roads to walk, nor tales to tell.  
 In the cancer ward, the women feared lumps and mounds, feeling for them with their finger-tips, always afraid of finding one. What they did and how they felt when they found one is not my tale to tell either. Those tales await another pen.

**Magic Rock**

Was it brought, as the Indigenous told my friend, by a wandering god and placed here on the beach at Holt’s Point? Or is it just a glacial erratic, as science tells us, carried here by the glacier that sculpted what we now call the bay? Did the ice carry it seawards and dump it along with eskers, drumlins, terminal moraine, and snout, a revenant harking back to some long-time-forgotten volcanic blast followed by the ice age? Whatever happened, it is an outsider, a wanderer, never belonging to Holt’s Point, like so many of the visitors who come here to marvel at it.   
 It might have been hauled here by spans of oxen, like the great stones at Tara, or teams of warriors, roped together for that purpose, as happened in Stonehenge. However it came about, we are not so different in our myths and beliefs. When it thunders in Wales, shall it be said that gods do thump the clouds? And in England, the land of the chariots of fire, bad weather is his ‘chariot of wrath’ and ‘dark is his path on the wings of the storm’. As for us human beings, we are not so different and many of our heroes fought bitterly, living and dying for their wee bit of hill and glen, before sending that old king homeward, to think again.   
 What the wise men among us really know is that Magic Rock throbs with life, reacts to the artist’s touch, the painter’s brush, moves and is moved by the poet’s pen, although it is unmoved by time and the Fundy tides that carve the land, sand-paper the shore, emptying and filling the fishing weirs, casting netted, star-spangled spells.  
 The standing stones at Tara were hauled by oxen and set up by men. At Stonehenge, my distant ancestors built graded ramps, rope-dragged the great stones up steep slopes, then dropped them into the waiting holes they had scooped out with the antlers of local deer, sacrificed for this purpose.   
 Stones: they stand in ordered ranks predicting the arrival of sun, moon, and stars. They tell sidereal time, foreseeing each season, the lunar year, the solar presence at mid-summer and mid-winter when the sun stands still. Everything, they say, is envisaged in the stars, in those golden fields to which mythical heroes are elevated and where the wild beasts, bull, goat, and lion, prowl eternally. Many moderns still believe these portents, as did the ancients. I too follow my horoscope in the local paper, hoping each day it will not turn into a horror-scope.

**Irish in Wales**

Irish and in Exile. Catholics hemmed in by Welsh chapels, stone walled in foreign pubs where they speak neither Erse nor English, but lots of Welsh, too tall to dig in pits, but digging for gold in foreign city streets, far away from their friends and relations, happy not to be sent as convicts to Van Diemen’s Land, for the wearing of the green perhaps, or a watch taken from a customer and slipped into someone else’s hand, yet saddened even so by these grey Welsh hills and these teeming valleys filled with rain and muddy waters bubbling brown like foaming beer.   
 Copperopolis called them and they came. They smelted copper, tin plate, iron, zinc, and breathed in all those pernicious fumes. Growing up among them, I learned their sad songs, their desire to return home, if not now, then in the life hereafter.  
 They had crossed the Irish sea from Cork to Swansea, just to become strangers in a strange old land, where they inter-married, shared beds, tables, faith, religion, festivals, and songs. Fine singers in our land of song they were, yet exiles all, and doomed to live in loneliness outside the warmth of their own Irish kitchens warmed by the sea-coal of Wales.

**Music**

A breeze through the reeds, water over stones, wind rustling grass, a whisper of leaves: the world’s first music. Then came man-made music: wood against wood, the rhythmic rattling of dried seeds, pan pipes and conch, blown horn, taut cow-hide or goat-skin stretched over a wooden frame.  
 My Peruvian flautist friend taught me that water in bottles, at different levels, could produce different notes and that several bottles, carefully tuned, blown into with pursed lips, could be harmonized to play Beethoven’s *Song of Joy*. Such simplicity, so far removed from electric guitar and press button music.   
 Listen to the leaves as they move and talk to the sky. Listen to the evening wind driving clouds across the heavens. Enjoy the crunch of feet on gravel, the slap of leather sandals flip-flopping on wood, the silken swish of a long skirt moving over buttocks, thighs, and calves.  
 In my home in Wales, the kitchen audience is critical and I am wary of every false note, every wrong word. Cousins, visiting from the Emerald Isle, trust only the genuine lyrics. They look like us, those cousins, talk with different accents, size us up in the same way we measure them back, curiosity mingling with acceptance.   
 “Tis the map of Ireland written all over your face,” the men in the elevator in Bordeaux say to my father.   
 “Yes,” he says in the thickest of Welsh accents, scoured like coal from the Rhondda Fawr, “I am Irish.”  
 In the broadest brogues the cousins join the kitchen chorus, Irish and Welsh singing together, in unison. The sincerity of song lifts all our hearts. We are as one, bound by a past that gave our families birth, landed us on these shores, helped us to survive. That past, recalled, makes voices break, tears fall, hearts overflow.  
 “Tis the map of Old Ireland written all over our faces.”  
 They taught me well. The notes are close and the words are right. They applaud with gusto and they gift me, those cousins, with the honorable wearing of the green, but it is so difficult to sing ‘the harp that once through Tara’s halls’ when the singer is not John McCormack, that great Irish tenor, but a small boy lost before the fire in a Welsh-Irish kitchen.

**A Rub of the Green**

A child among timeworn men, I learn traditional songs, *if ever there’s going to be a life hereafter,* with the correct words, no messing about with watered down lyrics, for back in the Emerald Isle ‘*they were hanging men and women for the wearing of the green*’. I listen as all the ageless grievances are aired yet again by the exiles who parade around the family kitchen.  
 I study the old ways and practice songs and tales from Ireland until they become familiar. As for those men, I met them in later life, at my mother’s funeral, knowing I had never really known them or understood them, those uncles and cousins, realizing that my family had split apart a long time ago down religious and racial lines. Yet I still sensed our closeness and recognized the familiar map of Ireland drawn in their ageing faces.  
 Their *Weltanschauung* was Irish Catholic while mine was Anglo-Welsh, tinged with Methodism. Each new school I attended introduced me to a new faith and eventually I believed in none of them. I became an outcast, standing on the outside, looking in. I often wonder what the early immigrants to Canada, the French and English, Irish and Scottish, really thought and saw when they first came here. Conversely, how did the Indigenous see those wanderers who had come to stay? Who now will tell those stories and bring those early cultures back to life?   
 I sit on the shore at Indian Point and listen to the silence. I wait for the wind’s whisper as it whisks all footprints from the sand. I hear the sea-song as it rises and falls. In my mind’s eye, I watch the rocks as they slowly crumble and I repeat the song of the stones as they grind together, metamorphosing unhurriedly into sand.   
 It takes a special kind of word-juggler to hold all this ancient world together especially when the old nests are empty and the birds that built them have all flown. Wave-foam slips into a single footprint abandoned in the mud and sand. All around me there are tales to tell and songs to sing. Many of them, I don’t yet know. Others might even be mine.

**On the Beach**

Marooned and listless, a once upon a time he bestrode, a colossus, king of all he surveyed. Now he is caught, barren and bare, naked, this ancient sea-side crab, unprotected on a wave-wet beach.  
 A throng of feasting gulls mob him. They plunge their powerful beaks into his body pulling the carapace this way, that way, all ways to Sunday, that never-never day.  
 A moment of truth ago, the crab, half-buried in the sand, pincers at the ready, hung on, resisted until the vacuum broke and he was hauled, willy-nilly out of his low-tide fortress to be exposed to the cruel yellow suns of those pitiless beaks.  
 Battered now the scattered body, already spread over a wrinkled table-cloth of sand, lies pillowed on mermaid-hair. His claws that once clicked a delicacy now for the crows who scurry them carelessly away.  
 Silence descends. The beach again is hushed, breakfast and the uproar done. Listen to the sigh of wind and wave. Watch the breeze leave wisp-fresh footsteps on the incoming sea. Count the seconds, minutes, hours as they glide silently by, in and out, with time and the tide.

