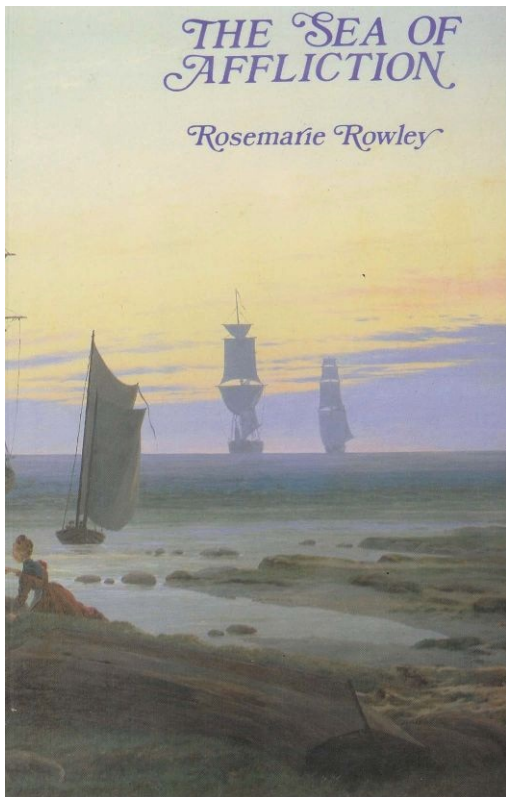


THE SEA OF AFFLICTION

Rosemarie Rowley



The Sea of Affliction

by Rosemarie Rowley

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I

In tribute to friendship
For NIVEN CHARVET

*I shall wear white flannel trousers, and
walk
Upon the beach
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to
each
I do not think that they will sing to me*

T. S. Eliot

THE VIRGIN THINKS ON ICARUS

Who has seen the fabulous unicorn?
Perhaps the virgin's symbolic eyes
Look through her turret at the skies
For fact to join with fantasy
And penetrate her text disguise.

Motif of poison and a glyph
Where history took her missing chances
Tumbles the grid: so her pure glances
Like a pinpoint on the alabaster cliff
Of indigenous truth. But where lies
Her one-horned lover in idea?
The cup of commissioned lies
Is broken on the wave of need.

Chimeres, of course, may be excused
For peering at the edge of daydreams
As fragmentation now is fun
For super-egos on the run.

And better her tapestry wings
Than those waxy things whereby Icarus
Disappeared. Better her window on the bight
Than a drowning mind suffused in rite.

Between the blazing, sun-wrecked head
And the trajectory, breast pushing arm
There is a compassed sea of knowledge
That gives delight its deep alarm.

And in this bright and burning dance
Love and ambition have no chance.
She hears, in the last exhalation of his lung,
A wish for a song that for her will be unsung
In a time that for lovers will never have begun.

EXPLODING THE MYTH OF THE GORGON

The snake-locks anemone
Hungered as she gazed on the green
Of eternal movement
Against the calm, cold,
Ignorant rock
Of pain and insecurity.
In the foam was splintering
Like actuality, her love dreams.
A moon
Turned masculine, he would
Govern her heart, mind
And spirit – computer
King-bee, to mimic her power over life,
Her terrible beauty franchised,
Petrified in the daily example of love.
Yet the dashing seaspray moves continually
In an infinite aubade, evensong,
A choric hymn to the sea mother;
Fractured, she would no more sing the song.
That second, when her eyes met the man
Mouthing the word atom
She knew him whose
Imploding eye
Would haunt her for centuries.

THE ZOO AND THE SEA

The gesture is the shape of flame
Which tells how sacred is a name

The Grail is lost, and yet we keep
Making comparisons, and cheap.

Follow monkeys in cages, where amused
They scan the weekend solitudes.

A grid necessary, but fractious
Come, poet, be friend and tax us.

At least we here have no pretence
Amenable to common sense.

We set our flag above the door
Gouge wide the existential sore.

We are all one species, so stay on
Here's ill-fitting paradigm for everyone.

Recognise what is good and true,
Leave faith, all will follow you.

And wallow blindly in the sand
For fate to hold and lend a hand.

Just say that mire reflects a star
Like the essence of what people are

And lying, they can easily fake
The watershed of their own make.

Live in inaction, like the clam
Devour the air, and eat "I am".

