To Melanie

INTRODUCTION

Tim Brennan, Professor of Art at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University introduces his sonnet cycle that speaks to the Stations of the Cross.

“I’ve spent my adult life making, exhibiting and teaching contemporary art. For many years my focus has been on place and history and this has led me to developing walks and guidebooks as works of imagination.

Walking often ignites thought and reflection. As Catholics we are never far away from the journey Christ made to Calvary. The Via Dolorosa is much more than an embodied journey. It stands for our life’s trajectory. Each life exists as a terrain to be navigated, whether across ground or water. For me, a walk is a device that is immediate, an everyday function that offers me the chance to consciously reflect upon the road to sacrifice and redemption. Walking helps me to meter out my life as prayer just as for some the prayer of the journey will be metered in other ways. The meter is embedded in the mechanics of the walk just as it is embedded in the structure of the poem.

The sonnet is an old poetic form. There is something prescient in the relationship between a sonnet’s 14 lines and the 14 stations of the cross. There is something resonant in 14 linked sonnets being known as a coronet. Here is my Blood Coronet.”

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

All images are by Tim Brennan, the author, except:
- Station VI: ‘Saint Veronica with the Veil’ by Mattia Preti
  Italy, circa 1655-1660. Oil on canvas. Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation (M.84.20). Los Angeles County Museum of Art via Wikimedia (Creative Commons License)
- Station VIII: Span of Ecce Homo arch outside Sisters of Zion Convent, Jerusalem, via Wikimedia (Creative Commons License)

Permission to use the poems or images in the booklet other than for personal use must be sought from the author.
Stand in silence as one and in receipt
The empty tomb that lies at journeys end.
Now the judgement cast in one decree
Falls into the vast horde’s malcontent.
No words can utter a sound response.
It is done, the gift cast, but none can see.
Internal brace with zero left to chance
No U-turn proffers even if could be.
The washing hands that wring it now bone dry
With dripping echoes amplified in time
Fast ushers in an audience of lies
Each particle the testament of crime.
All compressed and then calcified to be
Devoid of heart and direct empathy.
Devoid of heart and direct empathy
Remember not the first time wood was touched,
Splintered grain, rough course in entropy
What’s bared is rarely physically clutched.
The pain of others is more often squared
Into the rubric of a rosy cross.
Inherited ghosts, wraiths of disrepair
Spectres, unselfconscious of incurred cost.
And so the act of picking up is freed
From point of origin or provenance.
Samsara shouldered, heavy borne as need
Now in this inching topos of descent
Each footfall moves precisely to ascent.
III

Each footfall moves precisely to ascent. When felled by some ineluctable force
Sees the body’s athleticism rent
And drained, until a buckling has recourse.
Only partially does give way life’s frame
For energy still clasped deep at its core
Coupled with willpower’s slow burning flame
Human physique propelled by physic law.
The palm slammed web-like to the burning sand
And blood drips viscous fast from flagrum flay.
Even the taunting horde might not be damned
Such be the depths of your forgiving ray.
Then rise again mid cacophonous war
To face this barbarism of worldly flaw.
IV

