

In That Howling Infinite



Poems of Paul Hemphill
Volume Five

*But as in landlessness alone resides highest truth, shoreless,
indefinite as God - so better is it to perish in that howling infinite,
than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!*

Herman Melville, Moby Dick, Chapter 23

*who'd separate my love and I
must separate the sun and sky
part my body and my soul*

*for Adèle
constant companion, critic, advisor, and metronome
in these, my literary and musical endeavours*

What's Bob got to do with it?



I was in love with Dusty Springfield. In the drear tea-time of my adolescent soul, I worshiped her truly, madly, deeply. Tiny girl, big hair, panda eyes, hands moving like a beckoning siren. I just had to hear “da da da da da da” and then “I don’t know what it is that makes me love you so...” and I was hers for the next two and a half minutes. Until...

It was one of those beautiful late-spring evenings that you would get in the England of youthful memory. The evening sun poured through the gothic stained glass windows of the school library – it was one of those schools. A group of lower sixth lads, budding intellectuals all, as lower sixth tended to be, gathered for a ‘desert island disks’ show-and tell of their favourite records.

Mine was *Wishin’ and Hopin’* by you know who. Then it was on to the next. Clunk, hiss, electric guitar intro, and: “My love she speaks like silence, without ideas or violence, she doesn’t have to say she’s faithful, but she’s true like ice, like fire...” I was gone, far gone. So was Dusty.

I bought a guitar. A clunky, eastern European thing. I tried *Blowin’ in the Wind*, but what came out was unrecognisable. My dad said he’d break it over my head. One day, that tipping point was reached. It sounded indeed like *Blowin’ in the Wind*, or something similar. I was away, and the rest, as they say, was hearsay.

Back in the Day



"Once upon a time in England, with a sword in every pond", sang Roy Harper, the high priest of anglo-angst. On that high of hope and hype, so it all began. With a heritage of Irish rebel songs and folksongs, and the 'sixties folkie canon (but never, ever 'Streets of London'). Sea shanties, a capella Watersons, Sydney Carter's faith-anchored chants, 'The Lord of the Dance' being the most beloved (a song now and forever burdened with the curse of Michael Flatley). Across the pond, young Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Peter, Paul & Mary decanted fine old wine into new bottles, and during the Easter CND march in London in 1966, billeted in an old cinema in Southall, a first public 'performance' with Ewan MacColl's "Freeborn Man of the Traveling People". The journey had begun, and, as the father of America poetry had crooned, "Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road, healthy, free, the world before me, the long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose".

And it led beside strange waters. "Marc Bolan warbled "My people were fair, and had sky in their hair, but now they're content to wear crowns stars on their brows". But didn't they all in the days when Tolkien was king, and elves and ents walked amongst us. We thoroughly understood and empathized. And we marveled at the Scottish bard who could pen 'The Minotaur's Song' and 'Job's Tears', and then run off with Old Father Hubbard. Then Roy sang 'McGoohan's Blues', a twenty minute digression from the concept if not the plot of an iconic if indecipherable television series. "The Prisoner is taking his shoes off to walk in the rain".

'The Songs of Leonard Cohen' played in every wannabe poet's bedsit. "Come over to the window, my little darlin'. I'd like to try and read your palm". What a pick-up line, so fitting for the generous times that were the 'sixties. Others might sigh over the agonies of 'The Stranger Song', and 'The Stories of the Street'. But I preferred the drollery of "Sometimes I see her undressing for me; she's the sweet, fragrant lady love meant her to be". And the wondrous punch-line of 'Chelsea Hotel # 3', that gorgeous tribute to the peerless Janis: not what happened on the unmade bed, but "we are ugly, but we have the music". Bob segued from folk to rock, carrying with him many if not all of acolytes on the joker man's journey from "Oxford Town" to "Desolation Row". To this day, people ponder the meaning of "Jewels and binoculars hang from the head of the mule" and marvel at "The ghosts of electricity howl in the bones of her face

Roots and fruits. Roots and fruits. First the settings for poems that caught the fancy. Yeats, Auden, the Mersey Poets, Sam Coleridge, even *The Lord of the Rings*. Most have disappeared down the foggy ruins of time, including 'The Lady of Shallot' (predating by three decades Loreena Mckennitt's take on Tennyson), and Auden's 'The Shield of Achilles'. But others still get a public airing. 'Square Dance', Roger McGough's hoe-down in No Man's Land'; TS Elliot's, 'Hippopotamus', a hymn to faith, fauna and food; and AJ Tessimonde's bittersweet 'Black Monday Love Song'. "Seeing and being enlightened", out of the cloud of unknowing emerged first 'Conversations', and then 'London John', a harperesque epic of introspection. The quasi-spiritual 'Celebration' and 'Embryo' (no quasi this one, borrowing surat of Al Quran – the word of the Almighty Himself). A fabulist 'Byzantium' "with a little help from my friends" (Yeats, Whitman, Kipling, and Auden). And 'King of the May', and 'Christopher Columbus', with Rudyard most generous. The latter, and its sequel, 'The Day After Creation', were inspired by the scale if not the bloody reality of the journeys of

Columbus and Alexander the Great. "Out there in the distance, so tangible it seems, I conjure up this caravan of dreams. And we are sailing the seas to come..."

Two and half thousand years ago, an old Greek quoting another old Greek, remarked that "the unexamined life is not worth living". That throwaway line has been the ruin of more young men than any of the hookers in the House in New Orleans, and of countless forests of paper. "London John long watched his day begin from the edge of an optimistic morning". Lightweight and half-baked philosophy, the adolescent's bane, ensued. "Give us the morning to guide us. Into this time we're hurled. Motion is standing beside us as we drift in the untraveled world. Give us the morning to guide. Questions around us are hurled. The answers are burning inside us as we're sifting the unravelled world". Emotional and spiritual questing: "You were building upon an illusion, she said. I thought that you were the strong one. I sought a god in confusion, he said, but the way of the lord was the wrong one". "But déjà vu and memory have built an iron cage to show in disillusion where our hope dies". Roger Waters wasn't exaggerating when he sang that "hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way". But you get over it.

Then, down to the sea, always to the sea returning. One of those early folksongs was "Shoals of Herring", sung by the Clancy Brothers, but written by the fabled Ewan MacColl. "With our nets and gear, we're far'in', on the wild and wasteful ocean. It's out there on the deep that we harvest our bread, as we hunt the bonny shoals of herrin". And the power of it. In the old 'Lewis Bridal Song', 'Morag Bheag', the singer asks: "How shall we fair when the wind's in the sail, when storm clouds gather, storm clouds gather, how shall we fare in the whirl of the gale, out in the midst of the islands?" It was the stuff of dreams, of magic, and paradoxically for a landsman born and bred on a plateau miles from the ocean, and who has never liked immersion, a constant lyrical image and metaphor. The big, swelling, storming, wild, windswept, and restless ocean. Unfathomable and immeasurable – so like humanity. As Ishmael says, when we first meet him in *Moby Dick*, "whenever I find myself growing grim around the mouth, whenever it is a damp drizzly November in my soul...then I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can". So Columbus sings: "as a seeker and dreamer, I came, with my seed and the need to declare it, to the sea which my fathers had dared and my children shall dare it". And in these latter-days, we cannot escape a nautical image or two: "We rise on the billow, descend to the hollow, climb to the topmast or we cling to the raft".

And eastwards, ever eastwards. "There is nothing in the desert, and no man needs nothing", says Peter O'Toole as *Lawrence of Arabia*. But it is the very emptiness and nakedness of the desert that has drawn prophets and pilgrims to it over the millennia. "A voice reaches out in the thickening night, over pale and barren lands", as "from the mountains to the desert and all the fires between", "sages seek the desert as an antidote to fate". The restless sea, the rolling earth; spreading landscapes and panoramic land shapes. "Eager as a hungry flame, eastward, aye, I wandered. Circumscribed horizons change, burst and roll asunder". Condemned to drift, or else be kept from drifting, are songs of wandering and wondering, romance and rebellion. Introspectives about wanderers and nomads, seekers and searchers. 'Christopher Columbus' has a distant pedigree in the theme song to John Ford's classic western *The Searchers*. This was penned by Stan Jones, who also wrote 'Ghost Riders in the Sky'. Fast forward, and there are echoes in the Homeric yarn of the battling bulls (not included in this volume). All of this is recapitulated, almost, in 'Valences', a retrospective travelogue. For all the failings of memory, nothing is entirely forgotten. It is all there on the hard disk: "vanishing echoes of strange dreams returning, just out reach of the memory's hand, falling like mist through my arms".

And juxtaposed with the theme of wandering is this falling, weaving through it all in social, emotional, and political circumstance. Falling down, falling through, falling into, falling out of, and falling apart. Falling from heights, falling into gloom, falling into chaos, falling in love. An image lingers from Auden's *Musee de Beaux Art*. The poet contemplates Breughel's *Fall of Icarus*. The proud youth has flown too near the sun on golden wings of wax, and these having melted, he plunges into the Mediterranean. In a corner of a bucolic panorama, a tiny splash disturbs the tranquil waters, and two tiny, stricken feet and some scattered feathers mark his exit. Elsewhere in the tableau, life goes on. Farmers toil, hunters stalk, revellers party, and ships set sail for strangers' shores. The great drama, the tragic tale of vain Icarus, is lost in the busyness, the ordinariness, the everydayness of the lives that carry on about him.

Two other images resonate. American writer James L Dickey is best known as the author of that backwoods, survivalist, revenger's tragedy *Deliverance*. But he also wrote a remarkable poem that told the true story of an airline stewardess sucked out of her plane's emergency exit and falling to her death in 1962. From her

perspective and literally, her vantage point, as she falls – no, floats, drifts - down, down in a journey that takes forever. And then there is Richard Drew's iconic picture of 9th September 2001 of a young man falling from atop the World Trade Centre.

Similar themes emerge in the dark vignettes of 'When Freedom Comes' and 'E Lucevan Le Stele', 'The Sons of the Beast', 'The Marching Song of the New Republic', and 'Bless This Day'. Contemporary events echo historical parallels, plunging into waters cold and turbulent. Rwanda, Lebanon, Chechnya, Palestine, and the wars of the Yugoslav succession jostle for space with the Crusades, the Thirty Year's War, the Napoleonic Wars, and more. And right on through the dark night, to *The Twin Towers*, the *Global Financial Crisis* and *Arrabi'e 'arabiye*. "From the dust bowl of Manhattan to the ruins of Jenin". "From Hattin to Shatilla Camp, Wexford to Armagh; in Kosovo, we heard the call that sundered Vukovar".

"It is written in the Book of Days where the names of God a wrought, where all our dead a buried and all our wars a fought". And so we range through "the battlefields and graveyards and the fields our fathers knew". The cartography of carnage: Bali, Beslan, Gaza, Grozny, Kabul, Kigali, Sabra, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, to mention but a few of those "far-away places with strange sounding names". "Many have perished, and more most surely will". This latter quotation is adapted from Auden's often overlooked masterpiece *The Age of Anxiety*, a meditation on a world between the wreckage of The Second World War and the foreboding for the impending armed peace. "The bane of bad geography, the burden of topography. The lines where they're not meant to be are letters carved in stone". "One half of mankind does not think and the other does not care; and the sheep go to the slaughter when the wolf pack leaves the lair". And all this against a back-drop of the revolution despoiled, hijacked and betrayed. "The revolution's father, the hero psychopath" shows us how hopes and dreams can be "fooled by the riddle of the revolution". "Words carried far in time and space will topple tyrants, but there's no salvation".

An almost forgotten book was published back in the 'eighties in a series entitled *A Day In The Life of...* that chronicled in pictures the lives ordinary folk in major cities around the world. This one was dedicated solely to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington DC. It is a poignant gallery of images and messages of loved ones and comrades, the emotional debris of that almost forgotten war that although long gone, reaches out through history with an admonishing finger. "Shadows in search of a name for victims we've left far behind".

As Buffy once remarked, "You know what they say. Those of us who fail history are, doomed to repeat it in summer school". John Banville wrote, in *The Sea*, "the past beats inside me like a second heart". This, the epilogue of a later poem, 'E Lucevan Le Stele', is the drum beat that drives many, if not most of the later works. "Canyons and castles lie ageless and ageing, and captive in time". "And sing such songs as we might hear in dreams before day breaking, as ancient echoes hide between the slumber and the waking. We remember, yes, we remember".

So it goes, and so it grows. *Roman Holiday - The Poems of Meniscus Diabetes*, an anthology not included in this volume, and other 'histories' juxtapose past and present in a vein that is at turns dark and jocular. They combine poetry and music, horror and humour. Vikings, Romans, Mongols, and the Spanish Inquisition all faced the music, pushing poetic license to its hazy limits, reacquainting us with a particular take on history, imparting an altogether different perspective on pain and pandemonium, with dubious anthems to power, pride, and prejudice. And always, whether in light-hearted satire, or serious commentary, in 'Torquemada's Blues', or 'Devil's Work', in 'Summer Is The Time', or 'Red Rain'. The beast that lurks in man is there, watching, waiting, seeking an opportunity to break out of its cage. The need for power, for gain, for dominion over others. The willingness to dictate, to oppress, to brutalize, and to kill. And the desire that so many people have for others to be just like them, and with it, the atavistic fear of 'the other'.

And so, the tenor changes. I am reminded of Volumnia's description of her son, the arrogant, ambitious Coriolanus: "before him, he carries noise, and behind him, he leaves tears; death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie; which, being advanc'd, declines, and then men die". We go to dark places where bad things happen. The Meniscus anthology notes how in his latter years, the Roman poet's "melancholy muse was leading him down by dark waters, making him to lie down in barren pastures. He was clearly journeying through a confused ethical landscape to a sinister philosophical place". It is as of Meniscus' wandering shade was messing with the scenery, moving the sets around like some poetical poltergeist. And now we, like him, are sucked into the machinery of it all. And thereafter, juxtaposed with images from the Bard and the *Bible*,

the *Qur'an* and *Quixote*, Melville and Mandela, angels and artists, devils and diplomats, martyrs and mariners, prophets and pirates, rebels and rhymer, saints and soldiers march across the stage.

