

*The Sea of Affliction*

by Rosemarie Rowley

Comark with Rowan Tree Press, Dublin  
1987

## Acknowledgements

Irish Press, Quo, Succion, Voicefree

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“The Stages of Life” by Caspar David  
Friedrich, 1835

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ISBN 1 87027 109 HB

ISBN 1 870267 26 PB





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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 battening 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?

(iii) 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!

(iv) 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.

(v) 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.

(vi) 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 scrabbled 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 imbroglio,

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 knaves  
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.