

POEM OF THE WEEK

SOMETHING OLD, NEW; SOMETHING BORROWED.

“We starve, look at one another, short of breath
Walking proudly in our winter coats
Wearing smells from laboratories
Facing a dying nation of moving paper fantasy
Listening for the new told lies
With supreme visions of lonely tunes”¹

The forces of Death and Despair had launched the attacks precisely, without pity,
The poorly equipped battalions of Intellect, Emotion and Strength
had been flung against its relentless regiments;
it had been slowed down, the defences too disorganised to stop it.
In the absence of reinforcements, is the only option retreat? There is nowhere to go.
In silence the final assault, the final encounter is awaited.

The Thinker, the Fighter, and the Poet stand huddled.
There is no conversation, the frightened eyes say it all,
what had happened? The war had been brutal, and frightening,
but it had its unique sound: a sound that filled the empty pauses,
that gave meaning to the struggle. what is this ominous silence?
Where had all the meaning gone? What had it all been about?

We must reason with it, said the Thinker.
No! We must fight it, said the Fighter.
No! We must confront it, characterise it, said the Poet.
They stand, facing each other, angry, a divided command.
There is no agreement. The argument is not new.

“Fools said I, you do know,
silence like cancer grows.
Hear my words that I might reach you,
hear my words that I teach you.”²

A shabby, uniformed figure stands, wearily approaches them,
and quietly says, You are all wrong! “Who are you?” They demand.

I am the Will, I am that quiet voice that lurks on the fringes of your consciousness:
whispering words of warning, admonishing you to take that next faltering step;
That strain of steel resolve hovering just above Reason and a mite short of Faith.
I dwell in that haunting piece of music that resonates in your ears,
even when you are surrounded in silence,
or overwhelmed by the sheer noise and roar of the world.
I can be found in your favourite book, or that obscure piece of art.
I am found most often in the humblest of surroundings,

in those places where only you can find peace or tranquillity,
suspended in the void between fractured words
in broken sentences, and dangling phrases.

We are strong enough to face it.
There is a mumbled agreement. What do we do now?
We re-organise, we start again. we salvage our strength, our pride.
Silence has no name. It has no content.

There is an imperative for Hope and reasonable expectation
of the certainty of the return of Hope?
To not do so would be to cravenly surrender to - and drown in -
the ocean of despair that calls me syrup-sweet and siren-like to oblivion!
Recognise and accept the challenges of adversity.
Take steps, and actions, set goals; validate one's existence,
celebrate success in whatever form it comes;
have reason to believe that hope is achievable
and hope that the application of reason is a pathway
to experience the rebirth of hope.

We, the living: unpredictable, inconsistent,
perverse (even) as we may be in our faltering yet stubborn adherence
to an absurd faith in the power of Love and Life;
we have a final line of defence.

We create, we procreate; dream impossible dreams
- and do our best to make them happen.
We share, record and transmit those things we value.
we influence, argue; agree and disagree, assimilate and accommodate
information and experiences as we grow individually and collectively
and adapt. In such a collective consciousness is our power.
as one passes the (sometimes, barely flickering) torch of hope to another.

"Cry, Havoc! Unleash the dogs of war!"
Even in the tumult and carnage of battle,
we will celebrate our shared humanity!
We will sing our fractured song of praise.
We will shout our lonely "Hallelujah!"

Slowly, they shuffle into line, one by one they call their names: an affirmation.
Smiles begin to appear; cautiously, at first; they have not been defeated.
Now was the time to start again, consolidate, construct.

There is pervasive energy now, to continue.
In the distance there is a bird call, so piercingly sweet and clear
it is almost painful to listen to it. The bird soared high into the sky,
it seemed to fly so high.
There is our symbol, our answer, the Will said: it has freedom,
we have an even greater degree of freedom than it does.
Now is the time to grab and exercise it.
The sounds of the world; the bird song,
the sounds of animals, of wind in the trees
are beautiful: an anthem.

One battle had been lost, the war had not been.
It is not a time of jubilation but of quiet thanks and determination.
There is still much to do. The process is still in motion.
Bowed, not broken the troops continue their reconstruction and dedication
to live life to the fullest; to re-build and improve; to learn and improve.