Who were they? What did they think and feel? The thinking of another time can be hard to understand. Ideas and ideologies once compelling may become unfathomable. And the tone and sensibility that made those ideas possible is even more mysterious. We read, we ponder, and we endeavour to empathize, to superimpose the template of our value system, our socialization, our sensibilities upon the long-dead. And thence, we try to intuit, read between the lines, draw out understanding from poems, plays, novels, memoirs, pictures, photographs, and films of the past. We feel we are experiencing another facet of the potential range of human experience. But in reality, we are but skimming the surface, drawing aside a heavy curtain for a momentary glimpse through an opaque window into the past.

An old song, 'Let Erin Remember', encapsulates it: "On Lough Neagh's banks, as the fisherman strays, in the clear, cool eve declining, he sees the round towers of all our days in the waves beneath him shining". And that, perhaps, is what history is all about. It is the layers of history, the Long March of humanity. And the lesson learned? When it all comes down to it, *all flesh is grass*, and we are rendered into dust. Over two and a half thousand years ago, the controversial Greek poetess Sappho wrote "I tell you, someone will remember us; even in another time". But not all of us. As the unfortunate neighbour in Pèrre Lachaise complains in 'Chanson', "the names no one remembers and the ones no one forgets", cohabit as equals in this grand necropolis.

It is depressing stuff, and we emerge from it all suitably depressed. And in later verse, we delve even deeper into darkness. None more so than in the allegorical saga of the Mad Captain and the Whale that gives this work its title. On one level it could be the ultimate tribute song. Jack Sparrow, Tom Waits, Captain Ahab and Moby Dick, Nietzsche, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, Peter Paul and Mary, Otis Reading, The Ancient Mariner, and Bob Dylan rise from the raging waters. It is a song that is part sea shanty, part treatise on madness and obsession. "Down, down, deep we dove, in a tangle of rigging and rage, down to the deep where the dead sailors sleep, in the darkness of Lucifer's cage". It is, perchance, a submarine version of the sad stewardess' descent.

It's counterpoint could be 'The Salvation Navy', with its storm-racked nautical roll. "The winds of the world blow so hard and so cold and tear holes in the mariners' sails, and the wrongs of the world, oh, they make it so hard to stand fast in the teeth of the gale". It is as if Morag Bheag is sailing to a wake. And yet, may not. The 'Wreck of the Medusa' refrain suggests that all is not lost. The cavalry are just over the horizon. "I know that there are better things in this dark world, and I can feel it deep down in my bones". Whilst we are not on the 'Morningtown Ride' to Honalee, neither are we on the road to Pichipoi. This not the last stand of the 44th Foot at Gandamak but rather, the israelites looking out over Canaan Land. We are not climbing Jacob's ladder to Paradise, but neither are we sliding down the road to Ragnarok! There might be the dystopian 'All Fall Down' with its undercurrent of millennial chaos, but there is also 'Freefall', the cathartic, musical play-out to the recording of 'London John' that takes us unto broad, sunny uplands. Recall how Dylan Thomas' gave the metaphorical finger to mortality: "Though they sink down in the sea, they shall rise again; though lovers be lost, love shall not; and death shall have no dominion".

With these metaphorical themes, so then did the threads unravel, so began a journey that is now drawing to a conclusion. These were the moments I occupied, looking out onto England, but imagining the wider world. And then, from the far side of the world, where the journey will most likely end, in the midst of an Australian forest. Here we are then, with the world literally at our fingertips, as we look out onto a world that is smaller, more knowledgeable, more prejudiced, less wise, more dangerous, more en-threatened, but as ever, beautiful, unfathomable, and magical. And at times like these, perhaps like Banjo, "I somehow fancy that I'd like to change with Clancy" as he "sees the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended, and at night, the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars". And hope that like the Bobster, we shall "dance beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free, silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus sand, with all memory and fate driven deep beneath the waves". But let's leave the last words to AA Milne as we bid farewell forever to The House at Pooh Corner: "wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing".

The Poems

1. London John
2. The Only Running Footman
3. The River and the Wall
4. Celebration
5. Black Monday Love Song
6. Conversations
7. Ballerina
8. Combat in the Erogenous Zone
9. In Our Armour Bright
10. Byzantium
11. Strange News From A Strange Star
12. Though I Fall
13. Legend
14. Shadows
15. The King of the May
16. The Song of the Soldier
17. The Watchers of the Water
18. The Righteous Man
19. Chapter 41 (the howling infinite)
20. The Salvation Navy
21. The Rhythm of the Revolution
22. The Sons of the Beast
23. E Lucevan Le Stelle
24. The Old Road to Jerusalem
25. I Gotta Book
26. The Battle Song of the New Republic
27. When Freedom Comes
28. All Fall Down
29. Bless This Day
30. The Darkness
31. Devil's Work
32. Lucifer
33. The Day After Creation
34. Christopher Columbus
35. Embryo
36. Chanson
37. Ruins and Bones
38. Valences

Every Picture Tells a Story



1. Cover. Gregory Peck stands steady at the bowsprit as Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick* (1956 MGM).
2. Young Bob. Iconic picture taken during the "Like A Rolling Stone" sessions, June 1965.
3. Back in the Day. *Hallelujah*. Sydney Carter, Martin Carthy, Nadia Cattouse, Isla Cameron, and the Johnny Scott Trio, together in song on the BBC's Sunday night show, 1965. This blend of folk and faith was not out of place in the ecumenical music scene that was the 'sixties.
4. *Timeless*. A Syrian moment, in *Foreign Policy* 23rd July 2012. Paul Simon once sang "On the side of a hill in a land called somewhere". Little changes.
5. *Tiflit Al Harb (War Child)*, The Independent 18th March 2013
6. *Jed's Car*. Hillcourt Avenue, the morning after the farewell party for the likely lads' leaving of England. North Finchley, London, September 1972. We reunited in Australia six years later.
7. *Angus*, Highgate September 1973.
8. *I Am The Only Running Footman*. Berkeley Square, 1891. It is the longest pub name in London (the place is still there), but it's heritage is much more than that: see the anachronistic *Chambers Book of Days, A Miscellany of Popular Antiquities*.
9. *Romeo and Juliet*, as seen by English Pre-Raphaelite artist Frank Dicksee (1853-1928).
10. *Dance With Me!* A cormorant displays for a royal spoonbill in Sydney Park, Dec 2011
11. Frank's view of a less enjoyable romantic outcome in *The Confession* (1896).
12. "Dance 'till the stars fall down with the rain". Columbian chanteuse Shakira Isabel Meberek Ripoll, 2011.
13. *Look Into The Eyeball of Your Boyfriend!* Ellen and Alien, apologies to David Byrne.
14. Lewis Morley's famous portrait of Christine Keeler, the model and showgirl whose involvement with a British government minister discredited the Conservative government of Harold Macmillan in 1963.
15. *Our Armour Bright*, Ireland, August 2005. The famous statue in the market square of Enniscorthy shows the doomed Father Murphy, a leader of the quixotic intifada that was '98 Rebellion, pointing the way to Vinegar Hill for a young volunteer, 'The Croppy Boy'.
16. *Arwen at the Ford of Bruinen*. This was not in the book, but all is forgiven because Liv Tyler makes such a beautiful elf in Peter Jackson's *The Return Of The King*.
17. *Mount Warning Morning*, as viewed from Sri Govinda Dham, on the Tweed River at Uki, New South Wales, by Krishna Sundari, 2010.
18. Bucolic vista of the ancient Roman trading city of Apamea, between Hama and Aleppo. Syria, 2007.
19. *Thoor Ballylee*, the Norman tower bought by WB Yeats in 1917, Coole Park, County Galway. Aug 2004.
20. *Red Moon*. Eclipse, June 15th 2011.
21. Mary Jane Boyd 1951-1991.
22. *Arthurus*. Clive Owen as the Roman knight Arthur in the 2004 film *King Arthur*.
23. Keira Knightley, as an underdressed, 'Goth' Guinevere, lets fly in the same film.
24. *In Search Of A Name* at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington DC
25. *The Royal Spoonbill dresses for the Ball* in Sydney Park, 2010.
26. *Episode Of The War Of 1812*, a less glorious view of the debacle by Illarion Pryanishnikov in 1874
27. *Shahid*. Raymond Hoff's bronze sculpture, *Sacrifice*, Hyde Park Cenotaph, Sydney, a memorial to the Australians who fought and fell in The Great War.
28. Turkish soldiers at Gallipoli.
29. Memorials to the French victims of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald Concentration Camps at Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris May 2010.

30. "Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not hunt Moby Dick to his death!" Ahab's oath.
31. The fisherwomen of Cullercoats haul a lifeboat across the cliffs in aid of the stricken "Lovely Nellie" on 1st January 1861. The event, depicted heroically in "The Women", by American painter John Charlton in 1910, actually never happened.
32. *Will You Volunteer?* Bolshevik recruitment poster 1917.
33. *Who By Fire?* The eviction of Travellers from Dale Farm, Essex. Minty Challis, the woman, pictured, was not one of them, but rather, a self-appointed professional agitator. "A pain in the neck, more like", said one of the Travellers. But never let the truth get in the way of a good picture. Getty Images, Daily Mail, October 2011.
34. *Babes in the Wilderness*. Syrian children in the eye of the storm. Al Jazeera, September 2011.
35. "The past beats inside me like a second heart" John Banville, *The Sea*. Layers of history, Damascus.
36. David Rubinger's iconic photograph of Israeli paratroopers at the newly liberated Western Wall, Jerusalem June 1967.
37. The crusader castle of Krak de Chevaliers at Husn, near Homs. "Perhaps the best preserved and most wholly admirable castle in the world", said TE Lawrence. Syria 2007.
38. *God is With Us*. Al Jazeera. The flag is Egyptian, and the child, a Coptic Christian.
39. "What is going to happen to me?" "Bad Things!" From Timur Bekmambetov's *Nightwatch*, 2005.
40. *Timeless*. A Syrian moment, in *Foreign Policy* 23rd July 2012
41. *Siya-se*. Damascus, March 2009. The blue says "death to Israel", and the black, "I love you".
42. *The Hanged Man* Tarot card, a symbol of death and resurrection, and also divinity.
43. *The Falling Man*. Photographer Richard Drew's iconic picture of 9th September 2001 of Jonathan Briley falling from the Window of the World Restaurant atop the North Tower of the World Trade Centre.
44. *Chaelundi*. Forest action in northern New South Wales. These activists have reason to look nervous. They are high atop a tripod being shaken by policemen. Sydney Morning Herald, 1991.
45. The inestimable, irreplaceable, irascible, and dearly departed Saint Fred Hollows in his element.
46. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, as drawn by Gustave Doré (1832-1883).
47. *The Devil You Know*. A Frank Frazetta-esque take on the timeless allure of the Hornéd One.
48. "This destruction was wrought by American and Saudi aircraft". Tripoli 2011.
49. *Lucifer Descending*. Gustave Doré depicts Satan's earth-bound glide in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.
50. *The Lonely Sea and Sky*. Hungry Head, New South Wales.
51. *Paul in Petra*, Summer 1974, and in Wadi Rum, Summer 2007.
52. *Under African Skies*. December 2008.
53. Al Mu'amineen circumambulate *The Ka'ba* at Mecca
54. Père Lachaise, May 2010: necropolis streetscape; Jim Morrison's grave; and La Mur des Federes, commemorating the fallen of the Paris Commune of 1871.
55. Sundown in the Dead Cities of the North, Syria March 2009
56. The Decamanus of Apamea in Spring, Syria March 2009
57. *Outstanding in their field*. A bad hair day for Brendan, Paul and John in the hippie, trippy summer of '69. Whiteknights Park, Reading, before the developers got to it
58. "I met a Traveller from an antique land". Not quite what PB Shelley had in mind. Giza, July 1972



London John



*And I'm just a social experiment tailored to size
I've tried out the national machine and the welfare surprise
I'm the rich man the poor man the peace man the war man the beast
The festive consumer who ends up consumed in the feast*
Roy Harper, McGoohan's Blues

Part One: Floating

London John long watched his day begin
From the edge of an optimistic morning.
Often, he would watch as a cold and yellow sun
Burned its' way through heavy skyline with the dawning.
He laughs in time to a pre-set rhyme -
He moves to a point he has his eyes on.
London John he hums to the tune he strums.
He moves to a new horizon, and he's gone.

*Been on the road too long, been on his own to long,
Been on the train too long, he's been out in the rain too long.*

In the singin' and the fighting and the rockin' bed,
In the laughter and the lovin' and the leaving,
He listens to the music that runs wild inside his head
In the scheme and in the dream that he is weaving.

Maybe he was meant to be a preacher man
Teaching the word of the lord.
Maybe he was meant to be a fighting man
Kissing the unsheathed sword.

*Been on the road too long, been on his own to long,
Been on the train too long, he's been out in the rain too long.*

Writing old words with new meanings upon an open page,
We move and no one knows the road we're travelling.
We take the well-worn maxims as symbolic of our age -
We move, and all the time, the thread's unravelling.
We strut and rage on a crowded stage
To show in words and actions where our hopes lie,
But déjà vu and memory have built an iron cage
To show in disillusion where our hopes die.

*Been on the road too long, been on his own to long,
Been on the train too long, he's been out in the rain,
Been out in the rain too long.*

*Run, run, oh the fox must run.
Run like the wind or the hounds will find him.
Break, break, oh, the man must break,
Break like a beast from his chains.*

Part 2: Freefall

The come-on and the compass are symbolic of his game -
Display to him the motion of a wheel.
"You are learning", said the ghost, "that no two things are the same.
You are learning how to think and how to feel".

London John was alone in this town,
London John was alone in the crowd,
As he rode out of control upon a roller-coaster ride,
London John, he saw the stream but not the other side –
He's searching for a dream in which a moment, he could hide
For a while, just for a while.

London John felt so high and so strange.
London John felt in need of a change.
"Let your words now make mountains that our minds can climb,
Let our eyes then be lanterns, let our feelings rhyme,
And save up the rainbows for another time,
For while, just for a while".

Then a strangely strange elation kind of kills his concentration
And makes him to enjoy this vacant state.
Why force a dress rehearsal for another hard reversal
By jumping in too soon or else too late?

His hopes are timbers he's thrown on the fire.
He talks of love but his bane is desire.
Dreams of love when he's gazing deep into her eyes,
He's haunted by the devil down between his thighs
Who's picking up his words and calling them all lies...
"Those words aren't mine, oh no, not mine!"