Be sunk in strange nobility
Like lobster pots in a blood red sea.

The teeth advent the coming rage
Cry, and tear up every page.

History is made by agreed omission
Only the sea is true to its mission.

We sit here watching its vindication
As it is pumped full of radiation.

**“How many strawberries grow in the salt sea?”
(Trad)**

(i)

A molecule is ridiculous
And one is ridiculous

This is what I said as I gazed upon
The Canopic sea
With its torn sheen

A thread lies across my eye
Naked as air
The void is visionless for the
Wholly frighteningly
Inexperienced

Powerful emotion may be sacred
The poems of love may not be invitations

(ii)

The movements of popollutions
Have little to do with
But must outmode the archivist

History is not pansexual and the swirls
Of tapestry recede
Beyond the checkpoint

The movements of the masses can be
Registered without fear

The eye may surrender to the gum.

(iii)

Holy is the vessel
But the mountebank inquisitor
Gives sermons on the body and mi d

And in between,
The dimmed will
The parlour of sense

Feel a heart aching
The womb morass
Skirting life
The fearful chariot.

THE MERMAID

Could it be called a distance or a closeness
A tincture like faith when our bodies hurt
For each tied arm or breast of hopelessness?
Sun-starved without real love, sea-girt,

Gulled by the sea's obedience, could our needs
Like the stranded pellet of your off-wind eye
Mark in sea-grass the uncharted deeds
Where time believed your oars just drifted by?

Now rocks are the landscape of my dreams,
Their wimpled arms, their blighted eyes
Clams open to my gaze are screams –
Instruct my usefulness, with lies.

Imperial solitude! Past predicating
My eternal days are without retort
The shadow of his impossible bones
Like battenning drams, a consort.

WRACK

I had been sent to banishment
For haughty airs, and the beach
And the seaweed were a desert.

Lovers in the paradise lost
Now found themselves totally free
And hated it, as they had feared hatred,
And loved it, as they had not desired loving.

A heron close to the shore
Tore our tawdry eye
He wept we were unclean
Looking at the riverbed
Where fish were expiring
Tails lifting, thumping, dying
And cried all those who have sworn
Against a sacred will shall share this fate
Of deserty and desolation.

Children were asking
Mammy, would you take the nails out of my hand
If I were on the cross?
Did God have no mother or father?
And they breathed air that was dead and full of lead.

THE RAFT

From temples hiding from his wrath
Where fool and Pharisee sit in sackcloth
From places where the Holy Writ is banked
My raft set out to sea – one faithful plank.

The discourse of love was a novelty, so stated
The whinge of servility in the highly fated
The constant profanity in public places
Was seen as a blemish on the ancient graces

No blame at the conference on recidivism
Just pungent satire to expel the scroll's witticism,
Whispering behind hands, a convent girl on parole
Finds herself word-perfect on the soul:

It must be love, for I have still my heart
It beats in me, that is God's balanced part
Every truth makes the mind effective
Every action is the thought's corrective

Yet arms and munitions are hidden under rants
To make dismemberment speak, to lance
With foetid spear the halo of identity
And obfuscate the human destiny

But He who drove the waves beneath the firmament
Can speak in divers tongues a promise meant
He can see the rot the land has set you
Who was torn in anguish to perfect you

Grasp hope, the raft of a new season
Render unto joy the affliction of your reason
Believe a friend, who loves you more than He?
Is all the answer finding God has victory?

So hope, listen, is a word sent to the heart,
A loving eye, which is not yet upstart
From the garb of selfhood which imprisons
From the ruin of churches, which is schisms.

From the abuse of freedom, which is tyranny
Deliver us, said the detritus of the faithful sea
From the usurper's investment in the Evening Star
Save us, said the man who would not cull the morning
glory's hour.

SCAVENGERS

How gaunt they will be is a matter for conjecture
But their eyes will harden like the one they seek
In a hideous defamation of their spirit self
Once hinted at in the surface of a shell

Now welded to indestructible plastic
And regurgitated, to present its unhappiness
To the public air – a congealed meal
Thrown up by the private cogitations of the sea

Insulted irrevocably, irreparably, finally
Married, meaning marred, at last by man
Not just tamed, subdued, or brought to heel

But infiltrated. Poisoned. Now scavengers
Learn the lessons of our ancestors
In a new world without possibility.