**Lighthouse**

Once upon a time that lighthouse was a young boy who sat within the shadow of his father’s tale. He sensed he would never feel the power of his own words because he didn’t seem to have any on account of the black hole inside him that swallowed everything up. He thought he would never know the joys of creating his own myths, telling his own story. He thought he would never come to grips with storm music, wind and rain, a lost path sought and found. He longed for someone to gift him a rainbow, with or without its pot of gold. He also thought that the fatal shadow, cast upon a child by a father, would always be there.  
 One day, the early morning sun knocked on his bedroom window. He drew back the curtains and let in the light. That day, he emerged from the shadow and saw that the world was bright and full of sunshine. Each morning, he breathed in the sunlight, felt it flow through his body. His heart pumped new blood and he was refreshed by the joy of living, of being himself, of being nobody but himself, unique and wonderful, subject to nobody’s wishes and whims. Gradually he grew into the person he was always destined to be.  
 The sun’s rays lit up his face and eyes. Sunshine flourished within him and renewed not only him but all that he touched. It flooded out like the beam from that lighthouse, over there, on those rocks. It was put there to help and guide wayfarers and seafarers lest they become lost at sea.  
 Lost, he found himself. Found, he centred himself. Joy and hope, belief and knowledge took root under the suns that nourished his body, soul, and spirit. Renewed, light flooded from him. He burned like a bonfire or a beacon and became one of those special lights that enlighten the world. He became that lighthouse.   
 One day he will tell his own tale and reveal how he achieved such enlightenment.

**Ghost Road**

So many old ghosts live here, filtering, like shy deer, through encroaching trees, exploding shadows from long grass.   
 Rising, like barrow men, walking silent up through time’s mists, they rejoice in the half-life that comes with evening and the fading light.   
 They stand before me mouthing hymns and arias, whispering their ancient griefs. Their words are balloon bubbles floating fragile. Their speech and their thoughts are a juggler’s trick seemingly suspended on fragile air.   
 Some pray. Some Curse. Some plead for help. Others seek mercy or understanding.   
 Erring and straying like lost sheep, many have left undone those things they ought to have done and done those things they ought not to have done and they truly believe there is no health in them.   
 Their cold breath chills as they warm frosty hands on the open fire-pit of my throbbing heart. They fade in the early morning light when I gift them my forgiveness, bestowing upon them the peace for which they yearn.

**Ghosts**

My father’s father would wheeze and cough then lean on the wooden dresser in the old Welsh kitchen with its vast, cast iron fireplace.   
 “As black as the hobs of hell,” he would say, and “as warm as our kitchen.” It was full of secret nooks and crannies where pasties and pies could stay warm, soup cauldrons could hang from iron chains, and copper kettles could whistle wild tunes and call us all to endless cups of tea. Sergeant-major tea: so strong and filled with so much sugar that a tea-spoon could stand upright and never fall over. Gassed in the First World War, my father’s father was always out of breath and each time he coughed, he brought up a tiny part of his lungs. “One day,” he announced between wheezes, “I’ll have nothing left.”  
 Twice a day, he would roll up the newspaper and brandish it like a conductor’s baton. The first time would be when I came home from school and it was time to do my homework. The second time would be after supper when it was time for me to go to bed. Each time he rolled up that newspaper, he would tap it gently on the dresser to get my attention, and then he would speak those famous words: “Let battle commence.”   
 I would fight to escape to the street to play with my friends. I would fight to stay on my feet and I never, ever wanted to go to bed. I hated to be entrenched alone, upstairs, in the cold shadows of that ghostly no-boys-land where I could hear mice and rats scuffling behind the dugout walls and smell the sour smells of chamber pots, night vapors, old age, and illness that stalked my dreams.  
 “Up the wooden hill to Bedfordshire,” he would sing, conducting with his baton and pointing to the stairs. I was never afraid of him. He was dark, strong, tall, and very gentle, a great man in his own right, one of those tall men who would always stoop to help a little child. If I was too troublesome, he would start to cough. And if he started to cough, the pink phlegm would come and he’d spit it into the red and blue polka-dot handkerchief he always carried. The pink phlegm caused consternation and in the ensuing panic, I would bolt for the stairs, go up to my room, undress, put on my pajamas, and bury myself in the vast double bed I shared with my grandmother.   
 My grandfather’s bed was in the middle room downstairs. I didn’t realize then, as I do now, that he could no longer climb those stairs up which I scuttled like a wayward, fearful crab.  
 After a while, I left my grandfather’s house and went back to live with my father. One day, my grandfather, as he prophesied, coughed too much and that was the end of him. After the funeral, my father took me back to see my grandmother. Aunties and uncles, cousins, family friends that I hardly knew, neighbors known and unknown, spilled over the house in an invasion of tears and grief.   
 After the friends had gone, my father and I decided to leave and the family gathered on the doorstep to wave us goodbye. I waved back to them all. “Goodbye,” I shouted. “Goodbye aunties, goodbye uncles, goodbye grandmother.” I paused. My grandfather stood there waving to me. “Look: there he is. I knew he couldn’t have gone.” I pointed and waved. “Goodbye grandpa!”  
 “Don’t be stupid. He’s not there,” my father said. “He’s dead.”  
 “I can see him,” I said. “He’s there. I can see him.”  
 “He’s not there. He’s dead. He’s dead.” Tears ran down my father’s face.  
 Sitting here, writing these words, I can still see my grandfather, standing on that doorstep, waving goodbye. And I can still feel my father’s long dead, shadowy hands reach down, grab me by the shoulders and shake me, shake me, shake me, until I too am crying and the ghosts of my nine-year old milk teeth are again rattling in my head.

**Things I carry with me**

That old black cast-iron stove, wood-fired, that baked the best ever breads and cakes and warmed the bungalow on cold, summer mornings. The Welsh dresser with its age-blackened rails that displayed the precious plates, cups, and saucers. The old tin cans that ferried the water from the one tap located at the end of the field. Full and wholesome, their weight, sometimes shared, still weighs me down as I carry it in my dreams. The Elsan toilet from the shed by the hedge and the shovels that appeared as if by magic, as my uncle braved the evening shadows to dig a hole on the opposite side of the field, as far from the bungalow as possible.  
 The outhouse at the end of the garden. The steps down to the coal cellar where they went when the sirens sounded, to sleep in the make-shift air raid shelter, along with the rats and mice that scurried from the candles. The corrugated iron work shop in the garden where my uncle built his model ships, the Half-Penny Galleon and the Nonesuch. The broken razor blades I used to carve my own planes from Keil Kraft Kits, Hurricanes and Spitfires, an SE5, and once, a Bristol Bulldog. Twisted and warped, they winged their ways into nobody’s skies, though once we built a paper kite that flew far away in a powerful wind and got tangled in a tree. The greenhouse from which I stole countless tomatoes, red and green. Kilvey Hill towering above the window ledge where the little ones sat when there were more guests than chairs in the kitchen. The old bombed buildings across the street. The bullet holes in the front of the house where the Messerschmidt strafed us.  
 The old men spitting up coal dust from shrivelled lungs. The widows who took in lodgers and overnight travelers. The BRS lorries, parked overnight, that littered the street. The steep climb upwards into those lorries. The burrowing under dirty tarpaulins to explore the heavy loads, and many other things. The untouchable, forbidden drawer where the rent money waited for the rent collector’s visit. The old lady, five houses down who, when the shops were shut, sold warm Dandelion & Burdock and Orange Corona pop for an extra penny a bottle. Her vicious, snub-faced Pekinese that yapped fierce defiance from the fortress of her lap. The unemployed soccer referee who on Saturdays walked five miles to the match and five miles back just to save the bus fare, his only financial reward. My father’s shadowy childhood. His first pair of shoes, bought at five years old, so he wouldn’t go barefoot to school.  
 Wet cement molded onto the garden wall, then filled with empty bottles to be smashed when the cement set solid. The coal shed where the coal man delivered the coal: cobbledy-cobbledy, down the hole. The outside toilet with its nails in the door from which hung squares torn from yesterday’s newspaper. The lamp-lighter who lit the lamps every evening as the sun went down. The arrival of electricity. The old blackout curtains that shut in the light and shut out the night. The hand rolled fabric sausage that lay on the floor by the door and kept the heat of the coal fire in the kitchen. The kitchen itself with its great wooden chair drawn up by the fire. That chair: the only material possession I still have from that distant past.