On the graph of his elation
The parabola is dipping, dipping down.
From his lofty elevation,
London John is slowly slipping, slipping down.
He's waiting around for the day,
Thinking of some fine words to say.
He's turning on his heel to find a place where he can go,
He's calling out loud "Wolf!" But the wolf won't show.
He's reeling in advance of the expected blow.
But it was fine...Just for a while.



The Only Running Footman



Il have often seen skimming or flying across the road..He looked so agile, and seemed all air like a Mercury. His qualifications were fidelity, strength, and agility.

Recollections of Irish actor and dramatist John O'Keeffe (1747-1833)

And, exploring the main streets, mean streets and backstreets, parks and parade grounds, mews and alleys of Old London. What wonders dwelt within. The old church of St. Bartolph-Without, which turned up in later days in a Dracula movie. The churchyard of St. Paul's, a haven for summer's day lunch-timing. Green Park in spring sunshine as the lily white skin of England divests for primavera. Berkeley Square, where the fabled nightingale sang, and where Clive of India, his mind curdled by corruption and conscience, and haunted by guilt and ghosts, cut his own throat. And adjacent, in Hayes Mews, the hostelry with the longest pub name in London, 'The Only Running Footman'. Such a magical name, it was, conjuring up motion and majesty, speed and style. And it remained in my mind this half-century hence. I had an affinity with this anonymous, antique athlete. These were my running days. I ran everywhere. To the underground, to work, to the shops, to the pub (but not back), though the city, around the town. I revelled in the movement, in the freedom, in the physical and psychological exhilaration of it all. My running days are long over, but I still run in my dreams. From *A Window On A Gone World*, in *Tabula Rasa, Poems of Paul Hemphill* Volume 1

Born in the gloom of a baby-boom
In my post-war parents' heat.
Softly hurled into a jam-jar world
With a kick of itchy feet.
Overdrive in a lazy jive
To the beat of the great unplanned,
I started walking, started talking,
And now I stand

*Halfway into happiness.
I never get too far.
Halfway into paradise,
Upon a crooked star.
Caravan of optimists.
I know the highway well.
I was calling, I started falling,*

Fell into
Hidey-holes for
Homicidal, intellectual freaks.
Happy homes where garden-gnomes
Could hibernate for weeks.
Busy writing thank-you notes
For services undone,
Started fighting and gave up writing,

*Looked up she'd gone,
Gone away with running footmen barking at her heels.
If I thought I'd half a chance,
I'd buy myself some wheels.
Sitting like a postage-stamp
Upon a letter-bomb,
I'm hesitating, and perspiring,
So busy waiting until that*

Plasticine explosion came
And really fried my brain.
Chewed me into little pieces,
Blew me out again.
But the faith that moves the mountains
Tells me to take heart,
So now I'm falling,
Here I go again, falling,
All on my own again, falling,
Hey look at me, I'm falling,
Yes, I'm falling, indeed I'm falling
Back to the start,

*In the gloom of the baby-boom
And my post-war parents' heat.
Softly hurled into the jam-jar world
To the itch of dancing feet.
Lazy jive of an overdrive,
On the trail of the outward-bound.
Started walking, started talking,
Second time around,*

And I'm still
Halfway into happiness.
I never got too far.
Halfway into paradise,
Upon a crooked star.
Caravan of optimists.
I know the highway well.
And I was calling, I started falling,
And as I'm still falling,
I feel I'm floating,
And as I'm floating, I can't help noting
How

Kind of graceful it must look,
Kind of fine, and kind of free.
But I am "it", and when I hit,
It hurts no one but me, it hurts no one but me.
Sensation of slow-motion drop;
I'm conscious of free-fall.
But I am "it", and when I hit,
It ain't no good at all, don't do no good at all.

It's a song that drunken angels sing
As they stumble to their beds.
When all the world hangs from a string
And it standing on its head.
A song that drunken angels sing
When they fear they're growing old,
When all their dreams are vanishing
And all the fires are cold.
A song that drunken angels sing
To the tune of growing old.

Back When



*The world was young, the mountains green,
No stain yet on the Moon was seen,
Song of Durin's Awakening, JRR Tolkien
From 'The Fellowship of the Ring'*

Wintertime

Cold wet wintry London night time
Red cheeks warm breath
Damp hair cold skin
Hand in hand though Piccadilly
Wimpy warmth sings "come on in"
Espresso time is thaw-out time
The young ones never feel the cold
Busy dizzy rush-hour street
Feel the tread of marching feet
The busy city folks are rolling home
Heady dash through winter streets
And crowded tubes make winter heat
Holding onto handholds
As another's hand you hold
Climbing windy escalators up
Past the posters for the shows
The movies and the Berlei bras
And adverts for expensive cars
Then out onto the darkened street
And home to two bar heater
Get someone in for winter
A pleasure to treasure the most
For supper we've baked beans on toast
And cheap red wine by candle light
Hot water bottles down where feet
Refuse the cold bed-sitter sheets
Ah! That will chase the damp away!
A full moon shines through skylight
And night was made for lovers
The poet sang back then

Summertime

It might be just a fancy
That summers seemed so endless
In London way back when
We thought we'd live forever
We wander laughing and talking
Was ever a city made for walking?
We wonder through the here and now
Hot pavements sweaty trains
And Green Park grass and bluebells
White swans and white sunbathers
Breathe in the city's flavours
Of secret streets with histories
And pubs down by the waterside
We watch the ageless river flow
Evenings last forever as
Twilight slow foots its way
Into the long warm night
Long warm nights beneath the stars
There's music in the air
As Handel plays his fine fanfare
Across the lake and far away
And on the Heath up float the songs
Of summer and of strummed guitars
In green and shady English gardens
Get someone in for summer
With cheap chilled wine and pasta
Time was not our master
As full moon shines through skylight
And night was meant for lovers
The poet sang back then

The River and the Wall



*So, we'll go no more a-roving so late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving and the moon be still as bright.
Though the night was made for loving and the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving by the light of the moon.*

George Gordon Byron

*When the night has come and the land is dark, and the moon is the
only light we'll see, no I won't be afraid, no I won't be afraid, just as
long as you stand, stand by me.*

Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller

My love for you is crying out tonight,
Relentless as the arrow in its flight.
Of my heart I give to you control,
Commander of my body and my soul.

Caught between the famine and the feast.
Tossed between the beauty and the beast.
Trapped between the river and the wall.
Caught up in the pride before the fall.

Who would separate my love and I
Must separate the sun and sky.
Part my body and my soul
My body and my soul.

Restless as the waves upon the sea,
Woven like the leaves about the tree
Wrapped up in the magic of it all,
Caught between the river and the wall.

Who would separate my love and I
Would separate the sun and sky.
Part my body and my soul
My body and my soul.

Celebration



Then suddenly the Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror—indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy— but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird-haunted branches around them; and still the light grew and grew.

The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame, The Piper at the Gates of Dawn

Here's a song we can sing together,
Here's a song of how dreams come true,
It comes on strong, it goes on forever.

Here's a song for you.
Troubled voyage in the stormy weather.
Fallen angels of transcendence.
Accidentally lie together in this transience.

*Celebrate now the meaning of man
As only the movement and timelessness can.
The mouth that is kissed and the breath in the kiss.
Embraced and embracing, beloved of this*

True love in the flowing action.
Hearts and mouths in an ageless flower,
Seek elation and liberation in the flowing power.
Each his priest and his own Messiah,
Prophet preaching the private word.
Celebrate in the surge, the fire of a song unheard.

*Celebrate now the feeling that's there
In one ever-rolling and ever-rising prayer.
The archer that missed, and the arrow that missed.
Embraced and embracing, beloved of this*

All the word are written for me,
And all the notes and all the rhymes
Fall into place now to restore me to the present times

*Celebrate now the meaning of man
As only the movement and timelessness can.
The mouth that is kissed and the breath in the kiss.
Embraced and embracing, beloved of this
Celebrate now the feeling that's there
In one ever-rolling and ever-rising prayer.
The archer that missed, and the arrow that missed.
Embraced and embracing, beloved of this.*

Black Monday Love Song

After AJS Tessimond (additions are in *italics*)



In love's dances, in love's dances
One retreats and one advances.
One grows warmer and one colder,
One more hesitant, one bolder.

One gives what the other needed
Once, or will need, now unheeded.
One is clenched, compact, in growing
While the other's melting, flowing.

*Words cannot explain or reason.
Turn away, think, inquire.
Touch me not! You spread a poison.
Judgement, purgatory, fire.
Judgement, purgatory, fire.*

One is smiling and concealing
While the other's asking, kneeling.
One is arguing or sleeping
While the other's weeping, weeping.

*We conquer littleness obtaining
Success that only makes us small.
But unconstrained and unconstraining,
The permanent eludes us all,
The permanent eludes us all.*

And the question finds no answer
And the song misleads the dancer
And the lost look finds no other
And the lost hand finds no brother
And the word is left unspoken
Till the theme and thread are broken.

When shall these divisions alter?
Echo's answer seems to falter:
"Oh the unperplexed, unvexed time
Next time...one day...one day...next time!"

*We conquer littleness obtaining
Success that only makes us small.
But unconstrained and unconstraining,
The permanent eludes us all,
The permanent eludes us all.*

Conversations



*And how the room is softly faded
And I only kiss your shadow,
I cannot feel your hand,
You're a stranger now unto me
Lost in the dangling conversation.
And the superficial sighs,
In the borders of our lives.*

Paul Simon

“A romance from a silver screen”, she said,
“You were the happy ending”.
“Endings are not all they seem”, he said,
“And this dream, it needed mending”.
“You were fast enough with your body”, she said,
“But not fast enough with your heart”.
“Maybe, once, for a while, long ago”, he said,
“I wanted to play just that part”.

And the words of conversation
Grasping for the inner light,
Through the hearts and minds of darkness
In a soft and silent fight.
Was it just imagination
That conjured up this dream –
Driving on this conversation,
Drowning in this wasteful stream.

“As you drew my body deep into your own,
My needs on the rocks of unreason were sown,
And the seeds of a great disenchantment were sown
The night that you captured my mind”.

“You said long ago, in your impassive way:
The moment determines how long we should stay:
The future decides just how much we must pay
When our going leaves all this behind”.

And the words of conversation
Grasping for the inner light,
Through the hearts and minds of darkness
In a soft and silent fight.
Was it just imagination
That conjured up this dream –
Driving on this conversation,
Drowning in this wasteful stream.

“You were building upon an illusion”, she said.
“I thought that you were the strong one!”
“I sought a god in confusion”, he said,
“And the way of the lord was the wrong one”.

"I know that soon you'll see reason, she said,
"Though I know you were always the slow one".
"I didn't want it to end", he said,
"But I didn't want it to go on!"

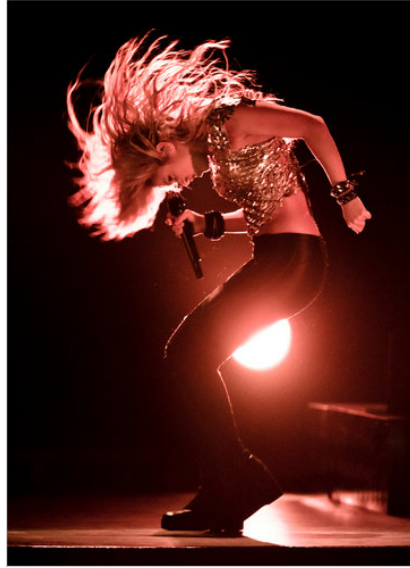
And the words of conversation
Grasping for the inner light,
Through the hearts and minds of darkness
In a soft and silent fight.
Was it just imagination
That conjured up this dream –
Driving on this conversation,
Drowning in this wasteful stream.

"The wheel it goes on turning, and we must make a break".
"I can't go on playing for time just for your sake".
"We've got our lives, laws, and futures to make".
"And it's something that alone we both must find".
"I hope that when I've gone, you'll think me kind!"

And the words of conversation
Would have drowned if they were tears,
As they moved through mental motions
In unspoken, secret fears.
The reconciliation and its words
Were both stillborn
For the doubts and reservations
From their womb could not be torn

And the words of conversation
Grasping for the inner light,
Through the hearts and minds of darkness
In a soft and silent fight.
Was it just imagination
That conjured up this dream –
Driving on this conversation,
Drowning in this wasteful stream.

Ballerina



*Dance, dance, for the figure is easy,
The tune is catching and will not stop;
Dance till the stars come down from the rafters;
Dance, dance, dance till you drop.*
WH Auden, Death's Echo

A lone ballerina danced on in the dark,
In quest of perpetual motion;
The lone ballerina sought long for the spark,
Which would set off a truly great notion:
"Oh, the forms that I fashion with grace of a flame",
This ballerina was heard to exclaim:
"And I move in a gyre so fantastically free,
It's a pity that no one can see".

The lone ballerina danced on in the dark,
In quest of an audience still;
And she ached with ambition to dance in the park,
Where the sunlight would shine on her skill:
"Oh, the form, the expression, the meaning profound",
This ballerina was heard to expound:
"And I master my movements so impressively,
It's a pity that no one can see".

The lone ballerina danced on in the dark,
Where only the night birds could see her;
Our own ballerina aimed far off the mark,
As she waits for some magic to free her:
"Oh, the love and the labour, attention devout",
This ballerina was heard to let out,
"But I stand in my shadows anonymously,
It's a pity that no one can see me,
It's a pity that no one can see!"

Combat in the Erogenous Zone



*My lover comes to me with a rose on her bosom;
The moon's dancin' purple all through her black hair
Her adies-in-waiting, they stand 'neath my window,
And the sun will rise soon on the false and the fair.
Townes Van Zandt, My Mother, The Mountain*

*I'll let you be in my dreams if I can be in yours
Bob Dylan, Talkin' World War III Blues*

Seriously though, the following was all in a dream!

