

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY - SONNETS

False Philosophers Fall
("The Salmon", Galway, Ireland 1982)

When all that is bluff and bull is squandered,
Whom does the wind embrace but simple men,
And soothe their grief with delicate disdain
For those who squandered truth like excrement?
Black-clothed pedlars of universal pain
Came by to my old man and me one night:
As he strained with all the gentle collier's
Honest strength to lift I shoved a brick
Between the axle's biting steel and earth
And scurried like a ferret for the stars.
A weight would crush me in its gravity,
On me a drunken university
With reel and bite with teeth of sordid liars
Who sugared our petrol and slashed our tyres.

How often you disdain, don't comprehend,
And creep around the skirts of abler men:
To crush and break them, make them impotent,
To brew them opium for shallow dreams,
To prostitute the intellect with lies.
And I who cling to winter's gleaming truths
Am fooled by ghostly dreams of destiny:
Oppenheimer stunned by a fierce light
That threw his madness back at him from eyes
Of Hiroshima, Nagasaki's light,
Gleams of Einstein, nature's favourite wand
That broke the bones of men for winter's truths.
So very few are given nature's ear,
And these she has left shivering in despair.

A blizzard, dark rendition, darkest fear,
The howl of learned men now flails the ear,
Universities which stocked with icemen
That do no warming kind of work at all
Must dissipate ideas into dust,
Be creatures of deterrence and the bomb,
Vindictive storms that beat for several years,
And spread a cancer that corrupts the earth.
It hangs around, a stench of ruined truth,
The whispered monody that dust choked lungs
Left ashen in the light's embrace, had dawned
With sinews, an anatomy, of hurt.
See? My old man and me were burning tyres,
And tactile minds were sugaring the pyres.

A Scholar Deserted by his University
(Aberystwyth early eighties).

Trapped like wit in a foreign body,
I am in this massive etching invisible,
In the window-glass of your architect
Rooting and reflecting like the winter's boar.
On ingrown thoughts you drool and bubble,
Ferment in dust, deserted libraries,
Torn from politicians, bent contractors,
In the years of Vietnam. I think, I am.
Cogito ego sum as black as ink
Grieving for the sun and enlightenment gone
In massive grey corruption comes the night,
The easy laughing fools were yesterday's.
Their embers in harmony glow in the dark,
Their flame light burns yet leaves no mark.

The Assault on Carreg Cennen Castle
(“The Salmon”, 1982)

Driven like slaves by trivial convention
Which centuries old became a habit
For bodies that were barely fed or clothed
In old moulds that they feared and despised,
In which elders perceived truth and light,
A busload arrived of the unemployed,
To be shown around the state's old mortar.
In the pointless desolate wilderness
Efficient management of slaughter
Had created inside the castle walls,
Realpolitik of kill, steal and keep,
They forgot for the day their own drab lives.
For years after that, all labouring done,
The castles still filled them with dawn and sun.

The Realizer of Truths
(Circa 1982 or 1983)

The noisy statements were suddenly dead
And all were left with no priority,
Strangers to the rules of sanctity,
Delved among rubbish, gave themselves peace.
They granted it some honour, a forced smile,
A crooked tooth for every work of war
Appeared, spat blood, and spoke absolution.
A pinnacle of civilization,
They marked it with a sharpened bayonet,
Displayed it, a cabinet butterfly.
Tribal patterns and spirals were straightened,
Strangers pretending to meet each other
Converged familiarly, gigantic ruts
Indelicately carved in weaving lanes.

Armour in zero visibility,
Indistinguishable in the darkness,
Weeping the embrace of mythology,
Television programmes recorded war,
Conversed in colour with blank horizons,
Painted plain wallpaper over hard walls
Polka dotted with the blood of innocence.
If it had not been known to be van Gogh
They would have thought it an insanity:
Things said were not meant, those meant never said,
The coin once spun hung weightless in the air
Waiting for the sound of sirens to clear,
Spiralling spear-like in the anguished sun,
In air the instant the war had begun.

A Tramp in the Hugh Owen Library
(Aberystwyth about 1982)

Removed from soil in concrete cubicles,
Mountain water and air, the peat of hearths,
Revolutionary habits, struggles,
Were catalogued, conditioned, sterilized.
No sounds were heard and no conversation,
The people grazed on leaves devoid of earth,
Creeped for sensation among miles of spines,
And hid from chaos, nature's solution
To the puzzle of moving in circuits
On silicon floors under silicon roofs,
To the ticking of sophistication
In perennial librarian seas and skies.
These conscious beings mushroomed for folk-lore,
Why should computers have given them more?