Have no doubts

There will be more battles, more stunned and shocked silence:
more admonishment of the collective components
of "Who" and "What" we are, to hold firm and resolute.
This time, the Will can face the Foe; challenge it;
hold up a battered bridal bouquet, and say,
"Death, where is thy sting?"

You might take my body, my vitality: all that I am;
I will be immortal, treasured and sustained
in the loving thoughts and memories of others.
I, you, we can face the nemesis, and say:

"The world will be better for this,
that one man scorned and covered with scars,
still strove with his last ounce of courage,
to reach the unreachable stars!"³

PART TWO: "Carpe Diem,

Battered Bridal Bouquets and Impossible Dreams"

"Cry, Havoc! Unleash the dogs of war!"
Even in the tumult and carnage of battle,
we will celebrate our shared humanity!
We will sing our fractured song of praise.
We will shout our lonely "Hallelujah!"

Carpe Diem! Seize the day! Yeah, Right!
Thirty years have passed, The process is still in motion!
It's more of a drunken stumble than a walk.
I couldn't feel, so I learned to talk.

Silence had no content, no form; but Nature abhors a vacuum;
so do I: like its domestic namesake, it sucks.
It is like a Petit mort (a small death). Poised, waiting to fill it
are lurking swarms of doubt, mistrust, casual cruelties, contempt and lies.

No!

It is a naive, desperate, stubborn (even absurd) act of Will to say "No!",
to cling to hope - however small and battered it may be -
to embrace, without question or pause, the ragged remnants of all that is loving;
to exclaim that the true measure of life is the living of it!

In full knowledge that Death is patiently waiting, absolute and incontrovertible.

That is our contradiction, our challenge, our quest,
to embrace the challenge and unpredictability of life, and acknowledge the certainty of
Death; to defiantly proclaim. "Not Yet!". To weather the Foe's mocking, pregnant pause
- rife with phantasms and terrors yet unborn.

The Will would ask,

"Why do I proclaim such an imperative on hope:
and the reasonable expectation of the certainty of the return of hope?"

"This is my reply!

To not do so would be to cravenly surrender to - and drown in -
the ocean of despair that calls me syrup-sweet and siren-like to oblivion!
To recognise and accept the challenges of adversity is not to give in,
give up or abdicate one's imperative responsibility in life:
to take steps, actions or the setting of goals,
to validate one's existence, to celebrate success in whatever form it comes;
have reason to believe that hope is achievable
and hope that the application of reason is a pathway
to experience the re-birth of hope.

"Cry, Havoc! Unleash the dogs of war!"
Even in the tumult and carnage of battle,
we will celebrate our shared humanity!
We will sing our fractured song of praise.
We will shout our lonely "Hallelujah!"

We, the living: unpredictable, inconsistent,
perverse (even) as we may be
in our faltering yet stubborn adherence
to an absurd faith in the power of Love and Life;
we have a final line of defence.

To dream impossible dreams

We create, we procreate; dream impossible dreams
- and do our best to make them happen.
We share record and transmit those things we value.
we influence, argue; agree and disagree, assimilate and accommodate
information and experiences as we grow individually and collectively
and adapt.

In such a collective consciousness is our power.
as one passes the (sometimes, barely flickering) torch of hope to another.

Have no doubts

There will be more battles, more stunned and shocked silence:
more admonishment of the collective components

of “Who” and “What” we are, to hold firm and resolute.
This time, the Will can face the Foe; challenge it;
hold up a battered bridal bouquet, and say,
“Death, where is thy sting?”.

You might take my body, my vitality: all that I am;
I will be immortal, treasured and sustained
in the loving thoughts and memories of others.
I can face my nemesis, and say:

“The world will be better for this,
that one man scorned and covered with scars,
still strove with his last ounce of courage,
to reach the unreachable stars!”⁴

Leslie D. Bush
© 5 June 2023

1. “The Flesh Failures/Let the Sunshine In”, from “Hair”
2. From “To Dream An Impossible Dream”, from “Man of La Mancha”
3. “Sounds of Silence”, Simon and Garfunkel.
4. From “To Dream An Impossible Dream”, from “Man of La Mancha”