I was tryin' on a suit of armour
I was lookin' for a wooden sword
When a lady in black stepped onto my track
She said: "Mister, can I say a few words?"
She said: "What are ya doin' down yonder, I wonder?
What are you doin' down there?"
I said "I 'lookin' for ways of spendin' my days,
Knight errantry's the cross I bear, Oh yeah
Knight errantry's the cross I wear"

I'm lookin' for a beacon in the deep dark night
Searchin' for good deeds to do
I'm lookin' for wrongs that maybe I can right
And no, I wasn't down there lookin' just for you
I know that there are better things in this dark world
I feel it deep down in my bones
Despite confusions and pleasant illusions of
Combat in the erogenous zone
Combat in the erogenous zone

I was trying' hard to find my karma
Thinkin' deep thoughts absurd
A lady in white came into my sight
She said: "Mister, can I say a few words?"
She said: "What are you doin' up yonder, I wonder
What are you doin' up there?"
I said: "I've taken a lease on an acre of peace
I've got oceans of patience to spare, oh yeah,
Got oceans of patience, I swear!"

I am lookin' for moments to fill up my day
It may sound a bit clichéd to you
I'm lookin' for a reason and I'm lookin' for a way
And no, I wasn't up there lookin' just for you
Everything, everywhere, falls into place
And it feels like I'm just comin' home
Despite institutions and circumlocutions of
Combat in the erogenous zone
Combat in the erogenous zone

I was lookin' for some place warmer
Listenin' to a song unheard
A lady in red crept into my head
She said: "Mister, can I say a few words?"
She said: "Why do your ideas wonder yonder
Tell me what goes on in there"
I said "I'm lookin' for lines and warnin' signs
To keep me from the wear and tear, oh yeah
To keep me from the wear and tear"

I was lookin' for a costume that would withstand the heat
It's a hundred and ten in the shade.
The moment was hot, the spirit was not
and I was not in the mood to get laid
I'm swift to condone the old physical drive
And let out a Neanderthal groan
Without doubt or sorrow, put off 'til tomorrow
Combat in the erogenous zone
Oh no, no combat in the erogenous zone
No combat in the erogenous zone



In Our Armour Bright



*Two roads diverged in a wood and I,
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.*
Robert frost, The Road Not Taken

We left the path for our fortune's sake,
No longer to enchanted be.
We ventured forth new tracks to make.
Oh, let those tracks adventure be.
We left the past for our future's sake,
So full of fears and jealousy,
And with a clean, uneasy break,
Strode down the road of mystery.

We left our home the memories' sake,
Said: "one day, I will return to thee".
But the road we chose did changes make,
And there could no returning be.
And suits of at our we did take
To clothe our vulnerability.
When we left the path for the future's sake,
And the past could not recaptured be.

Say, are we homeward coming
When we seek and all we find
Is measured not what we seek
But what we have left behind?
Say, does this homeward coming
Make a mockery of plans
Breathes a breath of fresh adventure,
Gives a grip to lazy hands?

Builds a beacon forgo guide us,
Yields us yet another truth,
Guides back to paths that we thought
Had vanished in our youth.

In our armour bright,
We advanced into the night.
To shining light we did come.
And the pattern seems
Like a web of dancing dreams
And the songbird, she is dumb.
With our fears at bay
We advance into the day.
Be it grand or grey, we find
That in highs and lows
A brand new flower grows
In the discontented mind,
That in highs and lows,
A brand new flower grows
In the discontented mind.

And our hearts are numb
As the beating of the drum
Marks the steps we must relearn,
And the one time chance
Throws us back into the dance
To which our restless return.
And the spirit aches
When the truth of morning breaks,
And the tale is hard tell.
We will say in truth that the magic of our youth
Was a ripened fruit that fell.
We will say in truth that the magic of our youth
Was a ripened fruit which fell.



Byzantium

With a little help from W B Yeats, W H Auden, W Whitman, and R Kipling, we are sailing to Byzantium



*In the golden book of the golden game,
The golden angel wrote my name.
When the deal goes down I'll put my crown
Over in the old golden land.*

Robin Williamson, *Job's Tears*

*Well she's walking through the clouds
With a circus mind that's running round;
Butterflies and zebras
And moonbeams and fairy tales
That's all she ever thinks about;
Riding with the wind.*

Jimi Hendrix, Christopher Young's *Little Wing*

If I could walk down streams of light,
Right on through the night, I'd get somewhere.
If I could ride on rays of thinking,
In the time of blinking, I'd be there.
But you are standing there, up above,
And, oh no, you pour salt on my love,
Just when I hoped that we would come
To Byzantium.

The 'haves' said: "Dope, forget the hope,
And try to look around for other fishes".
But the 'have not' flails in fairy tales,
And dreams of wealth beyond his wildest wishes.
And somewhere in the distance,
So tangible it seems,
I conjure up this
Caravan of dreams.

*And we are sailing the seas to come,
We are sailing the seas to come,
To the holy city of Byzantium,
The golden city of Byzantium,
The olden city of Byzantium.*

So I'll sing you a song of the rolling earth,
And the land beneath my feet;
The songs that played and the promises made
Will dissolve in the dancing's heat.

Dance, dance! Oh the figure is easy!
The tune is catching and it will not stop!
Dance 'til the stars fall down with the rain,
Oh, dance until you drop!

*And we are sailing the seas to come,
We are sailing the seas to come,
To the holy city of Byzantium,
The golden city of Byzantium,
The olden city of Byzantium.*

And only the master shall praise us,
And only the master shall blame,
And none shall work for fortune or lust,
And none shall work for fame.
But for the joy of creation,
Each, on his own separate star,
Shall draw the thing as he sees it,
For the God of all things as they are!

*And we are sailing the seas to come,
We are sailing the seas to come,
To the holy city of Byzantium,
The golden city of Byzantium,
The olden city of Byzantium.*



Strange News from a Strange Star

*For Susan, who resigned from the human race in August 1984.
And Mary Jane who tried to fly in July 1991*



*A ghost of aviation, she was swallowed by the sky
Or by the sea, like me she had a dream to fly
Like Icarus ascending on beautiful foolish arms
Amelia, it was just a false alarm*

Joni Mitchell, *Amelia*

When you read the words I've left for you,
I will be far away from you.
You'll ask in dumb bewilderment
Just what my motives are
My path was marked by hopelessness,
My footsteps dogged by copelessness,
I found a cure for this distress
In strange news from a strange star

The fears deep down inside of me,
The foes who would not hide from me,
The questions left unanswered:
Where you go, and who you are?
Hit at me in tortured ways,
Clouded up my brightest days.
I found an exit from this maze
With strange news from a strange star

The roots and fruits of my pretence
Thad eaten away my confidence:
Had left me in a vacuum that had left no door ajar.
The joys I'd felt would never last,
They littered the floor of an empty past,
And some one brought to this outcast
The strange news from a strange star

*A stranger barred my downward flight,
And whispered in my ear each night:
"The world will cease to hurt you
When you step beyond its walls".
He called me softly by my name,
And like the moth onto the flame,
I followed him to shadow land
Where the final curtain falls.*

As you read the words I've left for you,
I am far away from you.
And you are none the wiser
As to what my motives are.
But I've found an end to all my pain,
I stand up my feet again,
And find myself reborn again
With strange news from a strange star,
This strange news from a strange star,
Such strange news from a strange star.

Though I Fall



*Though they sink through the sea,
They shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.*
Dylan Thomas

*Keep me lovin' and you get to my heart.
Wings of time will never keep us apart.
Keep me lovin' and you get to my heart.
We can try, we can fly.*
Mary Jane Boyd 1951-1991

Though I fall down through the sky
I shall rise again, I shall rise again,
The winds shall bear me.
Though I sink down in the sea
I shall rise again, I shall rise again,
The waves shall spare me.
And the singer, the singer
Shall not bow or quake
Before God's finger.
The singer, oh, the singer
Shall not cower or shake
Before God's finger.

Though the tower around me tumbles,
I shall rise again, I shall rise again,
And I shall know no fear
Though the ground around me crumbles
I shall rise again, I shall rise again,
The road ahead is clear.
And the singer, the singer
Shall not bow or quake
Beneath God's finger.
The singer, oh, the singer
Shall not bend and break
Beneath God's finger.

Legend



Hic iacet Arthurus Rex quondam Rex que futurus
Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*

Spill my blood with Excalibur, and make this ground holy
Woad to Arthurus in *King Arthur* (2004)

Lights flicker and fade in the thickening shade
Of the deep and despairing dark.
The ghosts of empire ride the clouds,
The hounds of heaven bark.

The veil between the worlds is torn
And time itself unwinds,
As thrusting through, he grasps the blade
That savaged saner minds.

We've poured the wine of anger
On the graves of honest men.
We've raised the banner high before,
He'll raise it once again.

Forged in the fires of Albion
Sprung from the earth of Albion
Washed in the blood of Albion
The ground shakes
The bough breaks
The wind shifts
The earth rifts

Out of the mists of Avalon
Storming the walls of Babylon
Barring the gates of Albion
The hawk flies
The dream dies
The wolf calls
The star falls

Between the beginning and the grave,
Between the traitor and the slave,
Between the bonds of love and hate
Between the free man and his fate
Between The saviour and the saved,
And the tempests we have braved

There was nothing untoward when young Arthur pulled the sword.
The rock itself would crumble in good time.
But the catalyst of steel cut a pathway quite unreal -
A legend so great britishly sublime.

It was not a common thing for a well intentioned king
To set a shattered kingdom on its feet.
The catalyst of law ushered calm from shore to shore -
So welcome yet so quickly in retreat.

In men's hearts all evil lurks, idle hands make devils work,
And with wealth and power and favour to be sought,
The catalyst of gold through which man is bought and sold
Wove a web in which good Arthur's' dream was caught.

And his works were cast away on a dark and wicked day
When flesh and bone collide with lust to kill.
The catalyst of fire flared and died in combat dire,
Leaving darkness, and a promise to fulfill.

Legend says that when the land is assailed at every hand
By those who wield the power of the sun,
The day of dread shall bring the once and future king,
And the long dark night of waiting will be done.



Shadows (In Search of a Name)



I shut my eyes and wouldn't listen when they came with morning and told me that you had slipped away. I closed my mind against my thoughts, not wanting to believe you'd gone. Not dragged off, captured in the bright day's savage madness, not overwhelmed by the dark blind angers of night, but here within the sight and sound and smell of the sea, and salty spray on gentle winds so near. One of many notes left on the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, Washington

And we are here as on a darkling plain, swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night. Matthew Arnold: Dover Beach

*Echoes of honour and shame,
Phantoms of glory and fame,
Shadows in search of a name
For victims we've left far behind.*

And all is not quite as it seems
In the dark corridors of his dreams,
In the silence of his senses,
The violence of his mind.

Storms that thunder and rain,
Lights that waver and wane,
Winds that howl out in pain,
Visions from a great height.

Time for the turmoil to cease,
A silent wall shouting for peace -
From the bright day's savage madness,
Blind angers of night

You are the ice in my veins,
You are the age in my bones.
You are the flames in my heart
Raging out of control.

You are the blood on my hands,
You are the lies on my tongue.
You are the cries in my ears
And the eyes of my soul.

*Echoes of honour and shame,
Phantoms of glory and fame.
Shadows in search of a name
For victims we've left far behind.*

King of the May



Sometime in the early 'seventies, a man stages a 'sit-in' atop a tower crane. High over London Town, he protests against 'the lump', an exploitative form of casual labour then in use on British building sites. No compo, no OH&S, no rights. Tough times. Men died. I was there. The title comes from Allen Ginsberg's 'Kral Majalis'. He was actually crowned thus in Czechoslovakia - before the Prague Spring of 1968 too. And thank you to WH Auden for the loan of his lyrics.

The evening fell when I awoke,
Went down into town, onto the street;
A light wind blew from the gates of the sun,
And the waves of shadow danced about my feet.

*"And I am the mountain, I am the sea
I need to sing, and I am the King of the May", cried he.
"I am the road, I am the tree,
I need to sing, and I am the King of the May", cried he.*

The people look like moles, you know,
See how they swirl and run;
The moles are quite content, you know,
They're laughing in the sun;
And I may rush around when I'm down there on the ground,
But up in my suspension, I'm not one.

And the wind that blows between the worlds,
It cuts men like a knife,
And hell mouth fills the mortal soul with dread.
Man tries the best he can to taste the good of life,
But darkness fills the space behind his head.

*And I am the mountain, I am the sea
I need to sing, and I am the King of the May", cried he.
"I am the road, I am the tree,
I need to sing, and I am the King of the May", cried he.*

The swallow stopped as he sailed through the sky,
The snake slipped underneath a spray;
The wild hawk stood with the down upon his beak,
And stared there with his foot upon his prey.

And the nightingale sang: "I have sung so many songs,
I have sung so many songs, but none so sad and gay",
He sings to be now, sings to me, of what the world will be, will be,
When all things have passed, have passed away.

*And I am the mountain, I am the sea
I need to sing, and I am the King of the May", cried he.
"I am the road, I am the tree,
I need to sing, and I am the King of the May", cried he.*

The Song of the Soldier

The rebel yell that resounded in Paris in the summer of 1789 reverberated around Europe for 26 years until it sounded for the last time on the fields of Waterloo. On an overcast summer's morning on Sunday 18th June, two hundred years ago, over one hundred thousand soldiers prepared to face each other in damp Belgian farmland. More gathered during that "longest day". When darkness fell, up to fifty thousand of them lay dead or seriously wounded. A British rifleman would later recall: "I had never yet heard of a battle in which everybody was killed, but this seemed likely to be an exception, as all were going by turns."



Chaos is majestic in its way. I contemplate this vista of destruction and death with pain and helplessness in my soul.

Red Army Captain Pavel Kovalenko, in *All Hell Let Loose*, Max Hastings, 2011

Before him, he carries noise, and behind him, he leaves tears; death, that dark spirit, in's nery arm doth lie; which, being advanc'd, declines, and then men die.

Volumnia, in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Act 2, Scene 1.

A new age dawned when the Bastille fell
Twenty six long years ago.
We marched the road of Europe
In the revolution's glow.
In the floodtide of that revolution,
We bartered our young lives away.
And shoulder to shoulder we stood to arms
And held our foes at bay.

Against the might of empires,
Beyond our wildest dreams,
We fought the professional armies
Of Europe's old regimes.
And hungry, tired and poorly armed,
We ragged volunteers
Pushed them back in disarray
Far from our own frontiers.

*And we talked that time of setting stars
And the twilight of great powers.
And we never once thought that the sun would set
On an empire such as ours'.
But the siren song of liberty
Has lost its golden thrill.
The new age is now stained with blood
And we are marching still.*

There came a great adventurer
For whom France was much too small.
As if we'd had not enough of war,
We answered to his call.
He was like a father unto us.
He served his children's need.
A substitute for politics, for intellect and greed.