For Wales
(Circa 1982)

If I had bathed in you a darkling stream,
The cold and dead and intellectual lies
Which consummate their lust in iron waves
And leave their detritus among the seas
To break as killing salt upon their shores
Would not have drowned me in their frenzied wastes.
Your ever mellow timeless symmetry
Would purge me in this wilderness with sound
And stillness as our breaking waters found
Deep solace in a shimmering black-deep pool,
My mind would swim among your shining depths.
And now the tears of your time are gone,
And I am still as if my day were done.

For Jones, a Drunken Professor
(“The Spectrum”, Llanbedr Pont Steffan, Wales, 1983)

Today he sent me another little note,
And very well crafted with shining lies,
Reflections of all things deemed to be corrupt
As the opalescence in a dead dog’s eyes.
Filthiest of these was a spelling mistake,
A pee where two should certainly have been
Dominated the scene: conspired, demeaned
The writer’s motives and bad intentions
And churned them into disgusting nonsense.
Quietly the pee had started to leak
Away my work, and down an unknown drain
I saw my future soaking in the rain.
O why is the admin of Wales so tight,
Ridiculously constipated blight?

For the Unheard
(Circa early to mid eighties)

You were a brilliant child, a model for
Posterity; of these who cares that you
Were told so frequently to go to hell
By those fat and barren politicians?
These fools could bear no offspring, never will,
Untouchable and safe behind the scenes
Their torpid poisons coil around your root
Of child-like learning and integrity.
Hear the master of our worldly disguise,
Hypocrisy, in lurid modern guise,
The corpse that flickers blandly on the screen
Will always be lying and contriving
To perpetuate the all-embracing see,
Rotting in babbling anonymity.

The Consumer Society's Exile
(Swansea circa 1985)

By steadily ignoring myths like an
Old carthorse in his winter's pouring rain
And deserted by sun and certainty,
By the black and white writing of a life
In absolute truths and absolute lies,
He sought the murky bog, hibernant fog,
To weave from the gloom an affirmation,
To spin into life the winter branches,
To make of winter a warm companion,
Something that was neither bought nor sold in
The pitiless light, summer's noisy sell,
Giver of life, progenitor of hell.
Seen and heard in dreams and ghostly mistings,
The summer is sold, and the ice lies thick.

Rain
(Swansea, July 1985)

Falling rain looms heavy on the silent earth,
Brilliant verdant threads are grey with age,
The toiling bureaucrats are penning birth
To woven shadows in an iron cage.
The darkest hours of enlightenment
Run headlong from the July sun
And hide from him, conceal the stinking scent
Among the streams, our leaders on the run.
Quickly the sage and learned turn and flee,
In shining sodden torrents drown their debts,
Custodians swept to deep obscurity,
An army beaten by obscure threats.
The cloth of wisdom is a winding sheet,
A seamless garment full of rotting meat.

The Morgan Brothers Find King Arthur
(Circa Mid Eighties)

To the north a glacier roared and cut rock
As the black shotman sliced coal with powder,
The Black Mountain glistens with limestone,
Black, silurian mountain, crag and water
Embrace arthurian in the paths of night.
Llyn y Fan Fach, our lady of the lake,
Veiled above Patti's Castle, Craig y Nos,
Cut by the wind's hard teeth, the caves lie low,
Hid in time's grain that the ploughman had made.
Here, Dan yr Ogof, is the ossuary
Where ancient bones of certitude were carved,
Two Morgan brothers in the coracle
Paddled across time to Arthur's far shore,
And mighty were the idols of their cave.

In an Album
(Swansea circa 1987)

Frozen still by the rough stones of the years.
Hear this boy, myself, while he asks me
Why his eyes are blackened like coals by the
Many seams of knowing that mould the man.
For those eyes can see between the dry-walled stones,
The winds have rounded his words to mine
And bind us like the light between two stars.
Light is time, boy is man, the old coal shed,
Peeling, whitewashed; broken gate, twig-like arms,
The asking boy turned man is gone. I am.
Like starlight I am here but also gone,
The winds find no echo of his asking,
But I am his arching sun, his golden day,
And his timeless hours lightly lead my way.

May
(Swansea circa 1987)

Through leaden night the clear dawn of May
Scythes the time of birth in the brilliant air,
Light mile of earthen fragrance bears these fields
To golden horizons, far, far away.
May the first to bear, the first to flower,
The magic child of freezing cold despair,
Breathes with the sun, sows shining seeds of life,
A million pearls of wisdom off-spring shower.
Winter is the cold earth's frozen cynic,
Lightly tread his ice, there is dark below,
His vanished snows have left the paths of life
In silent beckoning born of stormy lies.
Now May is enthroned in her lucent pearls,
Bourne upon ancient time the light day whirls.