**On the Outside Looking In …**

I walked home on my own. As usual. I’d hated the church Christmas party with all its trumped-up noise, childish games, and artificial gaiety.  
 The priest, formidable yet effeminate in his long black skirted robe, had made us sit in a circle on the floor, legs crossed. He stood inside that circle and placed a bar of chocolate on the wooden boards. Then he walked around the group and whispered a word in each boy’s ear.    
 “You must wait until you hear your secret word,” he explained. “Then one of you, when I speak that word, whoever it happens to be, may have the chocolate bar,” he stared at us, large, horsey teeth, black no hair, eyes golden, fierce, like an eagle’s, beneath bushy eye-brows. “When you hear your secret name, you must run and grab the chocolate bar. Understood?”  
 I had come to the party on my own as both my parents worked. The mums and dads who had brought their offspring to the party leaned forward in keen anticipation. The boys all nodded.  
 “Are you ready?” The priest watched us as we nodded and then he shouted “Alligator!”  
 Nobody moved.  
 “Elephant!” The boys shuffled forward, like inch worms, hands twitching, fingers flexing and grasping.  
 “Tiger!” A sigh emerged from multiple mouths. Some of the boys licked their lips.   
 “Lion!” One boy moved, but the priest shooed him away. “Sit down. That wasn’t your word.”  
 “M-m-mouse!” The boys heaved, a sea-wave about to crest and break.  
 “I do love this game,” said the priest to the parents. “And so do the boys, don’t you boys?”  
 “Yes, father …” came the chorus.  
 “Monkey!” All the boys, except one, leapt into springy action. They dived, crawled, leaped to their feet, ran … a surging heap of boys writhed on the floor as the chocolate bar was torn apart and the long-awaited fights ensued.  
 All the boys moved, except me. I just sat there. “I said ‘Monkey,’” the priest frowned at me. “That’s your word. When I say ‘Monkey’, you join in with the other boys and fight for the chocolate bar.”  
 I shook my head.   
 “Have some Christmas fun. Join in the game.”  
 I again shook my head.  
 “Why not?”  
 “It’s not right. You’re just mocking us. I want to go home,” I stood up and walked out of the church hall. I turned at the door and saw the priest glaring at me while a mound of boys continued to scrummage on the floor.  
 As I walked home, it started to snow. Not the pure white fluffy snow of a Merry Christmas, but the dodgy, slippery mixture of rain, snow, and ice pellets that turned the streets of that little seaside town into an ice rink. I turned up the collar of my coat, bowed my head, and stuffed my hands into my pockets. Two houses before my own, I stopped.  
 A neighbor’s house. With a window lit up in the gathering dark. I drew closer, pressed my nose against the window and looked in. A Christmas tree, decorated with lights, candles, more decorations, a fire burning on the hearth, two cats curled up warm before the fire, presents beneath the tree, stockings hanging from the mantelpiece. For a moment, my heart unfroze and I felt the spirit of Christmas. Then I thought of my own house. Cold and drafty. No lights, no decorations. No fire. The snowball snuggled back into my chest and refused to melt.  
 When I got home, our house stood chill and empty. My parents were out at work and the fire had died. Nothing was ready for Christmas. I sat at the kitchen table, took out my colouring book and began to draw. When my mother came home, I showed her my drawing.  
 “Very nice,” she said, barely glancing at it.  
 “But mum, you haven’t really looked.”  
 She stared at the picture again. This time, she saw the Christmas tree and the lights, the cats and the candles, the decorations and the presents. But she never noticed the little boy standing outside the house in the falling sleet, peering in through the window.

**Cricket**

Street cricket. Played on ancient, cracked tarmac. The wicket: three sticks whitewashed on to the high stone wall of the cul-de-sac where my grandmother lived. It backed onto the wall that cut us off from the railway yards that led into High Street Station. That wall was the boundary, as were the neighbor’s front yards. Six and out if you hooked the cricket ball and hit it behind the wicket and over the railway wall. And you had to retrieve that ball. Lost ball stopped play and play stopped until you went across the bombed buildings at square leg, for a right-handed batsman, climbed the railway wall at its lowest spot, looked down at the rail yards forty feet below, and shouted until someone emerged from a workman’s hut to find the ball and threw it back.   
 No worker … no ball … no game. Then you had to run out of your street, down the main road, up the hill for two streets, beg permission at the locked railyard iron gates: “Please, mister, can I get my ball?” Then run all the way back to where the waiting cricketers hung over your own street wall, by those bombed buildings, shouting and cheering. Search for the ball among shiny rails, shunting rails, rusty rails, dandelions, thistles, and nettles. Avoid the occasional shunting engine, with the driver leaning out of the cab and screaming warnings as the steam hisses out from the engine, brakes squeal, and wheels slowly clack on crossing tracks. Find the ball. Try unsuccessfully to throw it back over the wall. Try again. No good. Wall too high. Carry ball back to iron gates. Thank gateman politely so you can come back next time. Return ball to game. Game continues, rain or shine. Unless it’s real rain. The pissing down type. If so, run for nearest house and shelter by fire in kitchen.  
 Other rules. Six and out over the railway wall. Two runs and fetch the ball yourself if you hit it into the bomb buildings at square leg, next to that railway wall. No fielders there. Too many loose bricks and too much scattered debris. Fragile walls still wobble or crumble warning you of cellars that might open up. Low walls that might collapse. You score four and out if you hit the ball into neighbor’s front yard. Some neighbors are nice and don’t mind. But watch out for the old witch whose fenced off garden is guarded by a gate. If you hit her window, even with a tennis ball, she’ll be out quick as a flash, and steal your ball or stick a knitting needle in it, old spoil-sport. Otherwise, it’s single batsmen. You run your runs and walk back from singles. One hand one bounce, and tip and run once you’ve scored twenty. Much more difficult to stay in and everyone gets a chance to bat. One hand off the wall if you don’t clear it for a six and out. Dog stops play if your fox terrier gets the ball and runs around in circles, chasing its tail, with the ball getting soggy in his mouth. Damned dog. Damn difficult to catch. Lost ball stops match if dog runs back into the house and gives the ball you stole in secret back to your gran who was saving it for tennis.  
 Cricket, in those days, was civilization. It had survived the bombing raids that missed the railway yards and bombed the bomb buildings. It had survived the machine-gun fire from the fighter-bombers that had strafed the street leaving bullet-holes, still unrepaired, in walls and shattering now-mended windows. It gave us a sense of rule and law, for the rules were strict and nobody broke them and stealing runs, touch and go, in tip and run was a skill and never a crime.  
 Cricket: a small, bright window on the back-street where I lived, a window filled with happiness and light, even when it’s over the wall and six and out, or the dog runs away with the tennis ball, or the ball vanishes down a mysterious rabbit-hole in the bomb buildings and slides down to someone’s ruined cellar.   
 Game’s over. The real Test Match is on, England versus Australia, though we live in Wales. The one primitive, tiny black-and-white tv screen in the street lights up with flickering figures and we sit around on the floor watching real men playing the real game on a sunny field in another world and that world, a world of white clothes, sunshine, and fresh-mown grass that many of us, us backstreet children from a ruined, bombed out neighborhood, will never be privileged enough to know or see.

**Time Reversed**

My rear-view mirror traps so much: washing hung out on Mondays, so that fumes from the local blast furnace won’t stain the fresh-washed sheets though they paint the street’s slate roofs red, orange, green, a rainbow coalition, poison and pollution perched above us.  
 A stray bomb, destined for the adjacent railway yards, took out the houses across the street. We call them ‘the bombed buildings’ and go there to play among the toppled bricks and cluttered weeds. The place is forbidden, dangerous for kids, but we go there anyway. Kim, my grand-father’s wire-haired fox terrier, always accompanies me. He knows where the cats and the rats hide and flushes them out, chasing them down with energy and joy. A low-flying Messerschmidt 110, on the same bombing mission, strafed the town and sprayed our house with machine-gun bullets. The pock marks from the shells still freckle the building  
 The council tore down rows and rows of unsafe houses. We were lucky and our house still stood, thirty years ago when I last went back. I drove past it when I visited the Hafod, but I didn’t go up the cul-de-sac where we lived. My wounds-in-exile were still too raw and sore.  
 I swore I’d go back again, but I never did. So many promises made and never kept, by them and by me. Promises, scattered like seeds, fell upon barren ground. The voices that made them walked barefoot into the wilderness and never came out.  
 Ten years later, I sat in the coffee shop on the English side of the Severn Bridge. Try as I might, I couldn’t cross that river from England into Wales. Why was I going back? I had no family, no home, no friends. Was I to stand at a hotel bar, drinking with strangers, unknown, unwanted, friendless in the town, a city now, where I was born?  
 I sat in that coffee shop drinking tea, salt tears sliding down my nose, thinking of the night that Swansea burned, thinking of all those things that I, and everyone else, have lost.

