

NEW POETRY AND PROSE

ENGLYNION

Englyn i Ysgol Ramadeg Pontardawe

Bid ben bid bont bid bywyd - yr ysgol
Ar ysgwydd serth y byd,
Calon oer, y calan clyd,
Dewr y naid, daw o'r ennyd.

Englyn to Pontardawe Grammar School
(Poetic translation without technique)

Learn and cross a bridge to life, - a school
On the world's steep shoulder,
Heart of trust, the first dawn's warmth,
A brave leap from the moment.

Marwnad Gerazim

Cip o liw maen capel mud, - duedd nos,
Duedd niwl, yw'r ennyd,
Gras ein bwyd, gwresni bywyd,
Am byth yr aethant o'm byd.

Translation of the Meaning

A glimpse of stony colour, a silent chapel, - a black night,
A black fog, this instant in time,
Grace of nurture, warmth of life
Have forever departed from our world.

MILTONIAN SONNETS AND PROSE

Three Ravens

The raven of the ruined village scoured
Like a crazed developer for meat,
For earth, nurture, voices, enlightenment,
Buried by a litter of ugly cars.
The raven of the mountain slope listened
For an ancient language among branches,
Winter's black branches, silhouetted, stark

In silent desolation without talk.
The raven of the ancient pathway circled
Above innocence, unspeaking children,
And searched for any scrap of succulence
In arid vehicular wilderness.
Three ravens had flown from an ancient wrong,
The harsh notes of progress their silent song.

Cameo One - The Dusk

It was beginning to rain again, so a battered coat with no buttons was drawn tightly in an effort to keep dry. Stepping out on to the road, a large unseen car flashed by, caring nothing for anyone in its path on this narrow, mountain road meant for people in the far distant past. The pavements were blocked by cars of great ugliness, caring nothing for the lives of children, and nothing for a now unspoken language. The cold wind turned the skin a raw red, so a hood was drawn to keep it out, images of an Antarctic journey in a small and dismally painted village. Its architecture was so ugly that it must have taken imagination to design it, a kind of failed Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright gone awfully wrong. The wind blew over the top of the hill and lashed the rain into a frozen face. The wind was very ancient, it came from the Atlantic, often in a giant storm that descended on the traveller. The people hid from it in front of very large television screens manufactured by the Ministry of Truth. They stayed there all night long, listening to mass produced trivia and hiding from nature.

The ground was sodden with water and ancient mud that stank with effluent from a rubbish tip thrown randomly on a bog many, many decades ago. Stinking lorries full of rubbish came from everywhere to the ancient village, and dumped the cess of a mad society on its beauty. Children used to play happily among this rubbish, which lay just below the surface of a stagnant stream that tried and failed to wash away the insoluble and stinking poisons. This stream had to be crossed, nose held tightly, to reach a stagnant and decaying council estate in which once proud miners lived in semi secrecy, nurturing their ancient language. Stagnant pools of rainwater lay on a sodden path, until a gate made purely of rust was swung open, a right of way. It had been rusting for a century. Playgrounds had been ripped apart by vandals long ago. Civilization was always been vandalized in this desolate landscape. Nihilism ruled the day, out of some ticky tacky houses stared the people who had once been coal miners, there had been no industry for sixty years. The miners were buried in progress rather than by a rock fall.

In order to escape the man made desert, a path was found towards the mountain side, through another rusting right of way falling off its hinges, through a small farm and up the steep slope. Water poured down the path from an ancient road made again for walking, along which cars forced their way. The soaking walker jumped clear. The steepest part of the road forced the traveller to breathe hard, he passed by a mad dog ever ready to use fangs, and came at last to an ancient farmway with towering hedges and lined with trees, again meant for walking. On this rough roadway there were few cars. It was a walk into the humanity of mediaeval times. The few cars that travelled there forced the traveller off the road, or in to a field, or up a tree. The sky was almost black in the gathering dusk and the traveller walked back into the gathering humanity. The mechanized ruin that used to be a village was left behind in the crazed twenty first century. The traveller reached a small farm in which lived a very old man, speaking a very old language, and he was home again.

Sometimes in the winter it began to snow, snow all over the world, a supplication to silent and very ancient nature, uninterested in humankind.

The Rainbow

The now and transient darkness of hedges
Reluctant to admit the shreds of blight
Eternal wisdom had slowly become,
Framed the blackened pools, menacing of rain.
In eternal past they had been verdant,
Through high foliage the sky had been blue,
The golden conversation of a light
Tinted green with sparkling eternity.
Time's downpour made furtive pools of blackness
From the brilliant interplay of past time
With the towering trees and tracery.
Unnatural rainbow arches blight,
Arch of Babel, an unnatural sight.

