

Poetry Series

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- 7 poems -

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On Bempton Cliffs

I hear the waves below the cliffs,
I smell the new-ploughed soil,
I hear the gentle whirr of bees
And watch the clouds pass me by.

On top of Bempton Cliffs I stand,
A headland proud, above the shore.
Far below the rocks withstand
The thud and crash of North Sea waves.

The sun above: its light now dancing
On waves below in glittering sparkles;
A fleeting spray, a momentary halo
Of diamonds, flashing high.

The sunlight catches the flutt'ring wings
Of puffins racing across the spray.
Noisy kittiwakes with fish they bring
To nests that cling to ledges so high.

From heights above a lark now sings,
Unseen, but soaring high and free.
From east the gentle breeze now brings
The sounds of surf from far below

Overhead, the keening cries
Of herring gulls who swoop and fly,
Proclaiming 'tis they who rule the skies
Above the cliffs and sea so high.

Through the fiendish bustle below
Haughty gannets sleekly glide,
No lordly favours to any bestow,
Onward, unperturbed, side by side.

Puffins and gulls in crowded profusion;
Their nests on ledges inches wide,
Perched on cliff in perilous fashion -
A frenzied city on rock face clinging.

Above I see the soaring chase
And hear the restless realms below;
I feel the sun upon my face
And feel the breeze so gently blow.

The sun is warm, air now still,
My drowsy mind is put to test
As back I lie on chalky till,
Perchance to ponder as now I rest.

Detached from all I start to think
Of heaven's domains in the skies

And restless realms upon the brink,
With life frenetic and shrieking cries.

A cliff-hanging city, so congested,
Squabbling and scrabbling above the rocks;
Above, a world not constrained,
Fresh and free in every way.

One below, one so high.
One so brutal, one so free -
On the cliffs and in the sky;
What manner of worlds are these I see?

I hear the waves below the cliffs,
I smell the new-ploughed soil,
I hear the gentle whirr of bees
And sleepily see the clouds slip by.....

(East Yorkshire 21 September 2013)

Brian P FitzGerald

On Some Primeval Shore

I

No soul sees:

The sun is hot, the water's warm,
No children laugh, no joggers run;
On sandy beach no footprints are left;
No bathers splash, no sea-gull's cry, not one

No humans observe:

Torrents of water from far-distant mountains
Through alpine ravine with slopes of scree,
With fragments of tree-fern and coarse sandy grit –
Now sluggish and slow and dropped out to sea.

No person hears:

A rumble of thunder across the strand;
Raindrops spot the beach before the tide
Now spreads its mud across the sand,
And wavelets with silt the ripples hide.

II

Investigation:

"Sir", he cries, "that boulder, on the shore! "
The students they watch as chisel strikes the block
The fissile gritstone begins to crack; "more! "
They cry; it splits, they stare, "see, the rock....."

Revelation:

No sitting in class, no passage in book, I swear,
Can grip the mind and so amaze
As now the sight on which the pupils stare -
A hidden revelation as pupils gaze.

Understanding:

Their minds now thrill at what's before,
Gritstone is split; a gasp of breath:
A scene revealed - a sandy shore:
Ripples in the sand and a shower that passed.

Brian P FitzGerald

On the Death of Petal - 10 July 2012

So what is memory? Why so fleeting?
It catches the soul when time has passed -
Recollections so soft and warm,
But 'neath the tree asleep she lies.

Why does the past intrude so sorely?
The past is not to stay, hold back the tears
and look towards the sky; the leaves rustle,
a breeze so gentle, so soft so warm.

My Beauty, stiff and cold, rests
where corruption takes its hold.
Now grief returns, I turn away
I look towards the sky.

The garden, where I doze, the sun is warm,
Behind, a fleeting shadow, a softness stretching;
I turn, a leaf, it wafts across the grass;
where once she lay, a piece of fur.

A presence soft, a silky touch
Beneath the tree now lies
Is memory but a fantasy?
The now is here and I look towards the sky.

(Cherry Burton 19 July 2012)

Brian P FitzGerald

St Helen and the Ghosts of Kilnsea

1831

At my desk I sit and stare,
An etching, old, dusty and grey -
A church on a cliff and a tower that leans
And fishermen below caught in the spray.

They struggle to land their catch:
The sea is rough, with an east-wind blast.
The rays of the sun now pierce the clouds,
Like life itself - a moment soon passed.

Risking the dangers and tempests at sea
And scratching, a living close to the soil;
Fishermen and labourers, the sons of centuries,
Who lived and died a life of toil.

With unknown mariners lost at sea
Whose lifeless forms are washed ashore;
Unknown to all but God alone,
Their corpses cry to God no more.

With none but villagers to mourn their dying,
Among the dead of the village they rest
In graves secure by Helen's Tower,
They sleep a sleep no longer distressed.

No longer the feel of the sun on their backs
As they reap the corn and cut the hay;
No longer they savour the draft of beer
In the tavern at the end of the day.

No longer they hear the cuckoo in spring
Nor swallows that fly above their graves -
No longer they hear the howl of the winter's wind
And the thud of the stormy waves.

The winter storms, they gather and rage,
The cliffs they slip, now slumping and tumbling
No man can save the graves from sliding
Into the sea - falling and crumbling.

