

SUMMERLAND

Jay Ramsay

*for Martin & Vicky
Marion, Joanna and Izzy*

Home is where one starts from
—T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker'

For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent
—W.B. Yeats 'Crazy Jane talks to the Bishop'

Choose life—only that and always and at whatever risk.
To let life leak out, to let it wear away by the mere passage of time,
to withhold giving it and spreading it, is to choose nothing
—Sister Helen Kelley

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Prelude

The sun blazing exactly
in a gap between hill and sea
the sea on fire...
and still, then as now
what are the eyes that can see
out of time, to the same numinous wonder ?

That hillside long ago
where your feet are standing now
waiting for Easter ?

The Earth's deep measured song
season sung, its Evensong
of twilight blackbirds and human voices
telling us this land is
from age to age what it was
beyond our reckoning.

THE STORY OF THE LAND

1.

These tiny clam shells
fossilized into stone
pristine as this moment
prized free of the ground

this Roman road returned
to the hunter's trackway it once was
now a pilgrim path for us
to open fields and blazing blue June sky—

one shell the size of a bead
exquisite in its fan-shaped filigree
a full stop, and a beginning:

a man and woman walking out of Eden

the land in and out of time.

2.

A thousand foot cliffs of ice...
anything that was there, crushed
shoved into the swelling melt-sea

and in between, the dream of life
palm trees, hippos, bears, elephants
processing in the Bristol Channel, surreal

Nature reclaiming everything

Creator and destroyer

Mother Gaia

3.

Such a delicate art for death
this cloudy grey blue shard
tessellated, chipped to a millimetre

wedged into a many times recycled stick...

and this tiny oyster shell knife, how it just
nestles in the fingers so lightly, rightly
smoothed to its white soft motherofpearl blade

such eyebright precision that tells us only
how alive these eyes were for the keening
of animal stealth, tracked, stilled

with the whole body's sensing...

Thought, wholly embodied, intelligent
the whole of evolution in its acorn;
Mesolithic, thirtysomething, transient

harbinger of all hell to come.

4.

Mere shadows in the land
two oval pits among the field weeds
on the side of this hill above the village

where you can imagine low uncemented walls
a thatch made of branches like a bender
smoke rising as primordial

yet here for 1500 years
for the birth of the plough, wheat, cattle
in our first attempts at home

exposed on these uplands
the forested valleys and levels below
same eyes narrowing towards the horizon

warmed and chilled to the bone.

5.

The unimagineable that had to be
unforeseen as it was in its shadow
massively exploding off Greenland—volcano
voice of the earth clouding the sun with its ash
darkening the land, the ecology collapsed

as if under a spell, the earth standing still
barrenness, famine, the stone circles stalled
unfinished, abandoned

Gaia unfailing...just as now
the sky empties of charter flights,
of neo-Atlanteans in their flying machines
all one and the same: *grounded in what is*
where wisdom begins.

NORTH STOKE

6. two streams

Two streams run
from their high hill source
one clear, the other calcifying.
Two streams in time, two stories.

One become a holy well
hidden under its lid of stone.
The other in the choked stream bed
coating fallen twigs with a fossil-like glue
you can snap open...

Sweet stream, bitter stream
stream of letting go, stream of remembering
both the truth of water...

Its worship hidden in what the church
now secretly enshrines
a pillared frescoed portico, Nymphaeum
and on its rough threshold—this font
not for baptism, but sacrifice
to the Mother of Life.

What did the naiads think of it ?
They sing on in the tinkling stream
in our ignorance of taking life to honour life,
beside a deeper yielding to receive.

What have we been ? Always
what is inside our bodies
revealed like the land from within
in its hidden inspiration and necessity
called back ceaselessly to return

dissolving like our dreams.

7. Romano

The Roman villa below
later in the shape of the farm
built on its foundations
(like the Anglo Saxon church
absorbing the Nymphaeum)

The font with its Celtic heads
all rubbed down, and one struck off
becoming a trefoil trinity
(its inner rim smoothed
above its sacrificial edge)

Time covering time
a hand over a hand—
the layers of the land
revealing its potency

the present another dream
as we busy ourselves surviving

and the house martins that migrated
and returned spanning the Empire

are gathering now, as you sit
your back to the Norman entrance

where the same sun sets
over the city on the plain below
suffusing the evening air in gold light...

and all our ancestors we've never met
standing behind us like these walls
scrolling back through decades, centuries

bearing our story.

8. Anglo-Saxon

Imagine them there
standing with their palms spread
raised, arms lifted
not to be crucified, but standing firm

Simple bread and wine
No trappings. The fact of Christ
this Warrior of the Heart
in their hearts—and ours
when we can let ourselves stand like him.

Descend to the altar
into death then feasting
before the fighting
while in Your great mercy
you stand and wait
for us to learn the true meaning
of Your Victory.

9. Medieval

Step into this porch, port
for the ship of faith
between the worn corbel faces
of a king and his forgotten queen

feeling the sea-swell under you
in the stillness of stone
in the cool out of the sun

Have you come to be married
or to lay a coffin down ?
(see it stretches from shelf
to shelf either side...)

Either way, you wait
for the priest to open the door
and greet you on this threshold
to another world.

10.

*A fragment of gold-stained glass
a shard built for the sky now
(not hunting, or harm)
to reflect its light*

*its thin painted-on layer
as fragile to the touch
as its shattering...*

scattered

*among all the other fragments
from the centuries
by the south wall,*

returned to the compost of earth.