Cameo Two: The Moorland

Light fleeing from a dark storm upon the moor was a remnant of day held in memory. Once it was a sunlit day bathed in tranquility and ancient ways, with smooth pathways worn by the grazing of millennia. Now it was rutted and torn apart by horses wildly galloped in a storm of decadence, and by motorized vandals with tearing and spinning wheels, engines belching smoke and spitting noise. In the darkening of day the ruts were so deep that water flowed down them, streams of transparent blood, the life of language being torn assunder. Over this wilderness ruled an absentee landlord, an aristocrat crazed by greed. One dared not look around the corner of what was once a landscape of pristine beauty and colour, captured in a photograph because nightmarish, flailing arms of turbines would sear the rapidly darkening day. A metaphor of barbarity would cut at civilization like the scythe of apocalypse. They did not even bother to paint these wind turbines, they were ghastly, skeletal white, bones of old corpses swinging on a rotating gibbet.

A roaring engine threw dirt into the face of civilization, again and again the wheels spun madly, and again and again it grazed the innocent walker by inches, threatening to break every bone in his body. Behind a plastic helmet lay the face of evil, yellow, stalinist eyes, the peasant slayer, the slayer of land and memory. These eyes were those of the distant aristocrat, who claimed ownership hundreds of years ago, ownership of a desert devoid of words and poetry. Again and again, roar of engines scythed through the once peaceful village, past houses that were built by coal miners but which had been sold into oblivion. They were bystanders forced to watch the mechanized destruction of history by local vandals. Authority sat by in remote offices doing nothing, perennial gasbags. Dare not look through the windows for you will see the ghosts of old miners, staring in contempt at decadence. Dare not remember this road too well, for you will see it as unpopulated with littering cars, with cattle driven serenely along it. Dare not remember these paths too well, because they were carpets of green in a wild moorland full of life and people. Now it is full of death, apocalypse horsemen and skeletons enclosed in plastic helmets, astride machines that roar and belch out sterility, devoid of language, devoid of ideas, devoid of civilization. The land is scythed to pieces, the top soil is torn apart by four wheelers, and runs in streams into houses that used to be the home of living people. The water swirls around their feet, extinguishes the coal fires.

This is the domain of the absentee landlord, the domain of giant scythes against the almost black sky, a red and fading streak of light flees over the horizon. Dare not think of this horizon, because it will bring back the colours of a high civilization. The rotting bone of a sheep is all that is left of it, and that is soon crushed by a four wheeler.

The anonymous politicians stand by and are never found on the moor. Slowly it is utterly destroyed and the day turns into black night. No light remains, sleet blows coldly into the eyes.

The Carpetbagger

Plate our sublime past with tarnished decay,
And the rain falls cold on that distant day
That any carpetbagger can purchase,
Civilization thrown out to the night.
A cold handful of dirt as black as coal
Paid by the most cynical of bidders,
And all the warmth of millennia is gone,
Plate the past with memory, a ruin.
The ragged night is pitiful howling,
Wounded former occupants bleed away,
Terribly wounded, terribly betrayed,
Their life blood is auctioned in blackness.
The carpetbagger stands and locks his door,
Contorted with hatred, he smiles no more.

Come and Say Hello to my Horse

Some infinitely distant bureaucrat had designated the ancient and secret road a bridle path, because in ancient times, honest Welsh speaking farmers walked their horses to and from work in the fields. At dusk the horse and farmer would walk back home into a blazing sunset filtered by the black branches of trees. In winter it would be as cold as stone, the horse and walker would be pieced by a lance of cold, many times lashed and flailed by sleet and rain, so the horse shivered and coughed. A very long time ago this would be the essence of survival, and sometimes people would use it to walk quietly from one immeasurably ancient llan to another, and before that from one place of druids to another. So the ancient hedges grew very tall, the ancient yew trees lived on for thousands of years, content and rooted in stability, loathing the changes they saw around them.

It changed very suddenly, vagrants with nothing to do epitomize their modern times, a change catalyzed by ugliness of spirit and the pointless burning of fuel in cars far too large for bridle paths. They came in their vehicles from all directions, many times they drove along the designated bridle path, ploughing it into mud, the graveyard of civilization was desecrated and the whitened bones lay open to the four winds and the four riders of apocalypse now. Sometimes they left their cars behind, changed into fancy dress and cantered and galloped over the skeletons of old dead farmers, and old dead working horses. They fired artillery at the fort of Vaux I saw in northern France and pockmarked the face of Celtic living with deep shell craters. In winter these became hard as the shrapnel of exploding shells, the entire hillside of Vaux was a smallpox of craters, which were imitated on a smaller scale on the bureaucratically designated bridle path.