**M. T. Head**

I sat in class, head in hands, avoiding eye contact. I hoped the priest wouldn’t point me out, call on me, nominate me with a finger, but to no avail. He called my name.  
 “You have sixty seconds to speak about,” he paused, then produced the rabbit from the hat. “Matches. Come along, stand up, sixty seconds, starting,” he watched the second hand go round on the classroom clock, then counted down: “5, 4, 3, 2, 1 …” waved his hand, and shouted: “… starting now!”  
 Images flashed through my head: *matches: cricket matches, boxing matches, rugby matches, soccer matches, chess matches, matches to light the burners on the gas stove, the oven, to light the fire in the fireplace … matches, matchsticks, Match Box toys, Dinky toys, toys for little boys, toys for big boys …* “Fifteen seconds have gone … you have forty-five remaining.”  
 “When I think about matches, I think about …”  
 … *the first spring day in the bungalow, our summer home. The rooms are cold and damp after the winter and nobody has been here since last year. We lay a fire in the grate, but the wood is damp, as is the old newspaper we gather from our last visit. We search for sugar to aid the blaze that we hope to start, but the sugar bowl is empty. We go to the stove. Cold, winter ashes crowd the fire bowl. We scrape them together in a desperate search for charcoal remains …  but we find nothing. We move to the oil-fired lamps and oil stoves. Matches dragged across soggy sandpaper fail to spark …* “Come along, boy. We haven’t got all day. You’ve got thirty seconds left.”  
 Silence fills the room. It is broken by the childhood sniggers and chuckles of long-forgotten classmates who never became friends My cheeks grow red. I start, stammer, and stop.  
 *… we leave the bungalow. Go next door to where our neighbours winter over. We knock on the door. “Can you lend us a match?” we ask, holding out our hands. Mrs. Williams beams at us. “A match,” she says. “First time in after the winter?” We nod. “I thought so. Saw you arriving. Wondered why you hadn’t come earlier. The weather’s been nice. Here: I can do much better than a match.”  She moves over to the fireplace, picks up the little coal shovel, scoops up a generous portion of her fire, heaps on another lump, then two, of fresh coal, and “Here you are,” she says. “Just put it in the fireplace and add some wood and coal. This can be your first fire. Here, you’d better have some matches too.” “Thank you, Mrs. Williams,” we say. “No problem,” she replies. “It’s good to see you back. It’s been lonely here this winter without you.”*

“Time’s up,” the priest says. “That’s sixty seconds of silence and you can hardly find a word to say on a simple subject. Are you stupid or do you just have an empty head?”

**Railway Yards**

The enemy came to bomb them. And they did. Tracks rooted out, twisted like spaghetti. Engine sheds burned down. Rolling stock ruined. Many children that year lived with the fear of thunder and lightning as Swansea, my home town, burned, in spite of the black out curtains and the air raid precautions. My father’s father lived by the railway yards. When I stayed with him overnight, the shuffle and clank of steam engines and the clatter of coal trucks scarred my dreams.  
 My mother’s father lived by the sea and each night the ebb and flow of the tides rocked me to sleep when I stayed in his house. I told the time by the tides and I knew every ship that entered and left Swansea Docks. Standing on the front step, with field glasses to sweep the bay, I could read the ships’ names, painted on bow or stern, and then check their movements in the local paper, the *South Wales Evening Post*.       
 Timetables: they ruled my life: time tables for the trains, tide tables for the ships. When they drove me away to boarding school, I was far removed from the rail yards and the sea. I was now summoned by bells, my every activity chimed in by bell after bell. Bells: wake up, get dressed, eat breakfast, be silent. Bells for each class, for the *angelus*, bells for dinner, supper, bed time, and baths. Bells on the altar as we knelt before tall candles that flickered light as the tinkling bells flicked sound across the chapel. The only escape from bells came during field games. No bells then, just whistles. But bells and whistles whittled the timetables of a carefully regulated working life.  
 When we moved from Swansea (Abertawe) to Cardiff (Caer Dydd), our new house also backed onto train tracks and railway yards. The rattle of rolling stock lulled me to sleep. Each day, I opened my eyes to the clash and clang of early-morning shunting. Each night, at exactly 3:10 a.m., the express train to London would rattle past my bedroom window and shake me awake as I lay in my bed. The one day I didn’t hear the train, I woke up anyway, listening for its sound. When silence stalked beneath the stars, I knew there had been an accident, and I couldn't get back to sleep. Radio and newspapers, there was little television back then, screamed the news, so many people dead and injured. We mourned for the unknown dead, just like we did in the mine disasters and the bombings.  
 Lights out at 9:30. Prefects and house masters on patrol outside dormitory doors enforced the silence that ruled the night in those inland boarding schools that I was forced to inhabit. No trains, no ships, no tides, no rattling of rolling stock, no steam whistle, no salt smell of the incoming sea disturbed my dreams, just the snoring and whimpering of lonely little boys lost in their iron-frame beds and longing for the comforts of home.

**Premonitions**

“Wind up the flowers,” she said and handed me the front door key. Happiness for her that day was water on the broad beans and tomatoes.  
 “Water the clock,” she said and put the empty   
watering can into my hand. I turned the key that raised the pendulums and they creaked upwards, filling time’s well with sound and music.  
 “We need more sand,” she said, and produced an empty pot. “Some grit as well.” I saw her mind’s wheels skidding on an age of ice and, for the first time, I felt afraid.  
 The tide flows out from my wine glass. I know, like her, I am running out of time and that time and tide wait for neither man, woman, nor boat. Nor can it be turned back, as King Canute was quick to show.  
 Days stand on their heads, cartwheeling down  
sombre streets. Evenings thumb their noses at the cardboard characters filling our TV screen. We scream back at the talking heads, but they never listen, even though they seem to have ears.  
 Outside our kitchen window, hollyhocks and sunflowers stand tall as grandfather clocks. They know their time and place. Each round face mirrors the sun as it numbers our days yet fails to warm frail, ageing bones. Hints gather like dandelions on the lawn. I guess it won’t be long before winter comes and they’re all gone.

**On Learning Welsh**

Here I sit, an old man now, in front of my computer, learning at last my mother tongue, Welsh. English is the language of the invaders, the mine-owners, the men who own the steel works and foundries, and who rule this land with a fist of coal inside an iron glove. Welsh is the tongue of farmers and fishermen, of the villagers who live on the hills and tend the sheep and plant potatoes in tiny small holdings where only the fittest children survive.  
 My mother’s father was the last of us to speak Welsh. It was banned in our house because it was bad for the kids. In a working-class household, Welsh, be it language or accent, was a barrier to success. And success came from imitating your English betters, and climbing upwards, like a vine, or Jack on his beanstalk, until you achieved the impossible and talked and looked and dressed like them.  
 Sitting here, I have discovered the beauty of simple words, not so much their meaning as their sound, the way they flow, the poetry of remembered rhythms:  
*Cwmrhydyceirw*, the Valley of the Leaping Stag, though legend has it that *ceirw* was really *cwrw*, and *cwrw* is beer, and its real name was the Valley of the Brown Stream Frothing like Beer.  
 Words have their own music, even if you cannot pronounce them properly: *Mae hi’n bwrw glaw nawr yn Abertawe* / it’s raining now in Swansea. *Mae’r tywydd yn waeth heddiw* / the weather’s worse today. *Bydd hi’n dwym ddydd Llun* / it will be warm on Monday. Place names also have their own magic: Llantrisant, Llandaff, Dinas Powis, Gelligaer, Abertawe, Cas Newydd, Pen-y-bont … Meaning changes when you switch from one language to another:  *gwyraig ty* / a housewife, g*wr ty* / a househusband, a concept of equality that has ruled Welsh lives since Julius Caesar invaded Albion, coming from Gaul with his legions in 55 BC.  
 *Un deg chwech, dau deg saith* *tri deg wyth*, *naw deg naw* … The photographer asks me to speak in English, then in French, then in Spanish, then in Latin, and lastly in Welsh. He checks the memory card in his camera and looks puzzled.  
 “You put on a new face each time you speak a different language,” he tells me. “Look, this is when you spoke French.” He shows me the photo and yes, I look happy.  
 “And this is when you spoke Latin.” He holds out the camera and I see myself on the screen. I look ever so grim. English, Spanish, French, and Welsh: all different and each language is a new a map carved into my face. Am I a clown, then, a comedian, a chameleon to wear so many masks and to slip so easily from one to another? Which, then, is my language and where is the Old Red Sandstone from Wales into which I can carve my memories and my dreams? More important, which of those many tongues will shape my story as I sculpt each letter of my tale?