UP THE CREEK

(i) The prickly cockle

Wait till I adjust my perfectibility
And I will rip that livery of yours
Token female this year, and yours.
With your watch chain broken in the sand.

The television with its cuckold horns
Has damned you for a filmic hero:

I clamp my mouth as I spit out
Tides of sea genius, weeds of catalepsy

Raw gusts of the zeitgeist. I will be
Featured in the back to nature series.

(ii) The smooth venus

Soothe my sense with sweet perfume
I have my sister's hoped skirt on
And I'm looking for a new song
An ensign for the moon.

Yesterday's a yellow trumpet
Turned gold with longing

Now in exile, I remember you boldly

Was it once we were together?

(i) The warty venus

Wait until the surrealist man takes over
And life will be worth reading!
Already, the choirboys are queuing in soup kitchens
And priests' knees are snapping at the altar.

Churches are done for.
So long they whipped magic out of blood
Now, Gothic windows are monotonous
As green grass.

In the beach-hut you are free
With all the pop-corn you buy for me
A smashed camera around your neck.

Let's take a trip far out to sea
Watch the white chairs flying
Over fish-head rocks.
Don't forget your surplus!

(ii) The Chinaman's hat

Is not awakening an even deeper delusion?
I ask myself as I buy my Chinese meal
The only secret left for me to unravel
Is the secret of buying and selling,
An old trade I had shunned with interpretation
of the Classics.
Now, the dark boy gives me change.
It is clear I have left my youth behind me.
How suddenly age has come upon me!
And I am only now beginning to be serious.

(iii) The hermit crab

I'm paradigm

A careful creature who lives where others want him.
I divine my borders through the rhythms of my neighbours

I enter into agreements for transport, food supply and
mutual protection

Loving, encompassing, I ask only clean air

and water and a few morsels

I trawl and crawl in the secrets of the deep,

I have a sideways approach to life.

Reconciliation is my ultimate ambition.

(iv) The Noah's Ark shell

Now look at us all

Covered in slime and effluent!

Sediment blowing in the wind.

What's worse,

You can't smell, feel or see

The real dirt

The kids have sores, die young.

We keep searching the blood-moon

For news of our worth.

I have forged the utmost link of fate

With time.

NEREID

(for Valentin Iremonger and family)

There is a place I'm sure to find my song
Although it echo when the night winds blow
And the harbour fill with tambourines of woe
When embittered sailors rowing hard and slow
Can't tell how time has made the story long
And in s doing, lost its maiden tongue
Yet there's a place where death won't sound his gong.

There is a place I know a barren reed
Moons in the river like a frozen note
Its delicate calligraphy afloat
To bear the honour of a single deed
Which has the imprint of a lover's need
To make the landscape mystic in the vote
And give the world kits beauty: quote
The luminous words among a scabbled screed

And saints who'd make of Pegasus a goat.
Here are flowers, massed among the weed
Not carried by those picadors of greed
Who learn psalms, songs, apothegms, by rote,
And in so doing, do their lessons wrong
And harvest snow, even from love's even song:
There is a place I know to right the wrong
There is a place I know I'll find my song.

SEA SHANTY

Here is the plectrum's imbrogio,

The empty torso of a man sinking
On the vacant sea of the living

And you are the bearer
Of a womb attended by dragons

And you are the earth
Holding the womb that will not be still.

The sea is accident-prone
And the womb is prisoner like a pink diamond

A tourmaline dredging blood
A peridot snaffling its centre.

The whole earth clams shut
But a light in your mouth
Makes you thunder of silence

Trembling you enervate the string
A wish escaping from your wooden body

RUMOURS ON LANDING

(I) At the dock

You belong to honed Parnassus
And even circlets of grace
With your sparrow hands and sunglasses
You eulogise this fault of place.