But he overreached in pomp and pride
To serve his vanity.
And we, the soldiers of the line,
Paid with our blood his fee.
'til the whole world turned against us.
It neither forgot nor forgave
We who came to liberate
But stayed on to enslave

*And we talked that time of setting stars
And the twilight of great powers.
And we never once thought that the sun would set
On an empire such as ours'.
But the siren song of liberty
Has lost its golden thrill.
The new age is now stained with blood
And we are marching still.*

From the dust of Torres Vedras
To the bloodstained Russian snow.
We followed the Eagles loyally.
Never questioned why we go.
'til the tide of conquest turned about,
And showed us how it feels
To retrace weary footsteps
With the wolves hard at our heels.

And now we march our final march
On Belgium's fertile soil.
We see an end to all our pain
And an end to mortal toil.
And the dream which fired us through the years
Has nothing left to yield
But peace that comes from a nameless death
On a confused battlefield.

*And we talked that time of setting stars
And the twilight of great powers.
And we never once thought that the sun would set
On an empire such as ours.
But the tyrant song of liberty
Has lost its golden thrill.
The new age is now stained with blood
And we are marching still.*



The Watchers of the Water



*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.*

Laurence Binyon, For the Fallen, 1914

The Sun's fiery furnace beat down on our backs.
We fixed our sharpened bayonets and shouldered heavy packs;
We marched in ordered files to destiny that day,
To a land God had forgotten, due east of Suvla Bay.

In hills so rough and rugged, we hauled our guns by hand,
Raised our shells upon our shoulders to the heights we must command;
We watched and prayed and waited, each heart beating like a drum,
We all had our eyes on the sea-ward horizon, to west where they would come.

*And the cold moon she rose on the watchers of the water,
The stars hung brightly, high above the trees,
And in the warm night-tide, sheep came to the slaughter,
From their land, so far away across the seas.*

When night fell, oh, she fell so soft and silent,
We could have been in the Garden of Paradise;
And no man raised his voice, not a soul made a noise,
Though our blood ran as cold, as cold as ice.

*And the cold moon she shone on the watchers of the water,
The stars hung brightly, high above the trees,
And in the warm night-tide, sheep came to the slaughter,
From their land, so far away across the seas.*

The cold moonlight upon the water glistened,
And enwrapped in all of our hopes and fears;
As through the long night-tide, oh, we watched and listened
With sharpened eyes and very, very frightened ears.

We saw small boats come sailing from great ships far out to sea;
And the shells came at us wailing in infernal symphony.

With fists of fire and steel we were hammered hard that night,
And many brave men went to God without the chance to fight;
And as the boats drew nearer, oh, we watched with bated breath,
As we waited for the order, and our turn to deal out death.

*And the cold moon looked down on the watchers of the water,
The stars hung brightly, high above the trees,
And in the warm night-tide, sheep came to the slaughter,
From their land, so far away across the seas.*

The Righteous Man



*For Oscar Schindler, Raoul Wallenberg, and the other 'Righteous Gentiles'.
In the words of the Talmud, "he who saves a life, saves the world entire".*

We said "the worst is over",
When the laws began to bite,
And our people crouched in silent fear
That fiery crystal night.
When they burned down the synagogues
And made Jews wear the star.
"this madness will not last", we said,
"Nor reach us where we are".

And we said "the worst is over",
Bought the optimistic line.
We shared the hopes of millions,
Prayed for peace in our own time.
And we listened to our elders,
And we kept our fears controlled.
And we thought the worst was over.
Until the panzers rolled.

Then we thought the worst was over
When our army laid down arms.
And we went back to our daily lives,
Dismissed as false alarms
The rumours that these conquerors
Would wipe us from this earth.
It didn't take us long to learn
What such false hope was worth.

Still, we thought the worst was over
When they made us wear the star,
And gathered all our people
From their townships near and far.
And they forced into ghettos
And set guards upon the gates.
We had seen worse persecution
In the history of our faith.

But we knew the worst still to come
As we watched the trucks appear.
And whispered talk of death camps
Gave dark substance to our fear.

When they sent in dogs and soldiers
To cull those trapped inside,
The ghetto was a station
On the road to genocide.

In the world beyond the wire
None could hear our people crying
As silence like a curtain fell
And cloaked a nation's dying.
The ears of men were stricken deaf,
The eyes of men were blind
As the free world's incredulity
Built the wall we died behind.

But we believed that at the hour of death,
When all our hopes had gone,
From the ranks of Gentiles
A just man would soon come.
He would part engulfing waters
With bold deeds and sleight of hand.
He would lead a tortured people
To a safe and promised land.

*And, we believe
That when all doors are bared against us,
He will come.
When all hands are raised against us,
He will come.
When no man will defend us,
He will come
Into our darkest day.
He will walk up to our sepulcher
And roll the stone away.*

*Yes we believe
That in the hour of our worst torment,
He will come.
Like an angel in the darkness,
He will come.
When all our hope is dying,
He will come.
And in our blackest day,
He will walk up to our sepulcher
And roll the stone away.*



Chapter Forty One

(in that howling infinite)

For long months of days and weeks, Ahab and anguish lay stretched out in one hammock as his torn body and gashed soul bled into one another, and so interfusing, made him mad.

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, Chapter 41

And when you look long into the abyss, the abyss also looks back at you.

Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil* (Jenseits von Gut und Boese)

Be not afraid of madness; some are born mad, some achieve madness, and some have madness thrust upon them. After William Shakespeare



Prologue

I met a drunken sailor who sang strange songs to me,
Of acid trips on phantom ships upon the endless sea.
He spoke of brave old Ulysses who'd drifted years and more;
And the lean and hungry Hollander forever barred from shore;
And stories too of the Wandering Jew, cursed by his god to roam.
Exiles all, in pride did fall, long lost to folks back home.

One

I met with Captain Jack as he came limping back
From an all-night drinking party In New York.
And he told to me a tale of a great albino whale
That sunk his pirate schooner west of Cork.

"That's a tall tale" says I, but He looked me in the eye
And said that He'd seen stranger sights at sea.
So here all its glory is that drunken sailor's story,
Of a chase that has gone down in mystery.

Two

We found the whale fish off Brazil;
And chased him down to Brazzaville;
I swore an oath that whale to kill –
And that was how it started.

From Galway Town to Killybegs,
We tracked the whale to Winnipeg.
He broke my boat and took my leg,
And left me broken-hearted.

*Heave ho and away we go,
If only god could see us.
Bound to the boat for eternity
Or 'till the sea shall free us.*

We chased the whale to Petrograd;
The need for take him drove me mad
From Grozny, south, to Old Baghdad -
He left me empty handed.

We stalked the whale to Marrakech,
He drew me deep into his mesh -
He drank my blood, he ate my flesh,
And with his mark, I'm branded.

*Heave ho and away we go,
If only god could see us.
Bound to the boat for eternity
Or 'till the sea shall free us.*

*Heave ho and away we go,
If only god could see us.
Bound to the boat for eternity
Or 'till the sea shall free us.*

Three

My broken body and my bleeding soul
Together in anguish lay,
With blinding obsession, unholy procession,
Chasing my reason away.

Down, down, deep down we dove
In a tangle of rigging and rage -
Down to the deep where the dead sailors sleep
In the darkness of Lucifer's cage.

Down, down, deep down we drove
In the harness of hubris and hate -
For such was the power and such was the pain
Of our tortured and intertwined fate

*The whale and me, in the depths of the sea,
Where only god could see us.
Tied to the mast for eternity
Or 'til the sea shall free us.*

Four

Now, my friend Nietzsche told me this
(and I do believe its' true):
If you look too long into the abyss,
The abyss looks into you.
And to do thus would not be wise,
For surely that way, madness lies.
You'll never sail to Honalee,
And you will not be free, no, you will not be free.
*The whale and me, in the depths of the sea,
Where only god could see us.
Tied to the mast for eternity
Or 'til the sea shall free us.*

Now some folk say that he's sailing still;
And some say he's in heaven;
Some people say he's on the Dock of the Bay

Or outside the Seven Eleven.
But out on the formless ocean,
Where lovely mermaids go,
Captain Jack, with the whale upon his back,
Is walking Desolation Row.



*Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen
white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great
shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago*
Moby Dick, Chapter 135

The Salvation Navy

For the unsung, oft times anonymous volunteers who go forth to aid *les damnes par terre*, "the refugees on the unarmed road of flight", "the luckless, the abandoned, an' forsaked".

"Tolling for the aching, whose wounds cannot be nursed, for the countless confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones, an' worse, an' for every hung-up person in the whole wide universe, an' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing". Bob Dylan, Chimes of Freedom



We're saving lost sailors in sundering seas
That batter the harbours of man.
Salvaging souls in the sickening squalls
That threaten to founder the plan.
Flying the flag in foreign ports
That try to extinguish the light,
The eyes of the Salvation Navy keep watch in the might

*"See!" he said, as he pointed to aft.
"A sail!" he said he said to his friends on the raft.
"Saved!" he said, as he waved with his hand,
"Did you ever see nothing so brave and so grand as the navy?
The Salvation Navy!"*

We sending out ships to lend strength to the fight
When the doubters and backsliders waver.
Sending aid to poor people in need
Who fear that they fallen from favour.
Crossing the world at a moment's call
To reach out a helping hand.
The marines of the Salvation Navy are waiting to land.

*"See!" he said, as he pointed to aft.
"A sail!" he said he said to his friends on the raft.
"Saved!" he said, as he waved with his hand,
"Did you ever see nothing so brave and so grand as the navy?
The Salvation Navy!"*

The winds of the world blow so hard and so cold,
And tear holes in the mariners' sails.
The wrongs of the world, how they make it so hard
To stand fast in the teeth of the gale.
And the lords of the world, how they warp all the rules
In the war between darkness and light!
But the ships of the Salvation Navy sail forth to the fight.

*"See!" he said, as he pointed to aft.
"A sail!" he said he said to his friends on the raft.
"Saved!" he said, as he waved with his hand,
"Did you ever see nothing so brave and so grand as the navy?
The Salvation Navy!"*

The Rhythm of the Revolution

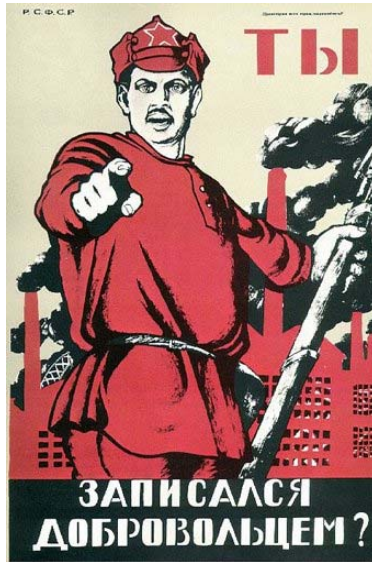
There are decades when nothing happens; and there are weeks when decades happen.

Attributed to VI Lenin.

The revolutionary movement grows extremely slowly and with great difficulty.

VI Lenin Christmas 1916 from: "Bolshevism and Revolution", Alan Wood.

Kashmir, the fall of 1971. The lights of army trucks break the darkness as I watch from across Lake Dal. Passing through railway stations as war is breaking out, I rush down the line as battalions of young soldiers head up the line. Egypt 1973, just before the Yom Kippur War, Egyptians feel the weight of poverty and deprivation, and are told it is all for good of the battle. Manila 1983. People Power storms the Malacanang Palace, ending the corrupt and violent reign of Ferdinand Marcos. And now, as 2011, the new Year of Revolutions draws to a close amidst violence, hope, and economic chaos, we can but wonder at the euphoric, erratic, quixotic, and so often, cyclic march of History.



We have come, guns in our hands;
We're not singing songs of love.
We've not come with peace in our hearts;
We've come to kill the dove.
Young men trained to kill and forced to fight;
Convoys burning into the frightened night.
On their armour, their faith is burning bright –
The revolution's come.

We ate black bread and water;
We were waiting for the fight.
The waiting grew no shorter;
We were starving for the fight.
The marching song and the chorus,
And the beating of the drums
Will not fill our stomachs for us,
Will not bring us back, no, give us back our sons...

*So we march to the rhythm of the revolution;
Oh it is our shining hour.
Move to the rhythm of the revolution,
And the revolution's power.
Run with the rhythm of the revolution,
Storm the palace, seize the crown.
Rise to the rhythm of the revolution,
Shake the system, break it down!*

We are waxing lyrical,
And the days are warm with hope.
We get play-acting cynical,
And theatrical in scope.

The marching song and the chorus
Will make truth out of the lies;
You who do the thinking for us
Guide us to an empty, to an empty prize...

I'm the body, you're the soul,
Touch my mind and make me whole;
In the darkness, give me light,
When I'm blinded give me sight.
In the long run, so you say,
We will greet a brighter day.
In the long run, so you said – in the long run, we'll be...

*Dead in the middle of the revolution,
Waiting for our shining hour;
Lost in the riddle of the revolution,
And the revolution's power.
Washed in the river of the revolution,
There is no fear, no pain,
Tied to the wheel of the revolution,
As the cycle starts again.*

*March to the rhythm of the revolution;
Oh it is our shining hour;
Move to the rhythm of the revolution,
And the revolution's power;
Rise with the rhythm of the revolution,
Storm the palace, seize the crown.
Long live the rhythm of the revolution!
Shake the system - break it down!*

The Sons of the Beast



تذكر أن الجنة تقع تحت ظلال السيوف

Remember that that Paradise lies under the shadow of swords.
Hadith attributed to Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari

Power resides where men believe it resides. It's a trick. A shadow on the wall. And a very small man can cast a very large shadow.
Varys, Game of Thrones

On a cold and stormy night
Came Hitler in his bedclothes bright,
A mariner lost on the land.
He dreams of the war
As he stands by his door
With his Aryan heart in his hand.

He has known from the start
That the seas of time part
So that pilgrims can travel dry-shod.
And he longs for the day
When the waves will obey
The laws of a secular God.
Yes, he waits for the day
When the winds will obey
The laws of the secular God.

The watchers will wait
As the waters abate
And the hero will rise from his grave.
As the word is made flesh
It will conjure a mesh
To capture the freeman and slave.