Suddenly I confronted apocalypse in the shape of an ugly woman astride a horse that had been cantered, in the background there were more shell craters. The grass of the bridle path had just been put back in shape very laboriously by a bent old man who lived near the bridle path, and torn apart again for the hundredth time. I could see that this gigantic horse had just pounded it to pieces. “Come and say hello to my lovely horse” said apocalypse now. “I am only trying to be friendly”, “I want to tear your culture apart in a friendly way, with friendly artillery”. So the ancient pilgrim stood in front of equus, a foot soldier or archer of Owain Glyndw[^]r, and would have fired the longbow had it not been for modern bureaucratic rules that forbid a people to fight for their language and land, and oblige them to supplicate to the devil in the name of tourism.

So the knight was not transfixed by an arrow from a longbow, and after a few words of cynical but most friendly contempt, faded away into the gathering dusk. The ghosts of ancient farmers whispered in the wind an ancient song, and apocalypse was gone.

The Plague

As the dusk struggled to implore the sun
Not to desert its language and being,
A cloud formed a halo around its disk
And held it there, desperate for noon light.
A plague-like blackness threatened land and time,
To cut up its people and tradition
Into saleable, anonymous plots,
Little spots of black plague on beauty's hopes
Spread its dusk below the weary sun,
Until all was shadow, stark betrayal.
Don't look there, it used to be a warm hearth,
Now embracing nothing but coming cold.
The sun glances down on its long lost day,
Slides from the cloud, its face a deathly grey.

The Medal

A supplicant praying to knowledge, he had stopped on the snowy shoulder of Pumlumon, pulled his mini to one side off the road, and for a long while looked at the white and silent landscape. He had driven home from Oxford with a shining medal, the culmination of all his hopes, and had rapidly reached the winding and ancient Wye valley of his ancestors, labourers tied to the land for centuries. He had sprung out of that earth. He had reached the borders of Wales at dusk, and had driven into a silhouette of black mountains. The familiar winding road was a beauty to drive on, underneath the gigantic trees, his ancestors transfigured, still held by soil. The snow began to fall, and a light covering spread across the road, a supplication to silence, prayer for enlightenment at the EDCL. He stopped in a small town when he saw the light of a shop that sold his staple food, and ate there for a while, eating the peasant's fried fish and chipped potatoes, with the luxury of an egg pickled in vinegar. The shining medal looked on in puzzlement and disdain. It was destined for better things than that.

The snow fell more heavily, the road took on the aspect of a priest clad in white raiment, lightning the darkness of a great cathedral. He pushed the little mini as hard as it would go, sliding around the corners of a tortuous road on the way to Rhaeadr. On one side loomed a giant ridge, vaguely present, vaguely felt. He had to get through the mountains before the snow became too heavy. The supplicant hoped that the people back in the EDCL would be proud of the shining medal with a countenance like the Mabinogi, a god with a bronze face. Perhaps they would let him stay there after all, and not lock him out in the winterlife forever. After a wild drive the little car sped past the George Burrow Hotel and crested the shoulder. Below was a winding descent into the Rheidol Valley. He had done this descent on a bike and had ridden in autumn time madly to the floor of the valley, bones intact.

But this was mid winter. After basking in the snow and darkness for a long while, he looked at the shining face of the bronze god, eyes held low and averted so as not to offend him. It was a magical countenance and he felt sure that they would let him stay at the EDCL, and not throw him into the perpetual snow and ice. This was indeed the answer, and with a sudden snap he shut the case and sped on the descent like a downhill skier. The little car slid around the road but did not fall away into a chasm. By the time the floor of the valley cushioned the wild fall, the snow had gone, the magic of the Mabinogi had disappeared.

He arrived near midnight in a deserted EDCL, and found nothing but a letter placed on his desk, colder than any ice or snow.

In Memory of Pontardawe Grammar School
(Sonnet in the Manner of John Milton)

When all was bright and newly brought to light,
Creation shone in every pupil's eye,
Learning was in a time of favoured grace,
And the blank satanic night lay vanquished,
The toiling years had walked to Eden's realm.
But I awoke, deceived in early cold,
The apple thrown upon a bare hillside
Was all, there were no youthful voices now.
Wind blew vengeful wrath, and in ignorance
A dirty soil like Passchendaele and Vaux.
The face of Satan come from night to day,
Avenging Angel drew a sword and slew.
In youth the years had delved a wilderness,
The mud of developers, mindless cess.