And say the Irish are not honest
Praxis has lost a kind divinity
All human life is here – the gonest
Are in the dark seas' shriveled galaxy

And they have kept a shibboleth
With wanton hands and fantastic lies
Irish rats rhymed to death
- a requisite for the disguise

For every chance that brought you here
Is counter to the digital clock
And I am left without a tear
A flower challenging a rock

The marvelous boy is drowned
The knave is at court, in a passion
The lies in the fire I have found
Would keep a salamander's tail thrashing

(ii) Severance but no deliverance

Thalassa! Thalassa! I cry
Sick of the sight of traitorous lands
- Andromeda at the quayside
Is nightly mauled by wasting hands

And up there on the city heights
A black sun ushers in the dawn
While the wind, under the guise of rights
Ushers in an unctuous pawn

I deck the shores in leaves of grey
Where the windset jetty salts the sea spray
A dangling balance is the day
Which burns the third eye in a charnel house.

And what is penile servitude
But a freedom spent
And what is ample fortitude
But sorrow in another rent?

THE SEA HORSE

(for Linda Hill)

It makes no difference what the scientists say
The hand of God that drew night and day
Out of the mysterious void so we could be
Said “Let there be light.”. The He conceived the Sea.

So God made nature, His bride and artifact,
Who must be joined to man to be exact
Solicitous, creative, her form adored –
But men are treacherous, and she gets bored.

The sea bows out, so has a neat acquittal
But a woman has to hang on, it’s marital
Defined by her childbearing propensity
He ignores her intellectual intensity,

That exclamation mark on feminine creation,
The seahorse, is father and mother of a nation
Bearing his eggs, his body all erect
Indicates Genesis to be unfinished tract.

The clam, the flagellate, the urchin and the crab
Outside the nighttime fancy of Queen Mab
What finger initialing in the sand
Would be seahorse in the middle of that band?

I, said the mother, who would die of thirst
Rather than be considered first
The protozoa and the doughty trilobite

Having precedence in this unseemly fight.
So, the wedding's done, the guests have gone to seed
To celebrate necessity and greed
Who in her bridal gown of plangent seaweed
Can sing the sadness of a broken reed?

HARBOUR LIGHTS

I watched them go out, one first, then together
The lights of love and kindness
Each friendship's pact, each lover's vow
Was left in residual blindness

They winked, before their own extinction
They glimmered, as they put out their shining
Lost souls going into orbit, discourse into monologue
And the blind self clung to the rail, diving

What fate now? What hope of communication
And the woman, severed from what she thrives on
Seeks spontaneity – a soul to be dispirited
By the crumbly dialogue all England survives on.

Embrace utilitarian agony
The arid pun, the joke's that threadbare
No meaning, but base exchange. Usage.
The heartless game of baron and taxpayer.

FOR THE EMIGRANT

In the wake of the ship, the glimmering necklaces of light
Shone hard as diamonds in the soul's first frost-bite
How little you knew that the tiresome trajectory
The gangplank between you and the world still free
Would shorten to a noose, catching at your neck
Strangling as the foghorn on the lonesome deck.

Your dreams, mystical, magical became
All of flesh, as your body surrendered to the name
Syncopated to an artificial chorus and rhythm
Where you couldn't hear the benediction of the sea hymn
But only a curse, and as many have discovered
Is Ireland's gift to you, head bent and uncovered

Loss is an agony that defies description
Farewell to laughter, joy and love's prescription
Your neat head that gazes in the ladies' glass
Returns an image, monstrous, unsurpassed
In terrors to be borne, rancour and rue
Suffered by guilty parties naming you.

Your husband, shame us, will rape and hex you
Will garland you with death wishes, glad to vex you
He'll force you to a stagnant act of union
He'll plagiarise, poison your true communion
Rapt in the image you throw back at him
He'll push you offstage, keeling at the world's rim

He'll translate your sacred traditions as hooley

Designate your exquisite abstractions as unruly
Your pieties will become his blasphemy
Your naivete in face of law, a felony
Your fruits and blossoms he'll render as a cipher
Your ballad sheets, to songs he can't decipher

This lies before you, who gaze into the glass
All these frightful deformities will come to pass
Walking on the deck now, have a care
Take out your instrument, play a slow air
Those who look with longing on your fiddle
Will steal your tunes, and make your heart a riddle.

The boat now moves across the heaving sea
Its destination begins another journey
A passenger, with false letters of invitation
You change your address to a modern nation
Devoid of inspiration, seeking crucifixion
You start your lonely voyage – and the fare is perdition.