And the grey-coated prophets
Will march once again,
And all shall then work to be free.
In the light of cold reason,
A man for all seasons I'll be -
For the whole world to see.

He will move through the night
Like a rogue satellite,
As fortune is seen in men's eyes.
And 'though just a swallow had took to the air,
An eagle descends for the prize.

And as memories fade,
So the bold renegade
Will descend like a ghost to the feast.

So make ready the guns
To make welcome the sons of the beast.
Yes, make ready the guns
To make welcome the sons of the beast.

On a cold and stormy night,
Came Hitler in his bedclothes bright,
A mariner lost on the land.
He dreams of the war
As he stands by his door
With his Aryan heat in his hand.

He has known from the start
That the sands of time part
So that pilgrims can travel clean-shod.
And he waits for the day
When the laws will obey
The whims of a secular God.
Yes, he longs for the day
When the world will obey
The laws of the secular God.

*Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.*

W. H. Auden, Epitaph on a Tyrant

E Lucevan le Stelle



*Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, che la diritta via era smarrita.
E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle*

Dante Alighieri: Inferno

E lucevan le stelle ed olezzava la terra

Giacomo Puccini; Llibretto, Luigi Illica & Giuseppe Giacosa

In his famous poem, Dante begins his descent into Hell saying: "I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost". As he journeys downward he travels through seven levels of Hell, each representing escalating punishments for escalating degrees of crime, from liars and cheats, through oath breakers and traitors, to robbers and murderers, and most particularly, down in the depths, to the killers of children and other innocents. Many represented by historical figures and personalities from his own time. Having journeyed down and then back up through the seven, he finally returns to the surface saying: "And thence we emerged to see the stars again

TS Elliot wrote, "*between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the Shadow*".

High stand the stars and moon,
And meanwhile, down below,
Towers fall and tyrants fade
Like footprints in the snow.

The bane of bad geography,
The burden of topography.
The lines where they're not meant to be
Are letters carved in stone.

They're hollowed of all empathy,
And petrified through history,
A medieval atrophy
Defends a feeble throne.

So order goes, and chaos flows
Across the borderlines,
For nature hates a vacuum,
And in these shifting tides,

Bombs and babies, girls and guns,
Dollars, drugs, and more besides,
Wash like waves on strangers' shores,
Damnation takes no sides.

*Many have perished,
And more most surely will.*

The paradox of piety observes no disconnect,
Nor registers anxiety
As the ship of fools is wrecked.
So, leaders urge with eloquence,
And martyrs die in consequence.
We talk in past and present tense.
As greed and fear persist.

For reasons only dead men know,
Few can resist the call to go.

That is your fate, the wise man said,
The good book in his fist!

The craven call of hatred rings
Across a thousand hills.
The children play in war array.
Communication kills.

The rockets fly in desert sky
And swift and deadly the reply.
So babies die and mothers cry,
United in the bye and bye.

*Many have perished
And more most surely will.*

And time, 'tis said, reveals it's dead,
And we shall voice what was unsaid.
Why he was wrong, and I was led,
His song I sing who gives me bread.

I was not weak, I used my head,
I had my kin and kind to serve,
It wasn't me – I kept the faith,
It wasn't me who lost his nerve!

All glory to the gods of men
Who guide us hence and back again
All glory to the men of gods
Who goad us thence with iron rods,

Admonish all who rise too high,
And all who ask the reason why,
For are all here but to live,
And die as we're commanded

And is not life a bitter pill,
The rock to hew, the soil to till,
Oh, brother, are we striving still?
We are so sorely stranded.

*Many have perished,
And more most surely will.*

We've laboured since antiquity
In mines of man's iniquity
We've marvelled at the perfidy
That covers all we do.

Observed with incredulity
The boundaries of cruelty,
How the men they slew,
The young ones too.

What is a moral soul to do?
In times. in times of such morbidity,
But strive for lost lucidity
And yearn for higher ground.

Above the flood of bigotry,
We reach for cleaner poetry,
And pray that in a better place,
We'll hear, we'll hear a joyous sound.

Many have perished
For the protocols of hate.
Many have perished
On the orders of the state.
Many have perished
By the prophets' holy words
Many have perished
By the gun and by the sword.
Many have perished
In defence of blood and soil.
Many have perished
For diamonds and for oil.
Many have perished
In the inquisition's fire.
Many have perished
On the wall and on the wire.

Many have perished
And more most surely will.
Many have perished
And the stars are shining still.

And cast down, creation's crown must one day pay the cost.
As swept off in the maelstrom, the straight way we had lost.
But out there in the shadow lands upon that darkling plain,
We may come out of darkness and see the stars again.

Above the clouds that rise so high, indifferent to all,
Concealing the anatomy of man's ascent and fall,
Concealing trails of infamy beneath the veil of night,
Above the clouds that cover all, the stars are shining bright.

I wear the weave of history like a second skin,
I wake with runes of mystery of how we all begin,
I walk the paths of pioneers who watched the circus start,
The past now beats within me like a second heart.

I stand as on a rock amidst the churning of the sea,
I gaze into the distance that is laid out far for me,
I wonder lonely as a cloud that roams o'er vale and hill,
Above the clouds that cover all, the stars are shining still.

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.*
William Cowper (1731-1800)



The Old Road to Jerusalem

A Nottingham pub, said to be the oldest pub in England, dating to the Crusades



*The air above Jerusalem is filled with prayers and dreams
like the air above cities with heavy industry. Hard Hard to breath.*
From Yehuda Amichai's *Jerusalem Ecology*

*In Jerusalem ... the angry face of Yahweh is brooding over the hot
rocks which have seen more holy murder, rape and plunder than
any other place on earth. Its inhabitants are poisoned by religion.*
Arthur Koestler, in Amos Elon's, *Jerusalem: City of Mirrors*

*There's this thing that happens here, over the hell mouth. Where the
way a thing feels - it kind of starts being that way for real. I've seen all
these things before - just not all at once.*
Buffy Summers, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, Series 7

Pilgrim of the cross must stand
On a sun-swept Holy Land,
Lonely heart in desert sand,
Strength in faith relying.
Faith-forged, the palmer's sword,
In the footsteps of Our Lord,
He will wander for the word,
Or will perish trying.

*Here's a song to sing, my sons,
Stories of the holy ones;
Here's adventure to extol,
Here's a song to please the soul.
Wanderers and holy men,
Lion Heart and Saracen.
All ye pilgrims cry "Amen"
On the road to Jerusalem.*

Soldier of the cross must stand
On a blood-stained Holy Land,
Stony heart in desert sand,
Strength in arms relying.
Steel-forged crusader's sword,
In the footsteps of Our Lord,
He will conquer for the word,
Or will perish trying

*Here's a song to sing, my sons,
Stories of the mighty ones;
Here's adventure to extol,
Here's a song to please the soul.*

*Wanderers and holy men,
Lion Heart and Saracen.
All ye pilgrims cry "Amen"
On the road to Jerusalem.*

Strangers in an antique land
Bid go forth with an high hand.
Strong heart in desert sand,
Strength in arms relying.
Sprung from an ancient faith,
Forged in fire, honed in hate,
Broken road to heaven's gate.
Hear the mountains crying:

*Here's a song to sing, my sons,
Stories of the chosen ones;
Here's adventure to extol,
Here's a song to please the soul.
Wanderers and holy men,
Lion Heart and Saracen.
All ye pilgrims cry "Amen"
On the road to Jerusalem.*

Exiles in a stolen land
Children of the gun now stand.
Hollow hearts, empty hand....
In the prison of their days,
Casualties and castaways,
Teach the freemen how to praise...

*Here's a song to sing, my sons,
Stories of the broken ones;
Such adventure to extol,
Here's a song to freeze the soul.
Wanderer, holy men,
Lion Heart, Saracen.
All ye pilgrims cry "Amen"
On the road to Jerusalem,
The road to Jerusalem.
The old road to Jerusalem.*



I Gotta Book



Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee,
And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me.
Robert Frost "In the Clearing" (1962)

Saydnaya and Ma'loula, in mountains northwest of Damascus, date back to Byzantine times and earlier. Aramaic, the language of bible days, is still spoken in these predominantly Christian towns. In October 2013, in the midst of a civil war, a Russian philanthropist financed the raising of a gigantic bronze statue of Christ the Redeemer on a mountain above Saydnaya, as a symbol of peace and reconciliation. Taller than the Christ in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, it can be seen from Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. Soon afterward, Ma'alula was captured by Islamist fighters, its churches and monasteries vandalized, and its people scattered, whilst the Jihadists have also targeted the Christ.

On a hill above a road
Where in old days pilgrims trode,
Christ himself is risen,
Borne aloft on Russian gold.
I know my Redeemer liveth,
And the crooked path's made straight,
But the road of good intentions
Leads us to the devil's gate.

For the fervent true believers,
And their sanctified brigade,
The path of least resistance
Leads them on a lost crusade
That echoes of old hatreds
Harking back to harder times,
And if history don't repeat itself,
You can be damn sure it rhymes.

I gotta book, you gotta book,
All God's children gotta book or three.
One fine day, gonna throw the book away
And roam around God's Heaven.

We've poured the wine of anger
On the graves of honest men,
We've raised the banner once before,
We'll raise it yet again.
In holy ground of memory,
The dragons' teeth are sown.
And we'll send our sons to die again,
So far away from home.

They'd sing:
I gotta book, you gotta book,
All God's children gotta book or three.
One fine day we're gonna throw the book away
And roam around God's Heaven.

There's a village in a valley
That time has hid away
Where folk could talk to Jesus
If he returned today.
And what is it they'd tell him?
And how would he reply
When he saw the rock and rubble
And the smoke against the sky?

He'd say:
I gotta book, you gotta book,
All My children got a book or three.
One fine day gonna throw your book away
And roam around Dad's Heaven.

And we'd sing:
I gotta book, you gotta book,
All God's children gotta book. Not me!
One fine day gonna throw the book away
And roam around God's Heaven.

The Battle Song of the New Republic



*Barbarism is not the inheritance of our prehistory.
It is the companion that dogs our every step.*
Alain Finkelkraut

History slips through our grasp,
Memories are strong.
Immortalize the dying gasp,
Avenge the ancient wrong.
Remember every word and deed
To crystallize our hate.
Advancing with a flaming sword,
We storm lost Eden's gate.

Litanies of battles lost
In destiny's dark night.
Legacies of castles lost
Foretell a future bright.
And soon, the fiery Paraclete
Will lead us home again,
From the House of Bondage
Into the Land of Cain.

Our time has come, our time has come,
And our cause is good.
And we will find the ties that bind
Are made of soil and blood.
Our time has come,
Our time has come,
And here we stand,
Heart to heart and arm in arm
On God's right hand, on God's right hand.

The storm clouds are approaching
To bring us back to life.
The smell of smoke is on the wind;
The blood is on the knife.
From Hattin to Chatilla Camp,
Wexford to Omagh,
In Kosovo, we heard the call
That sundered Vukovar.

Our time has come, our time has come,
And our cause is good.

And we will find the ties that bind
Are made of soil and blood.
Our time has come, our time has come,
And here we stand,
Heart to heart and arm in arm
On God's right hand, on God's right hand.

When Freedom Comes

For Robert Fisk



*Flashing for the warriors whose strength is not to fight
Flashing for the refugees on the unarmed road of flight
An' for each an' ev'ry underdog soldier in the night
An' we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing
Bob Dylan, Chimes of Freedom*

*Hear the cry in the tropic night, should be the cry of love but it's a cry of fright
Some people never see the light till it shines through bullet holes
Bruce Cockburn, Tropic Moon*

There goes the freedom fighter,
There blows the dragon's breath.
There stands the sole survivor;
The time-worn shibboleth.
The zealots' creed, the bold shahid,
Give me my daily bread
I walk amongst the conquered
I walk amongst the dead

Here comes the rocket launcher,
There runs the bullets path,
The revolution's father,
The hero psychopath.
The wanting seed, the aching need
Fulfill the devil's pact,
The incremental balancing
Between the thought and act.

*The long-forgotten army
In the long-forgotten war.
Marching to a homeland.
We've never seen before.
We feel the wind that blows so cold amidst
The leaves of grass.
When freedom comes to beating drums
She crawls on broken glass*

There rides the mercenary,
Here roams the robber band.
In flies the emissary
With claims upon our land.
The lesser breed with savage speed
Is slaughtered where he stands.
His elemental fantasy
Felled by a foreign hand.

*The long-forgotten army
In the long-forgotten war.
Marching to a homeland.
We've never seen before.
We feel the wind that blows so cold amidst
The leaves of grass.
When freedom comes to beating drums
She crawls on broken glass.*

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
On heaven and on earth,
And each shall make his sacrifice,
And each shall know his worth.
In stockade and on barricade
The song will now be heard
The incandescent energy
Gives substance to the word.

Missionaries, soldiers,
Ambassadors ride through
The battlegrounds and graveyards
And the fields our fathers knew.
Through testament and sacrament,
The prophecy shall pass.
When freedom runs through clubs and guns,
She crawls on broken glass.

*The long-forgotten army
In the long-forgotten war.
Marching to a homeland.
We've never seen before.
We feel the wind that blows so cold amidst
The leaves of grass.
When freedom comes to beating drums
She crawls on broken glass
When freedom comes to beating drums
She crawls on broken glass*



All Fall Down



*Things are going to slide, slide in all directions
Won't be nothing, Nothing you can measure anymore.
The blizzard, the blizzard of the world
Has crossed the threshold, and it has overturned
The order of the soul*
Leonard Cohen, *The Future*

Life is not a bed of roses.
Man proposes, God disposes,
We muddle through, supposing
That is just what people do.
Watch the daily news at bedtime.
Nowadays it's all in real time.
The world has got the blues, and big time!
So lights out, good night to you!

Morning comes and things aren't better.
Time to write another letter
To the New York Times or other
Beacon of a truer light.
The daily grind gets harder,
Every step we take is murder.
Try to go that little further,
But things have worsened overnight.

*All fall down.
All fall down.
After all that we have weathered,
Why then are we so untethered,
In ways we'd never figured?
Oh, is that the way it goes?*

*All fall down.
Things are standing on their heads
All fall down.
It is as the prophet said
The world totters like a burning house,
Staggers like a drunken man
Who tries to catch a rainbow
In his tired and shaking hands.*

Why do mortals dare to wrestle
With a doubt as old as faith?
Why do sages seek the desert
As an antidote to fate?
A saint will yearn for immolation
In his penitential fire?
Why do pilgrims seek perfection
In their pentecostal choir?