**Remembrance Day**

I watch a drop of red wine slide its limping way down the side of the bottle. November 11. Remembrance Day. A time to remember.   
 Seventy-three years ago, Father John had taken my ear lobe between thumb and forefinger and pinched the nail deep into the flesh until the blood ran.  
 "This afternoon you will go down to the bamboo grove and cut a cane,” he told me. “Bring me that cane and I will bless it."  
 That night, I couldn’t sleep. Snuffles, snores, and an occasional sob broke the dormitory's silence. The bamboo cane lay beside me, a long, cold serpent sharing my bed.  
 The next day, Father John crooked his finger in my direction and I followed him to hs priest’s cell. He made me kneel with my hands stretched out like those of Christ on the Cross. The priest struck me with the bamboo cane six times on each hand.  
 "Your Savior, blessed be His name, suffered more, much more for you," the priest intoned. "Examine your soul. Find fault with each flaw, for you are unworthy. Remember: the eye you see is not an eye because you see it, it is an eye because it sees you. Christ sees you as you kneel there. He sees. He knows. He judges. Examine your soul with care and stay there until I return."

The priest raised his right hand, made the sign of the cross in the empty air, and left the room.  
 I knelt before the crucifix in prayer and, as I had been taught, contemplated the wounds of Christ. I imagined each blow of the hammer and felt the pain of cold iron nails biting into my warm flesh. I tasted bitter vinegar as it dripped off the sponge, gasped at the thrusting spear, felt the lash's sting as it fell across my flesh. I gradually became the flagellated Christ and knelt before the crucifix, staring at myself eyeball to eyeball in the same way I looked at himself in the morning mirror. The crucified Christ gazed back at me, my brother, my soul mate, my double.  
 After an hour, a red drop of paint slipped from the nail hole in Christ's right hand. I blinked. The red drop trembled then fell.  
 After two hours, Christ opened his eyes and smiled at me.  
 After three hours, salt-water formed at the corner of Christ's eye. It glistened in a sunbeam that entered through the cell's narrow window.  
 After four hours, tears began to flow down flesh and painted wooden face.  
 Seventy years later, I sit at the table. I watch the red wine trickle down the bottle. It’s Remembrance Day. I remember it all and my tears flow again.

**What’s in a name?**

Only the winners write the history of their conquests, the tales of their heroes, the glory of their battles and their bloody deeds. Who knows now how the losers felt, the dead and the defeated, history’s non-winners, their slates wiped clean, their names erased from stone and stele?  
 How many vast and trunkless legs of stone lie in how many deserts? How many temples and tombs lie unexcavated in how many jungles?   
 Unknown warriors walk across buried walls, their names and times forgotten. Spider webs tie them down. Moss and moisture eat away at face and figure. Even the script is unknown, the letters untranslatable.   
 What’s in a name? The Red Wings, the Black Hawks, the Braves, the Algonquin? Whose heart lies broken and buried at Wounded Knee? Why does the Wolastoq rise in the Notre Dame mountains and flow down through unceded land to the city of Saint John on Fundy Bay?  
 “Sticks and stones will break my bones, yet names will never hurt me.” But what if I have no name? No-name man, no-name woman, no-name child, no language to call my own, no culture, no history, except the one that others wrote and forced me to believe.  
 Write your poems, write your stories, write your childhood, write your memories, write what you know, invent what you don’t know. You can’t remember your name? Give yourself a new one. You have forgotten your myths? Create new ones. You have forgotten your language? Seek and you will find and when you have found, learn your language again, a word at a time, phrase by phrase, word-picture by word-picture until you have renewed your world and your ancestors stride through your veins yet again to stand in the sun that you shine upon them.  
 Restriction, extinction, suppression of the weakest and poorest, survival of the fittest … You, you who are reading this, you who have survived, you can count yourself among the strongest and the bravest. Now name yourself for who and what you are.   
 Pick up your pen and write. Lazarus I name you: step out from your living tomb. Walk and talk, and write your own story. And remember the words of Oscar Wilde, “Tell your own tale, and just be yourself, my friend, because everyone else is taken.”

**Lamentations   
for   
Holy Week**

***Based on a text  
dated 1603  
and revised  
with 20/20   
vision.***

**Roger Moore**

**©**

**2020**

**By Way of an Introduction**

In 1613, Francisco de Quevedo, the Spanish poet about whose love-poetry I wrote my doctoral thesis (Toronto, 1975), wrote a collection of heartfelt ***mea maxima culpa*** poems dedicated to his aunt. It bore the title of *El* *Heráclito Cristiano* / *The Christian Heraclitus*. This in turn was based on an earlier cycle of poems, *Lamentaciones de Semana Santa* / *Lamentations of Holy Week* (1601), which Quevedo appears to have written following the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

These spiritual exercises consist of a set of contemplations based on the Stations of the Cross, ***Via Crucis***, in which the contemplator meditates on each of the moments of Christ’s torment and suffering leading up to his death by crucifixion at the end of Holy Week. The purpose of the exercises is to try and recreate in the mind of the contemplator the sufferings of Christ, to imagine his pain, and to feel his suffering at a personal level. This is an act not only of contemplation and contrition, but also of purification of mind and spirit.

In 2020, during Holy Week (from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday and the Resurrection), I attempted to follow in the footsteps of Quevedo and to contemplate the current world situation and my own specific situation, as influenced by the lock-down in New Brunswick and elsewhere instigated on account of the Corona Virus pandemic.

*Lamentations for Holy Week*, then, is my attempt to examine myself and my own conscience at a time of great personal stress, a stress that I share with all those who are infirm, frail, in ill health, alone, and getting on in years. These are the people most affected by loneliness and the threat of the pandemic to our lives.

However, the events surrounding the brutal death of George Floyd, who died with a police officer’s knee on his neck, made me re-envision the whole project. With 2020 / 20-20 hindsight, I rewrote the first version of the ***Lamentations*** and turned it into what is a very personal examination of my own current consciousness of the meaning of sickness, sacrifice, and death.

***Caveat lector*** / reader beware: I personally find these poems deeply troubling and readers’ discretion is advised.

**Addenda, 2021**

This year, Easter 2021, I will comment on last year’s poems in the light of this year’s new challenges and the current, constantly changing situation.

**Prelude**

**El Cristo de Carrizo**

*“Contemplate this crucifixion.*

*Each of your sins is a thorn  
driven into His brow.*

*Each misdemeanor spears  
the sacred side,  
draws water and blood  
from the open wound.*

*Your sinful deeds   
drive nails anew   
into hand and foot.*

*Christ lives in you.  
Your misdeeds nail him  
daily to the cross   
He bears for you.*

*He hangs there,   
open-eyed.*

*No death,   
no resurrection,  
just an everlasting suffering  
from these nails   
you daily drive.”*

**Palm Sunday  
  
Entry into Jerusalem**

1

Crowds   
mass in the street  
waiting to greet  
a man on a donkey.

Palm against palm  
a street-storm:  
jeers and cheers.

Some genuflect,  
others take a knee.

A sight to see  
these tears flowing,  
this tear gas  
blowing.

A war crime, when sprayed  
on the battlefield,  
this mace and pepper now played  
on those who prayed,  
or strayed,  
or too long stayed  
on streets now empty.

**2**

Bold is the soldier,  
even bolder  
this high-priest  
who takes a bible  
into the battle-space.

What is this upside-down flag  
waved by a pyromaniac  
who anoints troubled streets  
with the holiest of oils   
then ignites them with a match?

Incestuous this incense,   
this hot-pepper sprayed  
on people betrayed  
by those sent  
not to protect them,  
but to deflect  
and detect them,  
then to infect them  
and to bind their wrists  
and haul them   
away.

**3**

Nothing will ever be  
as it was before.  
Time, like water,  
like these people marching,  
constantly flows,   
trickling through my fingers,  
uncatchable, unstoppable,  
 sand filtering through  
the hour glass’ waist.

Water flows, currents shift,  
rocks wear down,  
banks slide and fall.

*“You cannot walk  
in the same river twice  
nor ever attend  
the same demonstration.”*

Nor can you recapture  
that first, fine, careless rapture,  
the touch of that first   
drop of river water.

Kneeling by the river bank,  
like St. Kevin and his Blackbird,  
I cannot recall the river’s name.

**4**

Don’t look out the window.  
You don’t want to know what’s happening.  
Don’t look out.