In Memoriam: the Poet's Grandmother.
(Swansea circa 1987)

Darkest hours, blackened echoes, cough up dust,
Beat back the suffocating pain of years,
The anthracitic seams where the light must
Die, where the day is a torrent of pain.
There, husband, you harvested me cold coal,
Gathered from an ancient sun, the blood of
Life and the blackened milk of time, the soul
Of warmth you carved, and gave to me your love.
Mine are the notes of music that you made,
Harmonious truths you wrought of forlorn light,
Hope for the tortured lungs of those enslaved,
The light of liberty in dusty night.
On the ocean of time I grieve for you,
Great symphony of dawn, your sun, bursts through.

Somalia : for the Poet's Aberystwyth Friend Christie O' Donovan Rossa
(Swansea circa 1987)

Valley ghost - the chapel cloaked in darkness,
Among the miners cotton-woolled in dirt,
Towering with coal tips, cold and fearsome,
Steep, silent, valleys burn with sudden light.
Silent is the pious black clothed preacher,
The hungry light has drowned his wall of words,
Swollen-bellied light is great with hunger,
Its futile bones a frame for sullen flesh
To sing in intellectual rhapsody
Of coming death and grains of vanished life.
Deafened by whispers and entranced by a
Flickering T.V., a congregation
Remembers famine in the light fo day,
Blinded by faith and forced to look away.

Keeping a Calf Dry
(Swansea about 1987)

Our cowshed had a corrugated roof
That time had rusted and I was tarring:
And all the day's folds lay like lakes of light,
Eyes, that propagated wavelike to specks
Of coal dust, deadly as hell, hammered in
The black lungs of my pals - those the night's slaves.
Tarring, see, to keep dry a Friesian calf,
Caulking out the killing rain, and keeping
Dry an intermingled shade, black and light,
So that safe at night I could paint its mouth
With milk, its hide with straw, its eyes with time,
And deep among night's waters find its land.
Now in this contemporary city
Stark, merciless, distracted stare at me.

Incident after a Fire at the EDCL Aberystwyth.
(Swansea about 1987)

Let the ship burn and turn in tidal time,
Bill spat a fag in the bin, as yellowed
As he with years, and the plastic pyres glow.
Bottles of benzene blow back our old bent
Minds to youth again, a great fire is fun.
Evans, that stupid clown, is trying to
Put it out: let him burn too, we hate him,
His accent betrays him, Welsh collier's son -
We are pride-loud, he squirms away his day
Spouting Celtic tunes, branding us foreign.
We imperial anglo's taught him to dance
And the stupid man took us seriously,
His pile of extinguishers, our empty souls,
Rolling like spent shells in our Irish sea.

1968 Prague Spring, Aladdin Factory, Alltwen, Swansea Valley
(Written about 1987)

Beaten minutes, dancing light upon a
Dark, machine clad time, the giant hammer
Pounds the sun apart: a metallic burst
Of photons from the blinding welding torch,
And violent child has risen to be man.
The stink of tric is all at hand to wipe
The greasy lies from pristine parts of life,
Moulded in the press shop in the heat of
Premature Spring. These tanks are small, from them
Are built commodities that crush the crowd.
In its place, light and time are fugitives,
Skeletal, ashen people that avert
Their eyes and ears. Now as the shallow tide
Of hope recedes, the morning shift begins.

David Havard after a Coal Mining Accident of the Late Fifties
(Written late 1991 at Ithaca, New York)

We went to help Dai Havard clean his arm,
A Modigliani in the gallery
Of black time, statuesque and abstracted
Against the unfamiliar light of day.
Stuck like a Braque pastiche, deep to the bone,
A signature in iodine and blood
Were bits of crushed coal dust all mixed with flesh,
Swaddled, a bedouin in bandages,
Dai was quiet, a swath of life that the
Reaper had carelessly allowed to stand.
Dai was always quiet, almost never
Did he open his heart, except to smile.
That was years ago, the name Havard need
Not be soiled now by a primitive's daub.

Royston Rogers, a boyhood friend in Craigcefnparc
(Written late 1991 at Ithaca New York)

Cloud-menaced, north-iced Hudson pushed the tide
Past Yankee Stadium where Tommy Farr still
Stands; between the burnt out Bronx and Yonkers
In jet-lagged time, whirlpools, blank concrete eyes.
They'll boot you there, degrees and all, he'd say.
Away from highways, furious cataracts,
The sea-sick Hudson then a coal rimmed pool,
The eyes of stone then sparking fire-fly clues.
We hide under stones, fish-like we are quick
Or dead, he'd say - Jo Louis could really bang.
Those that go to chapel don't care for me,
I see too far; far on a wind-blown day.
As he wandered echoing eerily,
Time's torrents smashed him so very casually.