The sea runs dry or else brims over.
We're spending like a drunken sailor.
Words carried far in time and space
Will topple tyrants, but there's no salvation.
When all is done, there are no thanks.
With toxic debt and zombie banks,
And credit ratings, who needs tanks
To wreck a nation?

The truth is there for us to find:
The antelope may get the hind,
The lion creeps up from behind,
And he gets eaten!
So as you start to lose control,
Try and weigh your mortal soul.
And after that, you fix your price,
And pray that you're not be beaten
Down.

*All fall down.
All fall down.
Although we have ascended
To great heights, we have depended
On an answer preconfigured,
For an outcome no one knows.*

*All fall down.
Things are coming to a head.
All fall down.
It is just as Leonard said:
If we forget to pray
For the angels every day,
The angels will forget to pray for us.
And we'll fall down.
All fall down.
All fall down.*

*A ring, a ring o' roses, a pocket full o' posies.
Atishoo, atishoo, we all fall down.*



The English nursery rhyme and playground singing game first appeared in print in 1881, but it is said that a version was being sung to the familiar tune in the 1790s. It has been associated with the Great Plague of London 1665, and also with the Black Death. A rosy rash signalled contagion and posies of herbs were carried as protection and to ward off the stench. Sneezing or coughing was the final, fatal symptom.

The Hanged Man symbolizes divinity. The Passion and Crucifixion, the Egyptian Osiris myth, and Mithras in Persian, and thence, Roman mythology. The destruction of self brings life to humanity. In Tarot, these are symbolized in the hanged man and the living tree from which he hangs bound. The Hanged Man is also associated with the Norse god Odin, who hung upside down from Yggdrasil, the world-tree, for nine days to attain wisdom. He thereby retrieved the runes from the Well of Wyr, the source of all sacred mystery and wisdom. The moment he looked on them, he died, but the knowledge within them restored him to life.

Bless This Day



To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West - know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist. To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.
President Barack Obama's inauguration speech Jan 21st 2009

There's a whisper in our souls
That this world has suffered long.
Beneath the skies have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong.
In the driving wind and rain,
The struggle and the flight,
Foundered on a darkened plain,
Blind armies clash by night.

Beneath the crushing load,
We toil the climbing way.
Upon the weary road,
We make our winding way.
We take the path well travelled,
So mindful of our fate,
Eternity before us
And God on every gate.

Long have we laboured to the light on the hill;
Hungry when we came to earth,
And we are hungry still.
In the shadows of the nightmare
You can hear the blind ones pray:
See for us Lord, and bless this house,
Bless this day.

On paths so manifold,
We wander on this quest.
So weary and so cold,
Our fears so manifest.
We scale the highest mountain
Just to admire the view.
And contemplate the mystery
That colours all men do.

From the dustbowl of Manhattan
To the ruins of Jenin
From the mountains to the desert,
All the fires in between
In the silence of the nightmare
You can hear the deaf ones pray
Hear for us Lord,
And bless this house,
Bless this day.

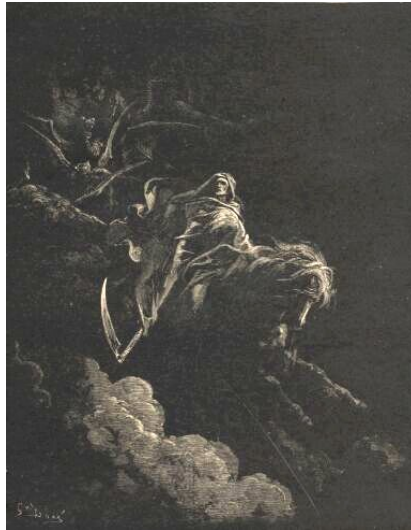
The days are hastening on,
Towards a time foretold,
In the ever turning years
By prophets, seen of old.
Beneath the altar of the fifth seal
Lie souls who died for truth.
We chase through misted landscapes
The shadows of our youth

It is written in the Book of Days
Where the names of God are wrought
Where all our dead are buried
Where all our wars are fought
In the bowels of the nightmare,
You can hear the dumb ones pray...
In the chasms of the nightmare,
You can hear the lost ones pray:
Be with us Lord, oh bless this house,
Bless the day,
Be with us Lord, oh bless this house,
And bless the day.



The Darkness

Towards the end of Nero's reign, a certain morbidity infused Meniscus' work. Ever darker thoughts surfaced to colour his poetic palate. Three poems have been attributed to the Meniscus of this drear time. The Manichean *Devil's Work* and *Lucifer*, and the surreal *The Darkness*. Known today as *Red Rain*, the extant manuscript of this latter work bore the Aramaic title "Choshek" (pronounced *kho-shek*). As a commentary on the turbulent and terrifying events of Nero's reign, the title is apt – figuratively it can mean misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness, as well as dark (ness), night, and obscurity. And the use of Aramaic, the language of the Roman provinces of Palestine and Syria, and of the Jews and the Christians, is instructive. *Extract from : Roman Holiday: The Poems of Meniscus Diabetes, edited by Paul Hemphills, 1989*



Choshek (pron. *kho-shek*) from 'chashak'); the dark; hence (literally) darkness; figuratively, misery, destruction, death, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness:--dark(-ness), night, obscurity.

Hear not the hard rain fall from a sky as dull as lead.
See not the steel rain fall - always a rain that is red.
The sword slides out - my children are crying again.
The sands run out, and there is no end to the pain.
The lovers cry out, and their faces are stained with the rain.

*I ask not the plague if it blights,
Ask not the flames if they slay,
Ask not of prince or of priest how long,
How long, 'ere we put them away.*

In the ashes of their lives lost souls are kneeling.
In the smoke-scarred skies silent kites are wheeling.
Behind locked palace doors the kings go on with their dealing,
In a subtle way. But no one can pay. There is no one to pay.

Here in the wasteland, we find that the daytime and the night time are one,
'til the curse of the king and chain breaks and their toil is undone.
The sword slides out - my people are crying again.
The words are torn out of the mouths of the children of Cain.
The lovers die out, and their faces and hands are stained with the rain.

*We ask not the plague if it blights,
Ask not the flames if they slay,
Ask not of prince or of priest how long,
How long, 'ere we put them away.*

Devil's Work



The Manicheans believed that God was just, and kind, and loving. He was forgiving God who would forgive us our trespasses. It was the Devil, therefore, who had to be propitiated with prayers and amulets and so on - averting "the Evil Eye". The Manicheans were accordingly persecuted as heretics at best, and as devil-worshippers at worst.

"At this moment, gentlemen, I think you are more afraid of me than I of you"

The last recorded words of Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake for heresy in Rome on 17th February 1600.

I dreamt I fought the Devil and I bound him in strong chains
To answer for our consciences, to blame for mankind's stains;
For all pain and perversion, crime and atrocity,
I brought the criminal to trial in the name of humanity.
This bane of humanity.

In judgement of the power man who makes us fight his fights,
And the holy men in uniform who trample on our rights;
To exact compensation for his prey alive and dead.
But when I brought him to the dock, this is what he said...

He said: "I had no part on what you say I've done to hapless man.
He's master of his destiny – he does the worst he can.
I did not set the fires that burn – I only tend the flames.
Men forged the swords and lit the brands, wrought carnage my name.
They conquered in my name.

"The tyrants and oppressors who jockey for control,
Are of mankind's own substance, the product of his soul.
The torturers and murderers – in these, I had no part.
They spring from man's perverse desires and his infernal heart.
Damn his eternal heart.

"The tyrant is not guilty and the killer has clean hands.
They are but pawns of the soul of man and the fruits of his demands.
One half of mankind does not think, the other does not care –
And the sheep go to the slaughter when the wolf pack leaves the lair.
The wolf has left his lair.

"And I am but an image, a figment of your mind;
I am but the whipping boy your hide your sins behind.
I was here before you came to Earth, I'll be here when you're gone –
I don't ask your forgiveness when you're deserving none!
My undeserving son.

“For what you’ve done to you own kind, you’ve done of your own will.
If I went away on a holiday, you’d be malignant still.
For all you’ve done unto yourselves, you’ve done because you must –
A self-destructive legacy to bring yourselves to dust.
To render you to dust.

So when you say I want to rule a realm of ash and bones,
Let he who is devoid of sin go cast self-righteous stones.
I stand upon the sidelines, contemptuous, aloof.
I won’t condemn all that you’ve done.
I may condone all that you’ve done.
I’m quite content with what you’ve done.
But cause it?
Give me proof!”

Lucifer



There was no diabolical god in the Roman and Greek pantheon – or amongst the Norse Gods for that matter. There were gods who did nasty things, but that was because they are annoyed, or angered, or moved to vengeance or malice. These, one placated to restore them to a better humour. Nor is the Satan, the principle of evil personified, actually in the bible. This was a later construct that was read back into it. In the bible, in Milton, the devil, whilst not exactly pleasant and delightful, is either on the side of the heavenly authorities at the least, or at the least, not destructively opposed to them. From *Roman Holiday: The Poems of Meniscus Diabetes*, edited by Paul Hemphill, 1989

Lucifer, star of the morning,
Lucifer, prince of the night,
Lucifer falling through darkness,
Lucifer cast from the light.

Lucifer sits in his wasteland
Trapped in the cage of his pride
The sirens of importunate circumstance
Reclining in ranks by his side
Plots he has made, so ingenuous.
Dangerous follies and schemes
For he has stage-managed quite strenuous
Drunken prophecies, libels and dreams.

Lucifer frets in the wasteland
Locked in a pillar of ice
We know of this only to well

We have visited him there once or twice
For his is the language of liars
And his is the honour of thieves
And he is the master of eloquence
As the last of the honest men leaves.

Lucifer crawls from the wasteland
No solace or peace or rest.
For he has corrupted the wisest
And he has co-opted the best.
And all that is good has since vanished
And with it, the fair and the true
And the silences hurting his demon heart
Are haunting, haunting you.

And the road that winds out of Meggido
Is the path that returns to the pit
For Lucifer prizes a web of disguises
He merely selects one to fit.

And the road that runs down to Jericho
Is the path that leads him to you
And the paradox searing his demon soul
Is hunting, hunting you.

So make you no truce with Lucifer,
Lucifer of fiery breath
For Lucifer is treachery,
And treachery is death.

Lucifer, star of the morning,
Lucifer, prince of the night,
Lucifer falling through darkness,
Lucifer cast from the light.



Christopher Columbus



*Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters;
they have seen the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep...
he caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed.*
Psalm 107

I

He remained a random lover when all men had taken wives;
He had passed through many summers,
He had lived through many lives;
The ribbon of reflection binds him to all loss and gain,
And his mouth is warming to the words now forming in his brain.

The man is made to labour, and the woman made to weep,
And the sooner it is over, then the sooner we can sleep.
That it all should seem so simple makes it so hard to explain,
But his mouth is warming to the words now forming in his brain.

He could see the embers dying out, now that the warmth had gone;
He could feel his senses crying out to greet an unborn son;
The mirror of affection binds the pleasure and the pain,
And his mouth is warming to the words now forming in his brain.

The highway sign reminds him that the road runs round and round;
With all that's left behind him, he feels he's falling down;
And he's got no place to go - but perhaps he's running slow,
Or he's standing on his head, and he's climbing up instead;
They're telling him to mind out, asking him to find out;
He's waiting on the morning tide for the sunrise.

II

Columbus tried to make new heaven and new earth,
More empire and more glory than all Spain alone was worth;
For him who dared to push his prow towards the setting sun,
To make west east was not the least of all he could have done.

*Here he is, the ocean's son, tell him he's the only one,
Waiting on the morning tide for the sunrise.*

Cast his body to the sea and the skies, so he sailed,
Faring well while his fortune lasted;
But his chance wore an ill-fitting guise as he sailed,
Frail and fickle as the wind in the masthead;

His course never changed as the weather does,
And the ship knew no ill will to tarry her;
So he rode, so he flowed as the feather does,
On the wind, a weather-driven mariner.

*Here he is, the ocean's son, tell him he's the chosen one,
Waiting on the morning tide for the sunrise.*

III

Strange you are, enigma, sir, strange, you are not plain;
True, your land's a strange land, sir, which few, so few can gain.
"My mind is but a screen, my friend, it projects my mind's eye.
The patterns on my brain, my friend, have taught men how to fly".

You said you had a dream, my friend, which gave you so much pain.
A warning light in the morning light which put you on the road again.
You said you had a dream, my friend. Is this some kind of joke?
Was the night too long and the wine too strong?
What happened when the morning broke?

"For the want of firm employment, I went to make my mark,
From singing in the subways to the love and money lark,
Waved goodbye to lords and ladies who were living in the dark -
I took the first train out of Italy".

"For the sake of firm employment, I took the pay of kings
To facilitate enjoyment of the qualitative things
That would render smooth the waiting for what each tomorrow brings
To the vacuum of my lost identity".

The more staid and sober said that he's bananas in the head,
Just a renaissancial drop-out looking for a waste of time.
"There was nothing much to do, cul de sac of 'ninety two',
And I had nowhere to hang my paradigm".

Hey, Christopher Columbus, sir, when all is said and done,
To be hauled away in goal-array, it isn't really on;
So resentful of correction, you went to so much pain;
The perfect sought perfection and was hauled away in chains.
Hey, Christopher Columbus, sir, the press would like to know
What are your views on monarchy now you're mistreated so?
Hey, Christopher Columbus, the rising price of fame:
The world is round and the place you found bears someone else's
name.

Hey, Christopher Columbus, was it all such a bad dream?
We'd like to bet you don't regret all the things you've done and seen;
Hey, Christopher Columbus, sir, the king would like to know
What it was, and how hot it was, tell him what it was that made you go.

IV

"As a seeker and a dreamer, I came,
With my seed and the need to declare it,
To the sea which my fathers had dared,
And my children shall dare it."

"In this excellent loneliness, laid,
Would the infinite ever dismay me,
Through horizons in darkness may fade,
In the endlessness lay me."

"The west gate is open and free;
In the sunset, it beckons to me.
Ah, do you smell the scent of the shore,
Breathe the warm blown breadths of the sea?"