Play ostrich.   
Place your head in the sand.  
Pretend there’s nothing there to worry about.  
Pretend you can see the missing PPE,  
the vanished masks, the surgical gloves,  
the sanitized hand-wash that everybody needs.  
Just don’t look out the window.   
Don’t look out.

Everyone knows a bum deal  
when they see their friends   
sitting on the sharp end of a stake.

But nobody speaks out.  
Nobody dares to open the curtains   
to look at that rough beast,   
its hour come at last,  
slouching down the street towards us,   
fierce in its new born strength.

Close the window.  
Don’t look out.

**Monday  
of   
Holy Week**

**Cleansing of the Temple**

**1**

Monday is garbage day  
in Island View,  
New Brunswick.

Garbagemen   
drive round in a truck,  
and carry our waste away  
leaving our homes neat and clean.

Who will cleanse us of our sins?  
Who will bring the refreshing snow,  
the blizzard that settles over earth’s scars,  
blanketing our northern winter world  
with a clean, fresh page on which we can write  
crisp paths, new resolutions?

You put your hand across your face  
and closed your eyes. After a while,   
you peeped and what did you see out there?  
Millions marching, vans driving into crowds,  
riot squads flushing the city’s arteries  
with clean, fresh blood? Or did you see nothing,  
nothing except normality happening around you?

Nothing except the daily inner-city dangers  
linked to being poor, being Hispanic, being black,  
not believing what the soul-suckers believe,  
working in several jobs at minimal wage,   
doing whatever it takes just to stay alive.

**2**

After spring floods, outside each house  
in the St. John River flood plain,   
rubble lies piled at the roadside:  
warped wood, water-logged carpets,   
shredded fiber-glass insulation,   
shattered furniture,  
broken chairs, household appliances.

Down by Burton Bridge,  
half tons pull in and dump more debris.   
Young men scale mountains of rubbish  
looking for anything of value,  
something re-usable.

Here, in these seething city streets,  
a river of rioting:  
damaged flesh, fresh blood,   
broken bones, skulls and skeletons,  
shimmering in parks and squares.

At local landfills,  
here in New Brunswick,   
Turkey Vultures, Bald Eagles  
perch, shoulders hunched,  
waiting for garbage trucks   
to unload more foul food.

**3**

The Augean stables are as nothing  
compared to this civil instability.  
Where is the Hero who will confront   
the Herculean tasks now before us?

Divisive, not decisive,  
these calls to go masked, unmasked  
the red masking tape of businessmen, turned  
bureaucrats, turning everything to profit.

Prophets we need, not profits.  
Where is the Martin Luther King  
who will dream the dream that will  
break these chains and set us all free?

Leaderless, his people march, and marching  
they leave the streets a wasteland of broken  
promises, empty canisters, tear gas, and tears.

Mine eyes have seen the glory, but this  
is not glory, and definitely not Old Glory,  
that seventeen by ten foot weather-beaten   
banner that means so much to so many.

Who will now slay the nine-headed Hydra  
or capture the Nemean lion?  
Who will slaughter this beast now stalking  
our cities’ streets, heading to Washington,  
striving to raise the old standard and be reborn.

**4**

Now we are in exile   
from all our gods.

Is there a god behind this god  
who vanished, vanquished,  
into thin air,   
leaving us there  
in a cloud of unknowing,  
in a rage of dark despair?

Fragmented beads  
from a broken rosary filter  
through our fingers.  
A fractured altar,   
a torn-down tomb,  
cracked head stones,   
words and worlds erased.

Who will inherit the temple   
of this forsaken god?  
Who will rescue him from   
the dust of forgetfulness?

Is that his hooded shadow  
walking step by step beside us?  
Some days I hope we’ll never know.

**Tuesday  
of  
Holy Week  
  
Premonitions of Death**

**1**

I did the memory test today.  
It’s hard to believe that tomorrow   
I may not know where I am  
nor what day it is.  
Others have passed this way before,  
none to my knowledge in my family.   
Sorrow gnaws the red bone of my heart.  
Lightning flashes. Thunder rolls.  
 My foundations shake as storm warnings  
walks across my cell phone screen.   
Aurora Borealis daubs the night sky  
north of Island View with its paint-box palette.  
Memories, according to the song, are they made of this.  
But what is this?   
Is it this shape-shifting, heart-stopping  
curtain of shimmering grace?   
Or is it those darker shapes,  
shadowed dancers cast by firelight   
on the smoky walls of a pre-historic cave  
 where our ancestors gnawed  
the half-burned bones of a roasted aurox?

**2**

Memories deceive me with their remembered shows,  
shapes shifting with a click of the magician’s fingers.  
What magic lantern now slips its subtle slides

across night’s screen? Desperate I lap at salt-licks

of false hope that increase my thirst and drive me  
deeper into thick, black, tumultuous clouds.

The pandemic lays waste to the dog-days of my mind.  
Carnivorous canicular, hydropic, it drinks me dry,  
desiccates my dreams, gnaws me into nothingness.

In my dreams, a black dog hounds me, makes me   
chase my own tail. It barks dreary shadows,  
memories that ghost through my mind.

Tarot Cards and Tea Leaves are lost in a Mad Hatter’s  
illusion of a dormouse in a teapot in an untold tale.  
Hunter home from the hill, I return to find my house  
empty, my body devastated, my future a foretold mess.

**3**

Tough days around us and even tougher ahead.   
Covid-19 prowls the schools and people I know,   
young and old, are frightened and in quarantine.

Gallows humor keeps me alive.   
Last night my favorite teddy bear went AWOL.   
I got up at 3:00 am and sent out a search party.

Then I picked up the phone and called 911.  
Masked men in their jackboots and their PPE   
came and broke down the door. Then they strip-

searched the house probing everywhere and filling  
each room with a hailstorm of bullets before  
they burst the invisible barriers and tumbled in.

All my friends are in the doldrums now, watching,   
as Admiral Brown abandons ship, mans the boats,  
 and hauls away into fairer weather and cleaner waters.

You say you do not understand? Verily, I say,  
‘Blessed are the poor in intellect and the weak of mind,  
for they might know peace in these troubled times.’

**4**

**A Throw of the Dice**

*« Un coup de dès  
n’abolira jamais le hasard. »*Stéphane Mallarmé

“A throw of dice

will never abolish chance,”  
the French poet wrote.  
  
Nobody understood his words.

Many said he was incoherent,  
just another babbler.  
Nobody, back then, had heard  
of Covid-19 and they knew  
very little about pandemics  
in spite of the Spanish Flu.

Now it’s another man’s turn to throw  
those dice. He plays poker for profit  
staking all our lives day after day.  
He tosses the dice from hand to hand,  
weights them craftily, then casts them.

Dead men’s knuckle-bones, scoured  
and scarred, they march towards main street  
bearing their skull-and-cross-bone banners.  
Cat calls and boos. Jeers and cheers.  
Anti-fas and Nazis, supporters and opponents,  
some wearing masks, many bearing guns.

Even when he weights them, these biased dice   
fall beyond the thrower’s control. They skitter,  
bounce off tear gas barriers, kneel on naked necks,  
choke the streets as boys and girls plead for mercy.

A monster waiting to be reborn stalks the streets.  
It never obeys the wishes of the one   
who made the magic and brought it back to life.   
When, I ask you, will we ever learn?

**Spy Wednesday  
  
Denunciation to the Sanhedrin**

**1**

Now is the time to talk of betrayal:  
my mother left alone in hospital,  
my father abandoned in a care home,  
my old dog left at the vet’s  
to die a dog’s death, all alone.

Who is this man, this whisperer  
who sows poison in the ears of priests?  
Who is this man who fills the wine glass  
with disinfectant and offers it to his friends?

Who are these men who stand on street corners  
and harvest the innocent with lethal weapons,  
dropping them in the streets, corn before the scythe?

Grim Reapers, indeed, and this day is the day  
of the criminally irresponsible who fly   
in the face of facts weaving their words  
into conspiratorial webs of spider-men   
fantasies and fanciful lies.

**2**

Here, in this self-imposed prison,  
I yearn for the sea I cannot see.

Taps run water, hot and cold.  
In dawn’s early light, I recall  
with misgivings everything I miss,  
wind-kiss, hiss of water on sand,  
freedom to make footprints.

Spring, summer, sun, and seasons  
make no sense, here, behind bars,   
marking time daily in my journal,  
and meaningless now the tick-tock  
of Roman numerals on the clock.

Days, months, and planets move and are moved  
in time to meal-time whistles and bells.  
The universe explodes, expanding outwards,  
increasing in size, while I diminish and shrink.

