

TENSE

1.

The past, present and future walked into the bar; it was tense.

An old joke, play on words? Yes, no; consider this.

Bar, no bar; it is within us.

Every breath we take, thought or feeling we have

is infused with elements of the three;

every response, action and strategy contains elements

of our past, present and future.

If there are mistakes to be made, are we doomed to repeat them?

2.

Does the idea work? I believe so, gave it a metaphor years ago.

It is contained in two poems written 30 years apart.

The initial poem was a metaphor was of battle lost,

a strategic retreat and rebuilding and re-grouping.

It evolved into a battle cry of defiance and determination

to succeed, regardless of the pain, the cost.

It was lost for many years, and returned by chance.

30 years later, I read it at my wife's funeral.

The second poem was written in part as a sequel
to the first, and predominantly as a vehicle to express
a determination to reach beyond the grief and pain I experienced.

Two poems, two wives; I do not wish a third sequel.

So, let's rev it up, give it some throttle; set the scene.

Imagine, for our purpose, an empty stage at The Globe Theatre.

You are all seated, awaiting the show to open.

A fanfare of trumpets, please.

THE SHOW BEGINS

3.

How many times has it felt like this, battle lost, no defences:

Broken dreams, broken hearts; visions of shattered souls;
minds and bodies shattered, sobbing, struggling with grief;
carefully constructed conceits ripped apart, stripped bare.

Mind splintered, fragmented; questions roar: seek answers.

“There must be answers”, Consciousness to understand,
will to live, is not theirs to command. Then it stops,
the mind goes numb; the body refuses to move.

Why so numb? What is this cruel, punitive, cosmically deep silence!

Reason with it, said the Thinker. fight it, I said;

confront it, characterise it, said the Poet? No agreement.

The argument is not new. Always been there; an uneasy truce.

Order, precision, that's what we needed; that's what we need.

Not this equivocation, this diplomatic dance.

There could be no discussion. They had one aim:

our elimination; total destruction.

If meaning has gone? What had it all been about?

Why fight so hard,? This was worse than the death of dreams,
worse than the scream of shattered illusions, love unrequited;
worse than loss of heart-felt schemes, strategies ingeniously crafted.

“You are all wrong!” “WHO ARE YOU!?”

**I am the motivation of you all;
until now I have followed, I was wrong.
I was created to coordinate: I am taking over.**

Why should I follow or obey you?

*Where were you when surrounded we were;
in dark places; avoiding death's embraces?*

On what basis do you presume to assert yourself?

You are not published, discussed or adored.

Collective wisdom, that's the key!

*He is the quiet voice that lurks
on the fringes of our mind:
whispers words of warning;
admonishes us to take that next faltering step;*

*His is the strain of steel resolve
hovering just above Reason; a mite short of Faith.*

*He dwells in that haunting piece of music
that resonates in our ears,*

Yes, even when shrouded in silence,
or overwhelmed by the roar of the world.

I can be found in your favourite book,
that obscure piece of art;

in the humblest of surroundings, in those places
where you find peace and tranquility,
suspended in the void between fractured words
in broken sentences, dangling phrases;

words unspoken. Silence has no name.

It has no content. It cannot touch us,

Together we are strong enough to face it.

re-organise, start again; salvage our strength, our pride.

One battle might be lost,

the war to survive has not.

It is not a time of jubilation,

but of quiet thanks and determination.

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.

So many memories; some wander freely,
others lurk; the worst are behind locked doors.

Is it is a naive, desperate, act of Will
to say "No!", to cling to hope?

Hope is essential; small and battered it may be -
to embrace, without question or pause,
The ragged remnants of all that is loving.
to engage in the challenge and unpredictability of life.

*The rules are clear. Play the game, follow the rules
(except those which you can bend); be careful what you say
there are some people it is wise or safe to offend.
Weigh the evidence, assess the outcomes, toss the dice.*

*How much have I learned, experience earned?
How many battles lost, won; situations from which I have run*

Soldier, thinker, poet figures dead?

They persist, argue and dispute; form temporary alliances.

The will, the will to persevere; to overcome, to win;
that never rests. Damn the odds, the intrusion of death;
episodes of partial success, dismal failure;
fall down, get up, dust myself off.

So I write, more so now than before;

extoll the virtues of hope; ask

“Why proclaim an imperative on hope:

and the reasonable expectation

of the inevitability 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!”

Drowning I was when I wrote that, two years ago.

*“That is our contradiction, our challenge, our quest,
acknowledge the certainty of Death; to defiantly proclaim.*

“Not Yet!”. To weather the Foe’s mocking, pregnant pause.”

*I am older, the thought of death as an inevitability
asserts itself more consistently and strongly.*

It's not abstract, I have seen another die.

I have seen the face of death.

It is not pretty, noble or to be praised.

It is savage, unforgiving; fighting for every breath.

How many times, as I held her hand, did I think'

"let go, be free of the pain." There was, could be no miracle.

In the days, weeks, months that followed, the question plagued me;

*with emotion numbed. I asked, "To have reason to believe
that hope is achievable and hope that the application of reason
is a pathway to experiencing the re-birth of hope."*

*The answer is yes. It's not quick, it's not easy;
it is not done alone. Whether they be strangers, friend
or family; each in their own way - for better or worse -
have a part to play. I too am playing a game.*

The children of my imagination long to be free.

I hold them tight; dress them in different role,
see how many times and forms I can make them perform.
Like a life-buoy, long beyond its effective use (but still looking good)

So, what have I learned; what lessons do I apply?
Take one day at a time, respect my body's willingness to follow
the dictates of thoughts and expectations of success?
Every beginning is an end, every end a beginning.

Triumphant statements are all very good
(necessary, I would suggest). In the end, it's the small steps,
the fumble, the fall; the determination to go on; write another poem,
read another book. Enrich another's life knowingly or not.

Call me quixotic, call me dumb. 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 assimilate and accommodate information and experiences.

We grow individually and collectively. A collective consciousness
is our power. as one passes the torch of hope
to another. Say defiantly, I can and will make a difference.

It matters not if is big or small.

Celebrate our shared humanity! Sing our fractured song of praise.

Shout our lonely “Hallelujah!” Say, what the hell!

Take my body, my vitality: all that I am; I will be immortal,
treasured and sustained in the loving thoughts and memories of others.

5.

Our show is almost done, rest ye a trifle longer.

We trust you are not bored,

Would it have been better, a trifle stronger?

In the end, it's simple, the least

will ascend, to lead and admonish

- to focus, and say “I am the Will”, rest

and reassemble, gain your strength, refresh!

Battle over, the War is not: always be another, live

and learn; don't count the cost. Gain from experience, give

and share with others; individually, we are lost;

a child without a mother; collectively we are strong.

Battle cry? Oh, no; it's more of a grateful sigh;
hear bird singing, beautiful, before launching into a sky
so radiant blue, kissed by golden sun; feel the grass
beneath your feet, the wind. There is hope, progress.

Hold high a battered bridal bouquet,
proclaim a heart felt "Hallelujah"!
You might not know the words to say,
I will try and sing them to you"

6.

So there, my friends you have it. My story is told.
It is bitter/sweet. A story of my life, of what keeps me sane;
when in the face of darkness I have ways to my hope regain.

The battle is relentless, ebbs and flows like a tide.

The past, present and future walked into the bar; it was tense.

An old joke, play on words? Yes, no; consider this.

Bar,? no bar! it is within us:

every breath we take.

THE END