"Do you sense now the swell and the storm
And the breakers so formless and flowing,
Do you feel now the heave and the hurl,
Feel the grip and the growing?"

"And on the water, he surges;
From the landsman, the line is played out;
Through the waves, see the bowsprit emerges,
I will wade out, I will wade out."

V

Hey, Christopher Columbus, sir,
You didn't quite explain
What made it so, what made you go,
Oh, what made you take that train?

"Things have their own momentum, son,
Our tracks just don't run straight.
Our paths are where we put them, son,
We build but can't create, can't create.



*He came dancing across the water with his galleons and guns
Looking for the new world in that palace in the sun*
Neil Young, Cortez The Killer

The Day After Creation



*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*
TS. Eliot, Four Quartets – Little Giddings

On the day after creation,
He was looking for a rhyme
That would put him into orbit
With the best of space and time.
He was born in love and torn in love,
The victim of a perfect crime,
And on the day after creation,
He was hollowed.

On the day after creation,
In the formlessness, he flowed;
On the waters of the deepness,
In the darkness so he glowed.
Waters flowing, waters rising,
Waters changing into rain,
And on the day after creation,
He was swallowed.

Eager as a hungry flame,
Eastward, aye, he wandered;
Circumscribed horizons change,
Burst and roll asunder.
Moving as the rolling earth
Until the land came to a stop,
In the word's end ocean,
He would have to turn or drop, saying:

*"Give us the morning to guide us
Into this time we are hurled -
Motion is standing beside us
As we drift in the untravelled world.
Give us the morning to guide us
Questions around us are hurled.
Answers are burning inside us
As we sift through the unravelled world."*

On the day after creation,
He'd been there and back again,
With a strangely strange vibration
That was clouding up his brain
And he taxed imagination
In a metabolic gyre;

He savoured the sensation,
Put his hand into the fire, saying:

*"Give us the morning to guide us
Into this time we are hurled -
Motion is standing beside us
As we drift in the untravelled world.
Give us the morning to guide us
Questions around us are hurled.
Answers are burning inside us
As we sift through the unravelled world."*

In the waiting room of wonders,
He wandered softly as a trance.
He was waiting for the treading of
An all consuming dance
He was waiting to be struck by lightning
He was looking for the one-time chance,
And on the day after creation,
He was followed.

Eager as a hungry flame,
Eastward, aye, he wandered.
Circumscribed horizons change,
Burst and roll asunder.
Moving with the rolling earth
Until the land came to a stop;
In the world's end ocean,
He would have to turn or drop, singing:

*"Give us the morning to guide us
Into this time we are hurled -
Motion is standing beside us
As we drift in the untravelled world.
Give us the morning to guide us
Questions around us are hurled.
Answers are burning inside us
As we sift through the unravelled world."*

And when morning broke and he awoke,
He had not far to go
If the choosing meant just losing,
Would his senses let him know?
In a foreign land he made his stand,
His feet firm on the ground.
And on the day after creation,
He was found.



Embryo#



أَفْرَأُ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

Iqra biismi rabbika alladhee khalaqa, khalaqa alinsana min 'alaqin
Recite in the name of your lord who created, created man from an embryo
Surat Al 'alaq 96:1

أَلَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ. سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطَلَعِ الْفَجْرِ

Laylatu alqadri khayrun min alfi shahriin. Salamun hiya hatta matla'i alfajrii
The night of power is better than one thousand months.
(That night is) Peace until the rising of the dawn. Al Qur'an, Surat Al Qadr 97

In the start was the void and the void became Man,
It was cold, oh so cold, and so frightening;
From the waters of emptiness, condensed the land,
In the life born of thunder and lightening;
Hiding His face in the cloud, surveying all He'd endowed:

And the day couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning come.
Night couldn't come "til He'd first made the day.
Light couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning sun
To chase the darkness away.

And this low embryo slowly made his ascent,
So alone, so alone, he was frightened,
Of the cause and laws unto which He'd been sent,
In the seeing and being enlightened.
Confined to Earth, he was bound, born with his face to the ground:

And the day couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning come.
Night couldn't come 'til He'd first made the day.
Light couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning sun
To chase the darkness away.

And a voice reaches out in the thickening light
Over pale and barren lands;
Calls to the One who brings forth the night
By covering the Sun with His hands;
He stains the thickening skies with a rainbow guise:

And the day couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning come.
Night couldn't come 'til He'd first made the day.
Light couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning sun
To chase the darkness away.

He's the One who commands, He made all the plans,
All creation revolves 'bout His head;
With a wave of His hand, He laid out the land
At His feet like a carpet bed;
Song to creation, He sings, song in the firmament rings:

And the day couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning come.
Night couldn't come 'til He'd first made the day.
Light couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning sun
To chase the darkness away.

Shape without form, a voice without sound,
He moves in an unseen way;
A night of power, eternal hour,
Peace until the break of day;
The doubter's dart, the traveller's chart,
An arrow piercing even to the coldest heart,
A hand surpassing every earthly art,
And shows everyone his own way:

And the day couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning come.
Night couldn't come 'til He'd first made the day.
Light couldn't come 'til He'd first made the morning sun
To chase the darkness away.



اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
Allāha 'alā kullī shayin qadeerun
God has the power to will anything

Lailatul Qadr (ليلة القدر), (the Night of Destiny, Night of Power, Night of Value, the Night of Decree or Night of Measures), is the anniversary of the night Muslims believe the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Muhammad. Qadr is most commonly translated as power, or wisdom, and also as probability. But there is no direct equivalent word in English. In Urdu it is called *Andaza*, the night where the probabilities of the universe are adjusted (somewhat like the expansion and contraction of the universe?).



Chanson

Pere Lachaise is the most famous cemetery in the world, and for the dear departed, the best address in Paris. Some 300,000 people rest here. A cavalcade of French cultural and political history, with a few foreign entombments, including the playwright Oscar Wilde and Doors front-man and zeitgeist icon Jim Morrison.



I

Summer is the worst time - there never is a good time.
They come from all across the world just to visit him.
A lot has come and gone since nineteen seventy one,
But I've never ever gotten used to living next to Jim.

Why do they come and queue for a man they never knew
Who had gone to meet his maker before most of them were born?
I guess that it's the fame, or the magic of a name,
Or a spirit never tamed, that brings them here to mourn.

The Poles will throw a party for their Chopin, and the arty
Bring flowers, poems and candles, and others' wine and bread,
Why do young folk come to rave 'round an ancient rocker's grave?
Don't they know how to behave in the presence of the dead?

It's the best address in town, but I think I'd rather be
With Karl and all the comrades up in Highgate Cemetery.
Though there's nothing to compare with this famous cemetaire,
There's not much love to spare between the Lizard King et moi.
Pourquoi? Dites moi! Je vous dis que...

Living near the great is highly over-rated.
They stand upon my headstone just to get a better view.
If I was recreated, I'd sooner be cremated
And scattered on the river or some quiet avenue.



II

Yes, Père Lachaise is the most famous cemetery in the whole wide world. Therein recline some of the most famous names in French history and culture. And imports like Oscar Wilde and Jim Morrison. Edith Piaf, Marcel Marceau, Delacroix and Gericault, The man who built the Suez Canal, and Antoine Parmentier who popularised the health benefits of the humble potato. Maria Callas' ashes were there until some Greek stole her urn and scattered her on the Aegean Sea. C'est vrai! C'est l'esprit de mort! Et maintenant, l'encore:

The singers, and the dancers, and the actors, and the chancers,
The rebels and the statesmen, and the fallen communards,
Napoleonic Generals and politicians' wives.
The poets and the dreamers, all those other famous lives,

The writers, and the waiters, and those great large format painters,
Deportee commemorations, Oscar's winged androgenoid,
The names no one remembers, and the ones no one forgets,
But Jim's here with empty coke cans and the smell of cigarettes.

And, summer is the worst time - there never is a good time.
They come from all across the world just to visit him.
A lot has come and gone since nineteen seventy one,
But I've never ever gotten used to living next to Jim.



Ruins and Bones



I

*"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.
Percy Bysshe Shelley*

In ages far beyond our ken,
These stones weren't set by mortal men.
In friendly fields and foreign lands.
They say these walls were by giants' hands were raised.
But few, few remember when.

With mortar mixed with blood and soil
And leavened thence with sweat and toil.
The masons and the muscle
All are bones, bones, dry bones,
And nothing else remains.

Their histories are carved in stone.
Their mysteries are locked in stone.
And so the monuments decay
As lonely sands stretch far away,
And hide the stones.

Razed down to the bedrock
Like Jerusalem of old, and built and built again.
The past now rises up like prayers
Emerging from the very layers of dust
That cover time and man.

On sweeping plains and on high places
Where those who went before us left their traces.
By lonely towers and standing stones,
Amidst the castles and the shrines,
Tracing lives and story lines,
Lie the ruins and the bones,
The ruins and the bones,
Ruins and bones.



كان يا ما كان، في قديم الزمان، وسالف العصر والأوان
 kan ya ma kan fi qadim izzaman wsalifi al'asri wal'awan
 Once upon a time in ancient times

Time and tide and warp and wind,
 Ah, see what ship by waterside
 Takes us far, and what betides us
 To look back, and watch, and wonder.
 Oh yes, we wander.

And sing such songs as we might hear
 In dreams before day breaking,
 As ancient echoes hide between
 The slumber and the waking.
 We remember,
 Yes, we remember

Iskander marched this way and back
 Across these battlefields of old.
 Persepolis he burned and in Babylon he died,
 And now, embalmed in gold,
 He lies waiting.

The killer khan in death reclines
 Amidst his guards and concubines,
 Who died so none would ever see
 The final resting place where he
 Lies waiting.

And in our own imagining
 The fabled, once and future king
 Upon an island in a lake,
 He slumbers still but will awake
 One day.

To tumbled towers and fallen stones,
 Broken statues, empty tombs.
 Ghosts of commoners and kings
 Walk the walls and catacombs,
 The castles and the shrines,
 Marking lives and story lines,
 Lie the ruins and the bones,
 The ruins and the bones,
 Ruins and bones.

Valences

(early in the morning at break of day)



Valence: The capacity of something to unite, react, or interact with something; connections; relationships.

*"Courage!" he said, and pointed toward the land,
"This mounting wave will roll us onward soon".
In the afternoon they came upon a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.*

Lord Alfred Tennyson, *The Lotus Eaters*

Out of the cradle so restlessly rocking,
Ringing the changes that resonate still,
The rolling momentum of memory sailing
Like some graceful galleon, onwards until

We came in due course to harmonious havens,
Seeking the warmth of another land's sun –
Such was the feeling, and such was the motion
Of onwards, and upwards, and endlessly on,

Out of those valences, casual, knowing,
Seeking out payments for debts never due,
The curious cadence of melodies flowing,
Gathering vagrants in pastures anew,

Forgotten weekends of such transient yearnings,
The edginess felt as we near a strange land,
Vanishing echoes of strange dreams returning,
Just out of reach of the memory's hand,

They're falling like mist through my arms,
Flowing like mist through my arms,
Broken memories, fractured songs
Are flowing like mist,

Flowing like mist through my arms,
Flowing like mist through my arms,
Broken memories, fractured songs
Are flowing like mist, like mist through my arms.

Out of the days of such recklessly wandering,
Seeking sensation and stretching the mind,
Journeying aimlessly, canyons and castles
Pass ageless and ageing and captive in time,

What lies before us and what lies behind us
Are little compared to the treasures we find,
Are nothing compared to what's lying within us
As secrets unfold and the stories unwind,

And down through the ages, the prophets and sages
Set beacons to guide us both forward and aft,
We rise on the billow, descend to the hollow,
Climb to the top-mast, or we cling to the raft,

And when all is unravelled, the road that's less travelled
Winds back to the start, and we know it again
For the first time, and we know that there's no more to say,
So early in the morning, at breaking of day.

Falling like mist through my arms,
Flowing like mist through my arms,
Broken memories, fractured songs
Are flowing like mist,

Flowing like mist through my arms,
Flowing like mist through my arms,
Broken memories, fractured songs
Are flowing like mist, like mist through my arms.



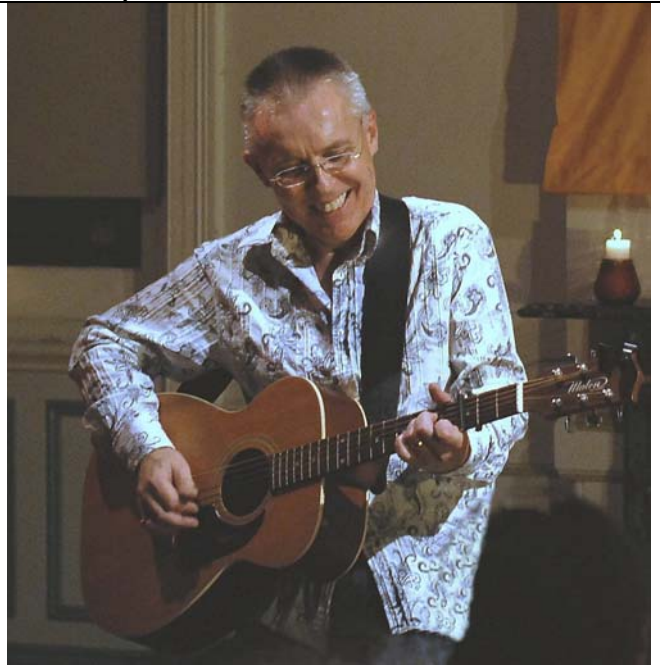


About Paul Hemphill

Award-winning songwriter Paul Hemphill has performed throughout Australasia and the UK, as a solo artist and as a member of the shadowy HuldreFolk, combining poetry and music, horror and humour. Vikings, Romans, Mongols, and the Spanish Inquisition have all faced the music!

Something old, something new, something that may take us disappearing down the foggy ruins of time – pushing poetic licence to its hazy limits, reacquainting us with his particular take on history, imparting an altogether different perspective on pain and pandemonium, and sharing with us dubious anthems to power, pride, and prejudice.

You can find out more and listen to some of Paul's songs on SoundCloud and YouTube. Search under Paul Hemphill or HuldreFolk (but ignore the Flemish death metal band of the same name)



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