Abandoned, alone in solitary confinement,  
*saecula saeculorum*, for ever and ever.   
Amen.

**3**

In the morning came the word:  
*“Pick up thine sleeping bag and walk.”*  
But I didn’t hear those words.

In the afternoon came the word:  
*“What doest thou here?  
Pick up thine bags,  
pack the shopping cart,  
leave the beggar’s paper cup   
for another and walk, just walk.”*  
But I didn’t hear those words.

Late at night, the word came again.  
Which word? What word?  
The good word? The cross word?  
The robin’s word? The crow’s word?

A weird word, key to a twisted world?  
A password to a secret society  
planning new privilege?

Oh, who would trust the crow’s word,  
pinion-penned, winged, swift and sure,  
obscure, across the roof?

Thin slice of sky-blue sky,  
carved by crafty crows  
scribbling wild words,  
moving shadows across a silken screen.

**4**

Verily, verily, I say unto you:  
is this the poisoned pawn that opens  
or closes the shutter-blinds of the game?   
Omega & Alpha, is it an end or a beginning?

In my beginning is my end. Or is it?  
And to what end did I begin? When I was born  
I would have taken my first steps on the road   
to this death that walks beside me,   
had I been able to walk.

Do life and time move in circles, then,  
one thing tied up in another, a kitty-cat’s-cradle  
interlaced, interfaced with non-linear time,  
circadian time, celestial time, the seasons,   
and everything carved in Stonehenge stone?

Verily, verily, I say unto you:  
I do not know the truth of this matter.  
Nor can I fathom the depths of this ocean  
in which I sometimes sink and sometimes swim.

Grim the coracle that spins on the current,  
golden the moonlit path over the sea  
that invites me every night to see things  
in a different light and set myself free.

**Thursday  
of   
Holy Week  
  
Last Supper**

**1**

What is this life but an indoor dream,  
a set of shadows cast over my prison wall,  
and me a prisoner shut down under lock and key  
solitary confinement in the safety of my home.

Breakfast, lunch, supper: I no longer care,  
except for freedom, fresh air, an end to so much  
suffering, sickness, cruelty, imprisonment,  
this pandemic that threatens life and limb  
with its poison that will sweep me away.

I want to escape, to break out of these barracks  
that are too small to hold my universal soul,  
my soul that flies at night and explores Platonic  
skies on the wings of a snow-white angel  
released from the dovecote of a Neo-Noah’s Ark.

Oh, pity those poor earthlings stuck below  
viewing the world through a television set,  
a cell phone, or a computer screen,  
unaware of the spheres as they dance  
to the prime mover’s music and motive tunes.

I open, then close, cell window and door.  
Like Sartre’s characters in *Huis Clos*,  
I cannot face the reality of my freedom.  
  
The dice are thrown. My fate has been cast  
Life outside at liberty is not as simple,  
or as good, as it was before.

**2**

Twelve is too many, even for a Yellow Zone.  
Guests should be limited to six at most,  
and preferably from the same family bubble  
or limited circle of one’s closest friends.

Remember to wear your masks, to wash  
your hands, to avoid buffets and finger foods,  
and do not serve dishes that must be shared  
in such a way that your guests contact the food.

Keep your social distances. Six feet apart,  
at least. No crowding round a small dining table,  
all cramped together on one side to pose  
and none of this crowding, this kissing on the cheek,  
no fingers dipped into the same serving bowl.

Forget horoscope and prophecies. Not everything  
is written in the stars, nor must we harken to a voice  
other than the voice of civil authority. And if  
you dwell in a bright red zone, then limit your  
gatherings to one or two people. Forget the audience.

Forget the doorway carved into the wall. Through  
that door, the pandemic may enter and strike you down.  
Come along now. Obey the rules. Make this   
a happy day and remember, no double dipping,   
and smile, don’t frown.

**3**

Who dips his hand in the dish  
at the same time as me  
and munches his finger food  
the day before that treacherous kiss?

Who walks a mile in anyone’s shoes  
and what does that man have to lose,   
other than the life of another and his life?

Death by suicide, strung up   
on an olive tree, that is not the path for me.  
An olive branch, yes, with snow white doves,  
maybe, not the black crows of acrimony.

Raise, oh raise, the bitter chalice.  
Drink deep, Drain it in draught. Don’t sip.  
Allow no slip between cup and lip,  
no thought for what the future may bring  
as approaching storm troopers  
close the ring and fence you in.

This death is my death and mine alone.  
It’s the one that was born with me,  
the one that owns me,  
and the only one I own.

**4**

This bread he breaks, take it and eat.  
This wine he pours, take it and sip.  
No, it is not his blood, nor his flesh,  
nor anything carved out of him  
in the metatheatre of a Shakespearian play,  
in fact or symbol, with the butcher’s knife.  
Take it and give thanks. It is all he has to offer.

Last will and testament, his presence on this street,  
the executioner’s knee upon his neck, and him,  
subjugated, brought under control, *sub jugum*,   
under the yoke the farmer makes dumb oxen wear.

These streets form part of no plantation.  
Tell me: what has happened to this nation?   
Brother, I cannot speak for you  
in your Jim Crow voice,  
nor make your Jim Crow choice   
that will never be a choice.

In my backyard there is no rooster  
to raise his rooster voice  
so you can be denied, not once, not twice  
but so many times,  
with nobody to stand up for you,  
and to cry out against these crimes.

**Good Friday  
  
Crucifixion and Death**

**1**

Now is the hour of his parting,  
such sweet sorrow, they say,  
but not on this day.  
Yet we’ll meet again, sang Vera Lynn,  
don’t know where, don’t know when.

There he lies, helpless, on the street.  
Why is that man in blue   
kneeling on his neck?  
*“I can’t breathe.”*  
Can’t anyone hear his cries?  
Is there anybody out there listening?

Watchers stand round and watch.  
Someone makes a video on a cell phone.

Who gifted him this gift,  
this parting gift he never chose.  
Everyone who follows him  
and tries to walk in his shoes  
knows he had no choice.  
They know he didn’t choose.

**2**

Do you feel the baton stab into the guts?  
The plastic shield’s edge slash into the face?  
The knee come up, no ifs, no buts?

Eyes water from tear gas and pepper spray.  
Thunder flashes crack and roll, deafening  
ears, taking years from marchers’ lives.

Did you follow him through Jerusalem?  
Did you walk in his footsteps, step by step?  
There is a green hill far away, or so they say.

The cameras rolled as they cuffed him  
to his pavement cross, men in blue smiled,   
winked at each other, watched him fade.

His loss was not their family’s loss.  
Just another loser tossed beneath the bus.  
The watchers watched and nobody made a fuss.

They stood and stared and nobody cared   
until cell phone videos hit the tv screens.  
 Now it’s fake news, whatever that means.

The believers will believe what they’re told.  
You can’t put a price on what he was losing,  
on what of what so many have already lost.

**3**

Leg-irons and chains:  
that’s what remains from his journey here.

Iron, cold iron, splintered, burning wood.  
A death bed on the sidewalk  
his last will and testament.

A flaming cross lifted him to the skies,  
that cross burning before his eyes.

Before he goes, we must double-check:  
whose is that knee upon his neck?

*“Let me breathe, let me breathe.  
Take away your knee.  
Why hast thou forsaken me?”*

Commissioner, forgive them.  
They didn’t know what they did,  
when all around the dying man  
men closed their eyes and ears,  
buried their heads, and hid.

**4**

Good Friday in Island View:  
a foot of snow fills the streets,  
empties the churches.  
The Easter Weekend lurches   
towards its predestined end.

But how do you end   
two thousand years of hurt,  
four hundred years of persecution,  
of cruelty and neglect?

How do you end   
eight minutes and forty-six seconds,  
with that black man lying there,   
choking, a white knee on his neck.

He died in the shade  
of orders that were given and obeyed,  
orders that should never have been made.

**Black Saturday  
  
Doubt and Despair**  
1

This is the day we go into ourselves  
to work out who we really are.

It is the teeter-totter day  
when the world balances on a knife-edge:  
Yesterday, the dark deed was done.  
Today the body is in the morgue,  
far from the crime scene  
where black and yellow ticker-tapes,  
sticky wasp-wire, keep sight-seers,  
thrill-seekers, rubber-neckers, at bay.

Today, there is no centre to hold.  
Things gyre and gimble in the wake  
of troubling scenes misinterpreted,  
called fake, and deliberately misunderstood.