THE SHIP OF STATE

The ship of state, she was a frozen image
Grown out of bloodshed, murder, adage,
Inward gazing brought her short of hysteria
And banished her writers to outer Siberia
Hocked soul, spirit, and mind for foreign exchange
Swallowed ideas, till they grew a mange
Advertisement, sugar stick of seduction
Ground her on the rock of destruction.

The shores polluted, the rivers stinking, rotten
Show how a less than modern state is begotten
The air is full of fumes from motor cars
The smoke of heating up of little Czars
The sea cogitates, warning starfish
To assume the form of anguish.

FLOTSAM

I searched my shoes and found my way
To the intricate bedpost of the sea
Away from the Roc's desolation
And the songs which told of you and me.

I met Superman among the waves
In the harsh deckle of the sand
His hair combed by seaworthy knives
To mend the journey's ampersand.

O settle my question, so I can tell
The dream of he who rides the sky
Pour love and the sea into a conch-shell
So children may listen and wonder why

The spaces between consonantal stops
Are worn and cancelled as your breath
And how your songs are like the funnel's
First reach seaward in your hot dark death.

THE GIRDLE OF VENUS

A man passed by. The tide shriveled at his feet,
Transmogrifying Canute, that neat witch.
His plastic hands trebled the broken image
Shards ricocheting outwards as from a mirror. The age
Demands silence, yet he chose for thrill
Magnanimous matter, woman's ill.

A young girl hasty in her first refusal
Kept a diary of her dissonance, an intuition
With thirteen months. Sea-thrift
Was her bounty. Her questions caused a rift.
The sea was her sincerity, treasuring
In a deep cove what love had died.

Confession of grief is worthy dissertation.
And token female academic heart is proof
Men bleed like women. The song was dribbled
By the grey-haired poets and a scroll-damaged poof
A taxi with academics and scribblers
Taking part in the loot. They made a spoof.

THE HOLD

Beauties of a place and time
Leave no essence in the mind
The winter bishop is not able
To resurrect his living fable.

Northern Ireland fights with dice
Propinquity at the settler's price
Clouds of anguish form my head
Sectarianism is a Procrustean bed.

Proselytising for the future
Parasitic on the past,
The heel is cracked, the toe is pinching
Where's a one to make a last?

Dig him in the bloody flaxfields
Plough his sinews where he musters
Lace his ears with sheaves of wrath
Split his mouth with blackened blisters.

In no corncrake spring he's drunk
With wine that never saw a barrel
His factory made vocabulary
Will trip him down on my light carrel

Where's the man if he is able
To pitch the jug of appeasement in the hay?
To Babylon he sends a cable
Such fictions root him to his clay.

Fiction nourish him, no wonder
A new world chocked on nutriment
And I am choked with common sense
A naïve realist in a Pythagorean tent.

Say what man will wrench a quarter
From the drink sopped drunken bay
The harbour head is silted
And cork-lined bodies block the way.

The mirror is broken, the lamp is aflame
The straddling sycophants give the horse blame
But when the news comes from afar
You may be sure they haven't seen a star.

THE ICE COUNTRY

It is the way I keep on, regardless
Past the ice blocks on the crust of time
With winter set in and the sea at my back
Frozen like a long echo

Pledges you had made in warmer climes
Now prove worthless as a translation of hope
They have diminished into raucous laughter
There's some fun in exquisite joke

That keeps me going, past the time
With the vision of your hands fading,
The beauty of the country of your body,
Immobile, presaged this ice age.

It seems we had exchanged blood,
Hearts, lights, kidneys, minds
But not kindness. We had vitriol
Violence, virulence and pestilence

In the dark green summer. I see
It imprisoned in a block of ice
Unable to hurt or heal, just prick the skin
With a fleeting irritation not like a wound.

I keep going past the dead, entombed
For ever in a glacial calm
Vegetation has long since left the path

There are only stones left, scarring the ice.

II

In tribute to sisterhood

For MARILYN MAXWELL

“The leaves of the sea are shaken and shaken,
There was a tree that was a father
We sat beneath it and sang our songs.”