And still the Light is shining.

11. Elite

And then the dividing wall
built across inside—
filling the space of the arch,
separating church from church

—all for the sake of a relic
now vanished ossified treasure
(probably of dubious worth).

Monks only allowed in—
common pilgrims like us, this side.

And it brought us here (c. 1495)
up the uneven path by the willows
to pay the tithe to see or touch it
leaving our graffiti by the door,
incised in soft stone with a knife.

Forever seeking
the sinners and the Chosen Few
all in this together— in truth
beneath the costume drama...
Wife of Bath, Knight, Franklin, Pardoner.

12. Pilgrim Soul

So with the old pagan temple walled off
become a secret holy of holies,
we had the Pulpit Word of God
the Bible translated on common view...
all that Langland and Tyndale had dreamt,
the Word among the people.

And somewhere in that shattered window
what we also lost: miraculous powers
St. Christopher whitewashed over...
the convivial pilgrim become a solitary soul
borne on a journey of struggle
through a slough of Suffering and Illusion

where Faith hovers like a flame
any drunken breath can negate,
and no woman can be trusted
in a world of pitiable men
whose envy is their damnation—

a church with no female soul.

13. Faith

How do ships lose their way ?
Forsaking their guiding star
converging with icebergs...

The church's tower mast re-faced
the wall rebuilt with its fragments
of Roman brick and string coursing

the dividing wall taken down inside
along with the keystone of the arch
re-set askew, so that nothing

after all is quite straight—
only a Roman road
but not the road of faith.

14. the Congregation

What are they coming for ?
We raise a plaque to Exodus.
We give them the Ten Commandments.

We take down the dividing wall...we renovate
everything we reasonably can...

and still there is only
the letter of the law
in a church without heart

and the strange red pointing
like glue around these stones,
oozing red blood...

15. returning

*For nothing can be sole or whole
That has not been rent*
—W.B. Yeats, 'Crazy Jane talks to the Bishop'

What Crazy Jane said to the Bishop
that shook the ground at Golgotha
and breaks in each one of us
in the church also on its knees.

No one here, and little caring
until a man of humble heart and mind
returns to his humanity

and praises God in the robin
meadow grass, larksong, butterfly
yew tree, willow and sacred stream...

kneeling where prayer has been valid
in all his heartbroken longing

that only Love can heal.

16. the Rose

Imperfect church
anywhere, everywhere, like life.
We walk on through our days
and in an unforeseen moment, it comes.
The fabric opens, the heaviness is gone.
Light is the reality...love
the Rose that opens, its emanation.

It gently closes, a child falling asleep
That world's visitation
echoing in our dreams.

And the liturgy continues...
what was he saying ?

For a moment his mouth was Pentecost
someone else was speaking—
and it wasn't in prose.

And you were there, witnessing.

METANOIA

Gk. 'to turn around, to be changed'

17.

What is the turning ?
First we must see
a world that's unreal
we're sure is reality.

Snow thickly falling
shrouding us in cloud.
We've lost our bigger story
linking us to Source.

Instead we have...Santa Claus ?
Our so-called big society,
its vain political promises
and substitute sky.

One global village, maybe
but abstracted above the land
our own true feelings
replaced by instant chat.

This is the realm of Ahriman
bonding us to matter
that we think we 'must have'
filling the inner void

while Lucifer gazes on
a lopsided Narcissus
full of his own image
only Christ, who is 'I', can counter

standing between them...
and without our being there
we're living in a driven dream
where Money is God

worship and security
until the bubble bursts
the rug is pulled—
it all falls through

till we start to see
we must have sufficiency
not greed, our wants and needs
hopelessly confused, fused

growth at any price—
resources privatized—
and money, our social currency
that only exists because we trust it

toyed with like a sex shop doll
by the private sector, for itself
only returned through us
to the realm of common good.

Meanwhile the world is on fire
and we are on fire with it
feeling it as we never have
intolerable as it is

(there's nowhere to turn
a blind eye to anymore...)

issues come out
of every crack and door

all in one crucible, flask, athanor
the gold of a thousand mornings
hidden in the blackening
and this saltwash of tears.

Earth, our circumference
and wholeness in Creation
we have to return to,
the wisdom of ages

the living Book of Nature
burnt to our reading
until we break free
of our techno-idolatry

coming back to soul, source
the Living Word, love
breathing here among us
within all our names for it

beyond all our conditions
freed from manipulation
become the thing itself
in manifestation...

Love, our salvation
one church across the world
one faith, one turning
in the ground of our being
Love in this turning
of everything between us
from hate into seeing
all we have been

and these fragile flames of hope
tealights lit in a line
quivering in the morning sun,
back in the Garden of Life

the evening lights of the town
glittering, bejewelled, neon
in the whitening dark
that is Bethlehem and birth.

This is our story
where we all have a place
in how we live and choose
and move through every day

beyond you, me and she—we
unfolding this tapestry
that is all we can be
in truth and beauty.

One World People
among the diamond seeds of dawn.

Coda

There 's always a story
That's bigger than you and me

these buildings and all
the land has been

age after age distilled
in this moulding of clay

and in the same hands
pressed palm to palm in prayer

that is older than its name
expanding into a trance

where heaven is all around us
the higher dimension of who we are

in our Source and origin
as it always has been...

the hidden truth of our becoming.

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