The Ruin of the Edward Davies Chemical Laboratories.

I had heard that something had happened, but I was far away in North Carolina. I desired to return to see for myself, bought my house here and put it back in the family, bought an ancient car, and headed towards Aberystwyth again, over Mynydd y Gwair and Bettws, whose primordial, precious beauty had not yet been desecrated and destroyed by wind turbines, of an ugliness created by the greed and insanity of beings trapped in the

hammering machine. It was the summer of 1993, and it was high time to return to the place of learning and enlightenment, where the windows of Room 262 looked out on a grassy bank of brilliant green. What had happened? The confused rumours had made their way through the trees and heat of North Carolina. The familiar buildings looked the same as when I left them in 1983, amid the flames of a raging inferno of time. It was only a decade ago.

The buildings looked the same, the soldier looked the same, sitting up in a trench it seems, but I looked upon a skeleton, the staring, empty sockets that a decade had made of understanding. The laboratory was bleached of life, and its ossified remains were all that existed after time had done the job. The soldier had been killed long ago, only his skeleton remained. The ordered intellectual activity of apparatus, chemicals, books, papers, paper tape and computer cards had been blown to quarks by a shell. It had ripped the taps out of their sockets. A numbness flooded my mind, and is there to this day. Slowly I realized that the entire building had been destroyed, the trench was a long line of skeletons.

There was a silence broken only by a ghostly, whispering wind, this messenger had told me what had happened. I glanced at my companions, and their eyes mirrored horror. We dragged ourselves away and around the corner to where the lecture theatre stood. It was a bunker shattered by a shell, its seats had been ripped to pieces by unknown barbarians, youthful vandals who were not interested in any lecture. Its windows were smashed to atoms. It was Chartres brought into the ruin of civilization, its stained glass windows reduced to shards and shrapnel, its buttresses pulled down. The new EDCL had lasted less than thirty years. No one had found a use for it at all. The windows of the library were above us, but they were built to be small, the library was a secluded space in which civilization thrived. We knew what was there now, the bleached bones of time, and we did not bother to look.

We turned away in nausea, and made our way slowly back to Aberaeron, where we ate a simple meal. We bade farewell and made our way home, but carried that memory with us for all eternity.

A Walk Around the Day

The walk to school lay under brilliant trees,
Guardians of multi coloured morning light.
The village rested on savage drift mines,
Its people guardians of an ancient tongue.
A transcendence under ancient Llan Gwrog
And distant shores of learning led back here,
As the dusk was destroyed by a raven
Looking for meat amid modernity.
Time had annihilated the morning
And had fly dumped rubbish over beings.
The raven croaked but could not sing a hymn
On chapels emptied by exigency.
I carried carefully around the day
A satchel of knowledge, every sun's ray.

Innocence and Enlightenment

I first came upon the Grammar School at Pontardawe in the autumn of a distant time ago, full of trepidation and foreboding. I carried an empty leather satchel with the golden letters M. W. E. on it, put there by an innocent and hopeful mother who had no experience of things such as a Grammar School. My parents had experience only of hardship, the Great

Depression was their schooling, amid the high civilization of chapel and church. They knew nothing about such things as high civilization, but they themselves had forged it. The Grammar School was full of foreign eleven year olds, many speaking a far distant tongue. The letters were soon ripped off the satchel, and the leather scratched and fouled, but it filled with books and notebooks. These became my constant companions, notebooks forged of the heavy labour of learning, the early algebraic bewilderment of experience. I fought with all my being to master algebra and master my trepidation, far in to the stony night.

Far into the night of a little stone house I fought the algebraic demons until they were subdued and crystallized into understanding. I began to master the reams of dictation until I could memorize all the notebooks. No longer would I be surprised by an examination table, and worked with all my being to do well, as well as I possibly could - innocently for the sake of learning and to please those around me - my family who knew nothing about such things as a Grammar School, and did not speak its tongue. I was suddenly top of the form, a Latin form, and felt a blazing light, I was enveloped in surprise. The entire class bust out clapping, a memory I have carried over half a century and one which will never leave me. The Grammar School was no longer a place of foreboding, it was filled with friends, foremost among whom was knowledge. The entire class of thirteen year olds saw learning as a friend and clapped aloud in innocence and enlightenment.