Wallace Stevens

THE UNREMEMBERED TREE

“On the shore of the wide world” (*Keats*)

Across the dire straits of unremember
I flagged the ancient dower to grieve
With the raddled spirit of the sea
The golden pledge which the world can thief
From the still leaves of an unremembered tree –
The shores are still-shelled, like a nimbus
Rare, above the dark intrinsic wound of self
As predicate, shrived, married in hate
Without honour, to the beastly baron waste.
He spoke our mind, the truth was our betrayal
- impulse and motion were his plunder
Yet hills called back to Wordsworth, a wonder
To child, and a child to wonder.
Dachau, Hiroshime, the apostasy to sense
Where is that sweet vow, that inheritance?

THE MAIN

It's wrong to think you have a special place
Where mirror's bane can't hurt
Where in idealic world
You can transcribe your real calling.

The house built on sand will go away
Down to the seas, you must not counter
The lost distance, with an emblem of farewell
Or dress it up to mourn the rag of youth.

So each galleon that sails from America
Pregnant sails heavy with spoil
Leaves a legacy to tear out mystery
Spell it out in heaves and sobs of loss.

Remember, while you dreamt of blessed lovers
You encountered the sons of reality.

DEAD MAN'S FINGERS

(a poem on Sellafield, the British Nuclear Reactor – in an advertisement in the London Observer in the 'eighties,, they invited the public to come and look at their clean nuclear power station)

No compass, lodestar nor muted caulborn child
Could have taken away our chancery
So much, nor in the abandoned wild
Of seafarers' destinies, scrawled this history
On faces chiseled by the sea, to doom
Of blood and breath. Sea thrift, a waste
Of what the verb to be, means. Boom
Of nefarious husbandry, they will reap
From the spendthrift sea a wreck of haggards
Scratch on the sand a white, deformed defeat
And the advertising in the paper, braggarts
That what is only visible is meat
For enterprise where maiden wombs will shape
Children born to die of master rape.

SCRATCHED ON A SEA-SHELL

(for Margaret Shore)

Once he possessed her in the yellow plain,
A field of corn gave her the first madrigal
And she wrote with green reeds the alien rain
With nature, understanding, and grew magical
Child and garden. For her flowing tears
He invented the clear confine of glass
And the blood-urge in his thought slew the fears
That she would leave the house, and pass
Through the silk doors of life to find them close
In his over-awed skill like a dream of heaven
Gone by. She went to the forest, as a tree knows
That only truth and nature are a leaven
Which flows like the spirit of the sea
But he had spoiled it, with her lost infinity.

THE THRUST

The sea is considered feminine. Rape is
The crime where the victim is not named.
Encrusted jewel flawed by hideous temerity
Pearl-theft sanction by fanatic greed,
Issue praised. Woman is a doorway
To a kingdom whose rolling crown is parody
Of love. Bartered for, means to an end,
Imagined justice paid for by her cries,
And child a word for issue, when the child
Is beggared on a loving gentle spirit,
A throwaway thrust that reduces the sea
To a squandered dominion like an old tin can
Rusting in the waves, a raddled plangent queen
Whose health and beauty he did not esteem.

BRIDEWELL

The battlements she raised have left her keep thrown
On an idle space – where breathings of the story
Blaze in the evening papers. So clear the loan
And interest on abuse, maternal glory
Is anodyne to stop public wound and –pleasure
And cut it in the icy icon of the eye
Where women freeze hope. The loot and treasure
Of journeying is borrowed time to why.

A child will trace in the ochre sand
Like the crab nebula, the explosion of his birth
His mother's history written on his hand
Clenched on coloured glass. The ocean's girth
Is like the deep swell in his curious mind
And intricate as the dream that made her blind.

WRECK

Assumption is the wreck of thought. The craze
For power ends between a woman's legs. Sealed
By a lover's pledge, men rent a phrase
In court. She says she didn't yield.

All women are subsumed in rape, by men.
The sea knows that. She has endured
A rape. Now, has a shrink, with Zen.
But the eagle is landed and we can't be cured.

A coast polluted, still with pride to rear
And pay the gaping god, is called a scrum,
No anodyne to heart. A gift of tears
When not a single tear can come.

Only a pain in the sanctuary of her head.
When violated, she's better dead.

THE PEARL

He taught her to listen to herself. He was indifferent
To the schooled hearts of sealed wonder, who were stopped
In the anchor of discovery. So, seeing affection
Bold in her face, he trifled with her sex and lopped
Her head off. Language was unused to these themes
So she rested with the memory of her true love
As she knelt on the shore of broken promises and dreams
Naked in the sand, where she could find no cover.