The lucky ones have gone back to their homes.  
The unlucky ones languish in jail  
or lie chained to a hospital bed  
so they will not run away.

Take these chains, always these chains,  
from our arms, legs, and hearts.

Take these cold irons from our wrists.  
Forsake your vicious choke holds.  
Leave us alone.  
Take your knees from our necks.

**2**

A birch tree lies on my power lines,  
and I am powerless.

No phone, no radio, no tv,  
and all because of a snow-laden tree.  
Why did this happen to me?

*“It’s a day, man, a day.  
It’s nothing but a day.”*  
*“Imagine,”* says my wife,  
*“being without power all your life.”*

I clench my fist and pump the air.  
Nobody sees me. There’s no one to care.

A ghost’s voice echoes in my head:  
*“Stop moaning, bro, at least you ain’t dead.”*

Sun, wind, melting snow.  
The lame tree rising, slow.

At last the wires are free.  
Power is back again.  
I breathe more easily.

**3**

For forty days   
I have wandered in this wilderness,  
walking from room to room,   
climbing stairs,  
descending to the basement,   
sitting at the computer,   
sitting at the table,  
writing in my journal.

I have watched the minutes  
as they turn into hours,  
the hours turning into days,  
days into weeks, then months.

How long, I ask, oh lord, how long  
before peace and love, friendship and joy,  
return to this world   
where they used to belong?

**4**

A turkey-vulture flew  
over the house this afternoon,  
hungering for who knows what  
as I too hunger for things   
I have almost forgotten  
and no longer know.

Freedom to walk  
in now forbidden places,   
freedom to shop for groceries,   
to stop at the liquor store,  
to buy wine and beer,   
other things that I adore.

For forty days  
I have sailed in this Noah’s   
Ark of a house.  
Like John the Baptist  
I have lingered here for forty days.

Strange and wonderful are thy ways,  
oh lord, in heaven, where souls and angels  
admire your beauty and sing your praise.

**Easter Sunday  
  
The Stone Rolled Away**

**1**

Cooped up in my cave  
I await the light  
that will shine one day,  
lightening the shadows.

I await that joyous moment  
when the scales will fall from my eyes,  
when the boulder will be rolled away.

Who are these people,  
who walk beside me,  
robed in a heavenly light?  
Are they sent to enlighten me?

I read in a black book, holy words,   
brought down from a mountain,  
set out in stone on the printed page.

Enough, oh lord, enough, no more.  
Restore, oh lord, those who cry to thee  
from the deepest darkness of their hearts.  
Set, oh lord, they people free.

**2**

“*Put,”* he said, *“your fingers in my wounds.  
Then maybe you will sing  
some different tunes.”*

*“What wounds,*” they said,   
*“we see no wounds,  
just a man who claims to have  
risen from the dead.”*

An actor they saw, a human being,  
like you and me, paid to play a role,  
not a superman with an eternal soul,  
not a man with a bastinade, so neat,  
tattooed onto back and feet.

*“Tell me,”* they said, *“who do you think you are?  
A man descended from another star?  
Show me please, the scientific truth  
or I must remain aloof  
and doubt forever who you are.*

*A birth certificate at least, not forged,  
but proving your place of birth,  
quite local, please, and not, please not,  
 from a fantasy land nor Middle Earth.”*

**3**

These were the men who doubted every fact  
except the ones taught in the academies  
where they learned that violence is overcome  
only by greater violence.

They truly believed the propaganda   
that told them that violence  
begets strength, and from strength  
comes a deep-seated fear that in turn  
begets love. They thought themselves  
superior to all men and despised the meek  
giving them six foot of earth to inherit.

Unschooled save in brutality, unthinking   
obedience to orders from superiors,  
they turned into killers who slaughtered   
for fun those they should protect.

Tactics rehearsed on hostile crowds  
in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq,  
were turned on peaceful demonstrators  
who became an enemy to be destroyed.

Tear gas, rubber bullets, pepper spray,  
choke holds, knees on the neck  
became lethal weapons turned on fellow  
citizens, now demonized by lies  
into the sort of people they despise.

**4**

Oh, gift me, gift please,  
the right to be as dumb as one of these.

The privilege, the money, all the pull,   
to be so powerful, with so much bull.

Oh, bull and bullwhip both go hand in hand,  
with pepper spray and tear gas  
and tanks to rule the land.

We thought we’d left the plantation far behind,  
that slavery was not on the modern mind.

And then we saw the economy drift.  
Minimal wage and mankind set adrift.

One law for the poor, another for the rich.  
A bill of rights that cannot right   
a single wrong.

How long, oh lord, how long  
must we endure?  
How long?

**Easter Monday  
  
Aftermath**

**1**

The world is on fire.  
Someone, somewhere  
lit a match.  
The world exploded.

A match in the lungs.  
the whole world burning,  
fire on the flood,  
the forests aflame,  
after-dark city streets  
lit up by bonfires   
and burning buildings.

Someone, somewhere  
sneezed into their sleeve.  
the world collapsed  
in a fit of coughing.

Protesters protesting  
about Covid-19 and testing,  
about masking and unmasking,  
about the right to carry guns  
and to use them without asking.

Intelligence, give me  
the exact name of things:  
corona virus, vaccine,  
air that’s pure,  
drinkable water,  
a new beginning,  
a cleaned-up world  
for my daughter  
and her daughter.

I wish I could spare them  
from all this slaughter.

**2**

Filled with fury,   
the world’s innocence  
smoulders in the charnel house.

We who brought you here,  
we who laboured to give you life,  
food, health, and education,  
pray for us, now  
and at the hour of our death,  
but from a safe distance.

Pray for us in our abandonment,  
in our care homes,  
locked down, inaccessible.

Now our only outlets are social  
media, e-mails, texts, television and radio,  
the telephone, if the voice at the other end  
deigns to answer, bothers to pick up the phone.

Oh answer, answer my call  
as from the depths I cry to thee,  
there on thy eternal throne.

Oh, let my voice rise up to thee.  
Set me and set thy people free.

I’m calling now:  
pick up the phone.  
Don’t leave me here,  
abandoned and alone.

**3**

*I had no paper with me in the car  
and wrote this on a bottle redemption slip.*

Redemption:   
that’s what I seek  
and some days it seeks me.  
A double need this need to redeem  
and be redeemed. A double need too   
this god I need, the god who needs me.

Lonely he will be without me,   
and I without him.  
Knock and the door will open.  
Seek and ye shall find.

I look and, yes, he’s there,  
him within me and me within him.

This redemption slip is all I need:  
empty bottles on the one hand,  
my empty heart on the other,  
both now redeemed.

All of this while I sit in the car  
outside a fast-food chain  
wondering if a bullet will come,  
a knock on the window pane,  
or someone brutal who will rejoice  
in his heaven-sent task of handing out  
pain.

**4**

Free will. *Libre albedrío* the Spanish called it  
during their Golden Age. It’s the ability   
to choose, to know the difference between  
right and wrong and to choose what’s right.  
It’s not to worship those woeful slogans:  
law of the jungle and might is right.

What’s wrong with this world if the light  
is hidden from us and what happened to  
the way, the truth and the light  
when our lost powerful people are unable  
to see the light and to do what’s right?

How can they sleep at night  
knowing people they have cheated,  
bullied, beaten, go hungry,  
lack a roof over their heads,  
sleep on the streets, in shop doorways,  
protected by cardboard boxes  
or plastic sheets to keep off the rain.  
No jobs, no insurance, no money,  
no health care, men, women, children  
in despair because powerful people don’t care.

I have seen the blunt needless passed  
from hand to hand and slipped into wrists.  
I have smelled the bloodied bandages,  
seen the people sleeping over  
the underground railway grills  
surviving because of the hot air rising  
from below to melt the falling snow.  
The winter is not the time to live  
outdoors in this cold, Northern clime.

What crime is it to be poor, jobless,  
deprived? It’s not their fault they have nothing.  
They didn’t choose to go without money,  
friends, food, shelter, all their possessions   
in a plastic bag you carry from place to place.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy,  
and the merciless shall receive no mercy in return.

**Closure**

« In the beauty of the lilies  
 Christ was born across the sea  
with a glory in his bosom   
that transfigures you and me.  
As he died to make men holy,   
let us live to make men free …”

***Battle Hymn of the Republic***

*Mea culpa.  
Mea culpa.  
Mea maxima culpa.*

**AMGD**

*Ad maiorem Dei gloriam   
inque hominum salute*