To face this barbarism of worldly flaw
A mother’s eyes are caught amidst the crowd,
Her azured aura bathes the open sore;
The covering, yes, the premature shroud.
The ur sound deep within her is contained,
Held fast so as to let the offspring cope
With the naked violence, unrestrained.
That rives her soul and tests the depth of hope.
The womb still fertile, in celestial,
Suspended sacral through eternity:
Still, prepares itself in terrestrial,
To cut the cord once more at Calvary.
The parent to this end foresees the end
With no possible access to befriend.
With no possible access to befriend
All seems spent. Riven. Debilitated.
The horizon line trumpets its false end.
Has life gone? Is the spark satiated?
A stranger, adrenalised, fills the gap;
The void that would have otherwise erased
The line twixt birth and deathdays on the map
To bare the cruciform, heavily weighed.
An act impromptu and intuitive
Propelled before close reasoning can form.
Seen as rash and in essence judged naive
When of creed it is actually born.
To follow empathy’s will to console,
As slow procession hereby takes control.
As slow procession hereby takes control
She extends a sweat cloth, a pristine gift.
One small offering, a pledge to console,
A square prepared for sulpturation’s print.
Now blood and sand caked on the torrid brow,
With broken steps through olive gardened path,
Met by the woman whose bleeding always flowed,
Stemmed by glory, as love defeats the wrath.
Pressed to the sockets, zygoma and bridge
The features caught within the fibrous weft.
This boon to the mother to forge courage
This goad to the sceptic, put to the test.
Oh Veronica, of vera icon
To you who first draws transfiguration.
To you who first draws transfiguration,
Like a bull you fell to the dust beneath.
Headfirst through the cloth: face in translation,
In ritual space sandblood beyond speech.
More flagrum lash from smirking enmity,
Past sanguine veils recalling Eden’s pain.
In garden so unlike Gethsemene
Where your transaction was so bluntly gained.
Skin cracked, whip torn and bled fast under foot,
So far beneath the base of dignity.
The shame that freewill cankers at the root,
Redemption pledged in possibility.
Glimpsed through mirage, this vague horizon line
To sanctify the now, beyond all time.
To sanctify the now, beyond all time
The women from their homes come into view.
Collectively their sounding all in rhyme
In harmony their sorrow surrounds you.
The pain they feel may not be measured here
Nor anywhere that is in human reach.
It is the seabed of their tidal fear
The deepest point of empathy for each.
A gap appears, your agony defied
And you are able to transcend the pain.
The consolation you offer now belies
Compassion that from others would be feigned.
This, escapes all possibility of form,
Being beyond the eye of earthly storm.
Being beyond the eye of earthly storm
Reined back to fall, and fall, and fall, again
Under the pressure of the cruciform
Where blood and earth join as eternal stain.
Groped at bone, digits hooked in open rip
With aim to haul and drag you on the way,
But, degradation from incessant whip
Frustrates their deathwish on this darkening day.
Their targets mean they cannot leave you here
Upon this path, as broken carrion.
They can see the hilltop, the arid bere,
Within spitting distance of their command
Past tumbled weed, claw, lizard, and rock snake
To reach the summit thence to annihilate.
To reach the summit thence to annihilate.
Skein of blood, crimson clot and matted hair.
The outcome of events is clear as fate,
Smell the open abattoir fill the air.
This tunic, garment of the dead to come
Is maybe worth a price once steeped and soaked
And wrung, to be the product and the sum
Of rank process and dark procession.
Hurried dice: rounds of greed in lottery,
Whilst the body trembles from its ordeal.
Sweated palms: bids cast in vain auxiliary,
Hands not shaken through bloody gambled seal.
All eyes return: anger to be vented.
Focus returned to the body centered.
Focus returned to the body centered.
To hand are the spikes, spume to be vented.
To be done: beyond reason’s reliance.
Ropes torniquet tighten, your upper arms.
The crossbeam pulled back and sun blind foresee.
A patella keeps flat: fingers and palms.
Now needles through wrists deep into the tree
And instep on instep and on through the vein.
Crucis fixus: Hoisted. Erect to bare
All that is holy will now be profaned,
All that is solid will melt into air
I. She. He. We. They. Hang indecorum.
Iesvs Nazarenvs Rex Ivdaeorvm.
XII

Iesus Nazarenvs Rex Ivdaeorvm
Darkness: sun extinguished the last exhale
Darkness: side rent as the body succumbs
Darkness: clearwater that flows from the cage
Darkness: spear of destiny is withdrawn
Darkness: numbing as hearts all petrify
Darkness: silence, that descends as a pall
Darkness: time distilled, no hope to descry
Darkness: shadows seep the colour content
Darkness: from black and white then monochrome
Darkness: no contours now for discernment
Darkness: devoid of light, this hinterzone
In this, blackened, all feeling is erased
All hope is snuffed, for future and past days.
XIII

All hope is snuffed, for future and past days.
Nails crowed out, limbs broken, limp, expended.
Palms torn, pinked subcutaneous and flayed.
Living hands cradling deathflesh descended.
Gross gravitas as gravity pulls down
Into the mother’s arms and nested lap.
All maternity, now begin to mourn
Nature’s tears for eternity are sap.
For all the trees cease from their growing now
For all the birdsong ceases melody
For beasts of burden release sorrow:
A low that resonates geology.
This pieta is now with you and me.
Stillness now petrified for all to see.
S
stillness now petrified for all to see.  
Then in slow motion from the place of skulls  
The human kernel of this new born creed  
Bears the vessel under our sun now dulled.  
Off the hill, to a rock-cut tomb nearby,  
A garden sepulchre of final rest  
Skin to the slab of cooling deep inside  
Uncion treated and in the shroud is dressed.  
The figures leave in singular retreat.  
The stone is rolled to seal the chamber fast  
Then all seems past as if in some lying dream  
Until three days of mourning have then past  
Vault now empty. A void for all to see.  
Stand in silence as one and in receipt.