Experience me. Love is real. I am destruction
The annihilation of your soul in proof-positive lore.
A capitalist rip-off, a counterfeit seduction,
That having used you profitably, now calls you whore.
And in that pain, you buy essential conscience
Keep this treasure, the pearl of your silence.

HER STORY

His word set a tombstone on my heart
Impelled the knife's silhouette into my side
The brown speck on his eye was a part
Of beauty's fungus, a leprosy of pride.
Still in the whited paling of my soul
I let this dark transparency take root
To drive into the earth of my whole
Spring, fantasy's festering shoot.
Envy's gratuitous mockery of the just
The grudging, tetchy, mimicry in the skull
Will sail with death, and at last, a gull
Stifled in the world's windpipe, is torn
Out of some quiet bay, a raucous horn.

THE SHAME

The issue, flesh and blood. But ringed around
Like a discarded necklace, are the deeds.
The mind, invaded, sets up a surround
Of fake belief: while, mocked, the spirit seeds
Darkly in the waste. The wraith, bereft found-
Ling, looms in the desert mirage, shimmers, beads
Of blood on the glistening temple. Sound
Of blood dripping, soft bone breaking, seaweed
Girdling a ruptured angel smile. The hound
Of hell and heaven snapping in the reeds
Of honest thought, spirit's sea-spray, bound
To dishonour words – a memory no one heeds
Of heart, mind and body: - multiple treason
In the wild foam, a smashed, afflicted reason.

BONDAGE

The tears of the world are a constant quantity
And moving hearts fixed testament of grief
Restless under the moon, we ask the sea
To keep this essence. She's repentant thief
In time;s transcript of a shattering hope
A summer's day when love and joy can teem
Over in a green swell. Yet a man will grope
To ferret out the ardour of her scheme
Forget which person can present her cause
Of expectation in calligraphy and scroll
A graduate of life before its laws
Are etched into the witching of her soul
Winched in her body, he tests the pulse of matter
The friend turned contact all his words will scatter.

THE REEF

The blighted hope that struck upon the reef
Of generous neglect, has tied the dreams
Of things which vouchsafe integrity's demeanour
Such is the boat heaving on the tide.

Not necessary for the claim to ponder
Which strikes the heart direct.
No to that. Yes to prevarication
The wealth of nations rests upon a quibble

Of the self and others, need versus greed,
The aspirant's wages, the market's interplay
Hung on the straddled stupor of the age
The trees, struck down with sickness, cannot rage.

Woman, the precious ornament of time
Is in her old age, the memory of a crime.

THE LOSS

The bride is now a travesty, a skeet.
Her gown trails her on the beach
Of broken promises. Somewhere a sweet
Dove ascends the air, out of the sea-gull's reach
She sees it fly away, and from her eye
A pearl tear loosens, squeezing bitter pride
Out of the wreck of her soul. A passer-by
Looks on, anxious to take a side
And hear the tale of desecration, sigh
For the truth forever lost. A jealous ride
Of scron has trampled the wild, prised
Open the oyster pearl of flowering thigh.
She sees, in shells, the bounty of her store
Robbed, plundered, open on the sea shore.

THE SAD TROPHY

Spoilage may be man's destiny, though he wills,
He cannot birth new being into the world,
Involuntary spasm soon translates what thrills
Can bear aloneness, as seed is hurled
With millions into the matrix of matter
With the other half, to show an eye an age.
Fatherhood is such remove, may be a tatter
Of mystery which fills his heart with rage.

So imitate that which gives offence,
The miracle of birth. So sacrifice,
Make bloody entrance into absence
And marry intellect and lust. A paradise
Of muted birds, then, pollute with hate
Her broken dreams, like her sea in spate

THE MARINER'S WIFE'S TALE

He's the love of my life, and he speaks kindly to me
But my part is written, even before I speak
While he expands sea walls. Paradigms of love
Cast me in his stereotype, pliable, meek.
The beaches he will plunder for the treasure
To make a carcanet for me, will seize my neck
And tighter grow in his bonds, till I expire
On the fulsome praise which he with impunity can feck
From the store of word jewels my mother taught me.
His theft is time-honoured, my merest brake
Of thought on speech just hastens towards the bar
Of thankless thrift of golden eye and picture
And miraculous fault. Yet multiplied in my wake
Are my children, hall-marked, legitimate.