I first came upon the University College in Aberystwyth full of trepidation and foreboding. It was bewildering, utterly foreign, it did not speak my ancient tongue. It was a long drawn out fight for existence among hunger, bodily and intellectual. Gradually I mastered the College, and graduated the top first, leading me into the freedom of post graduate study, to the laboratories and universities of Britain and France and back again to Room 262 with a mountain pack full of books. In the middle of graduate studies my mind filled with enlightenment reflected from the verdant bank of green outside the laboratory. This was the development of understanding where previously there had been a weedy tangle of confusion and half learning. I felt for the first time the force of understanding, forged on my own with freedom.

Since then I have struggled for this freedom.

The Ice Man

“Oni welwch chi hynt y gwynt a’r glaw?
Oni welwch goed derw’n ymdaro?
Oni welwch chi’r mo^r yn parlysu’r tir?
Oni welwch chi’r gwir yn ymgweirio?
Oni welwch chi’r haul yn yr awyr yn hwyllo?
Oni welwch chi’r se^r wedi syrthio?
Oni chredwch chi yn Nuw, ddynion gwirion?
Oni welwch chi’r byd wedi darfod?”

Gruffudd ab yr Ynad Coch, “Marwnad Llewelyn ap Gruffudd” (circa 1283)

“Can’t you see the rain enraged by the wind?
Can’t you see the thrashing, beating oak trees?
Can’t you see the earth in terror of sea?
Can’t you see blinding truth before us all?
Can’t you see the sun adrift in the sky?
Can’t you see the stars have fallen to earth?”

Can't you believe in God you foolish men?
Can't you see the world we know is finished?"
The ice man glides over shards of language,
Crystals of ice, frozen in wilderness,
A windblown flake of snow touches his brow,
An intricate pattern journeyed in time,
Many hundreds of years looking among
Llewelyn's People for his long lost tongue.

Listening for a Stream

The iceman had heard the news and his blood had frozen. The high mountains of Eryri grew as dark as Cyffyn Williams, many centuries ago. In the recesses of his mind the tongue was still alive amid the wind blown snow around Wyddfa. I had walked up to that summit to meet a blizzard tearing in to me. The iceman was just around the corner in a café saturated with tourism. He was invisible in the blizzard, and his ancient words echoed in the volcanic crater. No tourist understood him, but the rocks and fields below could comprehend him perfectly. The iceman needed a way down from Carnedd Llewelyn, Carnedd Dafydd and Carnedd Gwenllian, Gwenllian ferch Llewelyn imprisoned in dark stone all her life. He listened for a stream that would understand him, and followed its poetry down from the cold rocks to the green fields surrounded by stone walls. These were patterns that he remembered in the time of Llewelyn. The stream spoke his ancient language, amid cars that tore the landscape into shreds reflected off speeding metal. The perfect sculpture and beautiful tongue of nature gave way to the ugliness of the dumb, man made machine. The machine was uncomprehending, it chanted in a monotone in the materialistic mirage. It deceived humankind - a false promise to its own creator. The iceman walked along a tarmac road, and the machine cut at him with metal flashes. The iceman listened for signs of ancient life, a word of his own time, but the roar of red hot engines drowned his hopes and drowned his words.

The iceman was not in his frozen element, the fabric of his being began to melt away, soon he would join the stream in a quest for linguistic beauty, the beauty of the time of Llewelyn. The iceman became a stream, and made his way over rocks made of time, each sentence of the stream was made of millennia, the wisdom of a free People. The stream became perfect language, soon it would broaden and reach a beautiful estuary framed by the mountains of Eryri. It would reach the sea, where the infinite wisdom of language safely resided. It would leap, son of the sea wave, on to the reborn shore, and the time of Llewelyn would begin anew.

Sonnet on the Desecration of Gerazim

Sold in a drinking house, desolate dusk,
Descending darkness, veil the end of day,
The sun has turned and turned on hope and lives
Who chose this ground to greet the dawn of thought,
The chapel turns now on a potter's wheel.
Pieces of silver, a foreign auction,
Are scattered on the gravestones, drops of rain,
The potter and his congregation dwell
Together, the potter turns the hour hand,

The silvered eyes of Judas hang on time,
Pieces gathered from material frenzy,
The detritus of the arid machine.
What is that beating on the chapel door?
The ghostly risen dead in fury roar.

The Rotten Shillings

The light so bright a dawn ago shattered
Itself on an oak tree gnarled by the night.
Fragments were hurled over the youngling land,
And scattered as streams and Arthurian lakes,
Danced with goddesses, flashing silver.
“This land is mine”, snarled early humankind,
I will put these shillings in my pocket,
And profit from the ancient hopes of dawn.
Only some blackened bones survived his day,
Rotten shillings were found as dusk drew on,
The remains of a cutting dumb machine
That had ruined their civilization.
The rotting apples on a darkening tree
Were at dawn their enlightened destiny.