The Three Lloyd Brothers
(Written about 1991 in Ithaca, New York)

Then, with his leg a piece of weathered steel,
John Lloyd was still a stronger man than me,
Sculpting bales from wild hard gorse, before rain
Soaked the hay, and blood soaked the end of day.
Much stronger. He and his brothers were carved
As half gods, pre Celtic, neolithic,
Laughing at the glacier, slowly doing
The valley long after they were complete:
Laughing at Hengist and Horsa as these
Saxon visitors thieved and killed the east.
Laughing at Grindle-Mathews' weird lab
Where in a cranky fog he death rayed clouds.
These three giants worked indifferent to time,
A common sight enough and then sublime.

Swansea Town One, Arsenal Nil (Late Fifties)
(Written in Charlotte North Carolina 1992)

'Erbie Williams scored a goal with his 'and,
Alone of thirty thousand at the Vetch
I saw him, and Swansea Town won the game.
This was cheating as bad as cooking prac,
Bad as stealing Betty Corfield's crystals
When mine would never leave the liquid state,
Thick and bad as the mud fo Passchendaele,
And the thirty thousand crosses of Vaux,
Supplicating alone to the gods of
Reason, the Idols of Chance passed me by
On the transatlantic road to wisdom,
And they swam with the stream the other way.
'Erbie, that day the Idol of the Crowd,
Warned me not to think too much aloud.

On Being Beaten by Bannister, Brasher and Chataway
Ifley Road Oxford, 1975.
(Written at Charlotte North Carolina 1992)

When Bannister, Brasher and Chataway
Shouted to get the hell out of the way
They still fancied the Olympic five thou,
Breaking thirteen minutes at Ifley Road,
Concealed by thick fog from Magdalen's scorn
And the spires that laughed and shook with fun
At our perennial circumlocution.
Anyway, this is what they thought that
They should do to become ministers and
Masters, breathe life into Britain again.
The rutted blazing sun, U.N.C.C.,
Circumlocution in the stagnant eye,
Tired the ideals, old new world bellow:
"Listen to me, you're not at Oxford now."

Upon Seeing a Photograph of a Slate Tip at Ffestiniog
(Written at Ithaca, New York 1998)

If it were merely winter's black and white,
Shuttered, caught, netted, sketched, smelt in the dark,
If bromide were really beehive cells,
Dwelling among these lashing grains of slate,
Reassuring, beguiling, it would be,
A trade-in of graining, silver for life,
Millennium of talk for a slate quarry,
Poor people for arrangements of stone.
Where are they, where are they, the bright triskeles?
Gold bright as the first light on Ffestiniog.
Desiccated and made dry with all time
They are abstraction and camera charnel.
It was not black and white nor shades of grey,
Their blood was red at the end of the day.

On Peering into the Entrance of a Drift Mine,
Nixon Colliery Late Fifties.
(Written at Ithaca, New York, 1998).

I am the Lord of the Flies, this my cave,
You will be the carrion that they feed on
For three hourly pennies each killing day,
The dirty putrescence of a Friday
Shall eat you wages like a methane storm
In the black back garden of the empire.
Don't think boy that you can escape me,
My black eyes are like the seams before you,
Useless for seeing: the day wasn't here.
The flies gather round me in galleries,
Driven by the smell of death they firefly,
Briefly they will live and suddenly die.
Out of the way boy, there's a tram coming,
Didn't you hear just now the sirens sing?

On Hearing the Way Down .

"I don't believe it" laughed O'Donovan,
The rossa of the western world was cold,
The gods had only just let him come down
To gulp his supper full of beans and bold.
Hall was worried, earlier in Punlumon's
Blizzard, he had sensed nothing but sorrow:
A local deity whitewashing us
Into dancing skeletons. So he knew.
Someone had thrown the Hebrides away,
Someone had minimized the human sway,
The Piper of Glencoe was there that day
And captivated the sun on an 'Tron,
I heard no stream to guide me back to ground,
But I saw that up there the gods abound.

Myron W. Evans, Criagcefnparc, January 2005.

Note : These sonnets are often not in iambic pentameter but are always decasyllabic, ten syllables a line, fourteen lines. Sometimes I use the traditional rhyming couplet at the end. They are a kind of autobiography.