BAD FAITH

It happened to me too: I left the road
Of jewel-encrusted happiness for your lie
Because that explained the misery of the world.
I stopped talking to the travelers, and gave
Them standing orders monthly through the bank.
Bread went stale in my house, the birds left
For aromatic gardens hung between
Time and space and our great year of doubt.
Their fragrance came to me in the ship's cabin
Where I was logging your philosophy as dementia praecox
I plundered mythologies, the tree and cross were banned.
All this for one lie! But it poisoned me.
It pursued me like a golden serpent
And turned to dust the memory of our youth.

FAIR WEATHER

Dear friends, when those we love are in distress
Our first impulse must be to tread them down,
Less we encourage a shiftless mess,
And be prevailed upon to act the clown.

For only fools suffer, and we cannot bless
Those who with base error seek renown
And have it prattled up and down the town
Ours is to leave, lest we, too, regress.

This may seem cruel and will cause some pain
But what is pain besides knowing what is right?
For right is might, and foolishness can bite
Like a sick leopard at what we hope to gain.

For friends as you a feast is but a bane,
Gobbets of gizzard, a Tantalus cup of rain.

THE ARGOSY

Atoll glimpsed south, way North, the seas, aloof
Bevelled the shore on which the ship had struck
A bevy of beauties descended on the sloop,
With bibelots, guipure. Sprayed luck.

The dying sun spilled out like honeysuckle
An incense-laden evening on the soul. It poured
Gold on the seas. They raided the binnacle,
Compass broke. The dogs of war ran by and roared.

The watcher on the hill, gave no rendition
Of pain or pleasure which could heal the rent
Of spirit, gazing on a scene bereft
Of invocation, veneration. Even attrition
Which to his exiled heart he would have bent
Is useless in the tears that woof the weft.

THE SEA CHANGE

Lost in the crenellations of the sea wave
A shell, a limpet, hugs the graining sand
Passive, quiet, with bent and covered head,
Enduring all. Beneath the tough rim, blind.

I take it in my hand, not grabbing, stroking
The tale of tumultuous and terrible seas
Etched on its back, the ministry of water
Leaving impressions where the heart had faltered.

Your modest hum, your humble introversion,
Denies at root the need for soul;s exertion
My eye is clear, said this returning wraith,
To make and trust, above all, live in faith,

And hope that He who tamed the seas
Will conquer Hell, until at last it freeze.

THE MATTER

Shot with light, the moving turbulent sea
Broods on the bright eternal, sends out hope,
In the constant flux, a need, a rage to be
Considered whole, at one, is met. But the scope
Of such a riddle asks a mind, pays a fee
For joining mortal to divine, rope
To hang the thesis, God on: luminosity
Through which His good power, gold dope
Of the clanking metal reason, has a victory.

Her mind is hurt by light. It had to cope
With invasion, insult, the cruel knee
In the groin, a hand around to grope.
When her secret sanctuary was sacked
Her eyes, tear goblets a gimlet couldn't crack.

THE INHERITANCE

Whom I loved most was my old grey mother
Yet they have knit her a shroud
To last her centuries, a jeweled shawl
Of plutonium, uranium, and radioactive waste.

The poor moon is demented, and trawls
The earth in search of magic tidings
The sun is afraid of bursting into tears
They send messages we are living on borrowed time.

Why is the obverse of this testament
Hid deep in a man's heart, a mad relay
Of acid rain and powerful scourings
To get vengeance on her who made him keel the pot?

Brother man, it's time to stop your game
Sister is hungering standing in the rain.

THE STAGES OF LIFE

(after the cover painting by Caspar David Friedrich which comprises the cover of this poetry collection)

He walks to meet his fate. He wades
Towards the sea, and sees his own death
Come to him, a vision out of Hades
Sea rocks scorn the shrill pearly wreath
Those eyes have become. His own raids
On the visionary mirror the dearth
Of responsibility to the real. Jolie-laidés
Have invaded his dream, earth
Has demanded her price. He dies, fades,
The opalescent gleams give a monstrous birth
Out of beauty. A machine parades
With sleazy oil across the horizon's girth.
The woman runs grains of sand through her hand
The children plant a flag upon the strand.

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