Oh, St Helen, your tower now yields;
The church resists the waves no longer,
And graves are open to the sea's predation:
The dead who rest, now rest no longer.

The noisome bodies of those who died;
Clawed by storms from silent graves
Now litter the beach, and dragged to tombs
In icy waters below the waves.

Can those who rested for cent'ries past
Now find their peace below the storms?
Aware of seamen who struggle to ply
The stormy sea above their tombs?

And can they hear the tolling of bells
By ghostly ringers far out to sea?
For those who rest so deep below
At Colden, Newsham, and Hornsea Beck

Colden Parva, Monkwell, and Hyde
from Ringborough and Odd to Ravenspurn,
the bells they mourn the unknown dead.....
Who hears the bells for Skipsea Sands?

2013

I sit on top of Skipsea cliff -
The sea is calm and waves are peaceful;
Seagulls wheel and swoop to shore
A gentle breeze now ruffles the water.

A hazy moon across the bay
On wavelets casts a spectral light,
That shimmers and dances a wraithlike ballet
As dusk now turns to sultry night

A mournful sound across the water
Softly tolls the knell at last
Of parishes long-since lost to sea,
And those who lived in centuries past

The bell now tolls in turn for Skipsea;
The road to Ulrome collapsed and barred.
The steps to beach exist no more;
The café for tea is shuttered and scarred.

I stand and stretch and wonder no more
Of people whose graves are under the sea,
Of villages on cliffs about to fall -
The bell may soon be tolling for me.

(East Yorkshire 24 July 2013)

Brian P FitzGerald

The Church

My heart is held in icy grip
A biting wind now takes my breath
Along the path I struggle and slip
Before me dance the wraiths of death.

So bleak the church ahead I knew,
Grey and spectral in ghastly glow.
The tumbled tombs and gnarled yew
And drunken headstones covered in snow

The lych gate beckons with moonlit chill;
A frosty welcome offers me.
An ashen light from shuttered grill
What solace there can find for me?

Along the frosty path I tread
In wretched pain and hapless grief.
The door creaks open, with deathly dread
I step inside, but no relief.

Here death pervades the icy air;
And now amongst the ghastly flock
Whose twisted bodies sit and stare
I sit: my memories I try to block

The air is bitter, no warmth I feel
My fingers freeze in icy air
On bench I sit, on floor I kneel
No comfort now I find in prayer

I hear the preacher preach
Absolving all by Godly prayer
Of joys eternal he tries to teach
But thoughts of joy are dim I swear

"O Lord, make haste to help us."
The priest now mutters – a plea indeed
"And make thy chosen people joyful."
O, how can joy be so decreed?

No joy I find in here displayed,
As death pervades the arctic cold;
I swear to God in all I prayed
That joy for me would ne'er unfold.

I join a world, of gruesome dead
A nightmare grim in mortal terms
The ghoulish priest in fear and dread
My life and death he now confirms.

I slump and fade; I sigh and then.....
No thought, no feeling; I dream no more,

I reap the sleep of sinful men;
In death I rest and live no more.

Brian P FitzGerald

Under the Market Cross

A murky mist now grips my brain.
My thoughts, they reel in mire so chilling;
My eyes see nothing but driving rain;
Despair is such, no hope instilling.

In abject grief, on pillar I lean;
Those I knew, now know me not,
I'm now a part of life's unclean,
In lonely squalor I exist and rot.

People pass, heads bowed low,
Thoughtless, complacent and unaware
Of those who lie in anguish, tho'
Cold and bloody, in despair.

Declared unclean, hated, abused;
Despised and broken, and rejected I be;
Spat upon, cursed, punched and bruised,
Forsaken by all - no longer free.

I try to forgive, so difficult I know,
Battered and mugged, no life held dear,
I lie so cold, no future now?
I'm left to bleed with death so near.

To bring the Word to them I strove
For them it was I lived and died
For them it was for truth I drove
For them it was I cried

For them I prayed, this I vow;
For them I gave my life my all.
Forsake me not! Hear me now!
In you I trust, hear my call.

Am I forsaken? - my heart-felt cry;
Forgive; they know not what they do;
In you I trust! death defy!
My life in death I offer you.

Early hours in the Market place
Upon the cross a body bared -
A corpse, unkempt, with bloody face;
The crowd, so curious, stood and stared.

(Beverley, UK, 16 April 2014)

Brian P FitzGerald

Where Moses Crossed the Nuwebian Shore

Where Moses Crossed the Nuwebian Shore

He ponders the tide caressing the beach -
Its ripples cross the glist'ning sand,
From Sinai's cliffs sun-setting rays reach
Far-distant peaks that shimmer in desert heat.

Across the darkening sea, turquoise and blue,
The haze begins to change on Midian's face, whereby
The golden russet transforms to purple hue,
As rays from sun-set reach across the sky.

A ferry sails by; its wake now washes ashore.
A gliding crane appears and lands on water's edge;
The boat is safe in port and seen no more.
On one leg, the crane surveys a rocky ledge.

The sun is hidden, the horizon dark,
The water is quiet, the air is still;
Jihad now scribes in sand and makes his mark,
A breeze so softly stirs the dust; a chill I feel.

Generations whose names, inscribed in shifting sand,
Now fade in the dusk, like the crane on the shore,
And those, who make ripples that die away,
Pass into port and are known no more.

My footprints are covered; what augurs await?
The ripples have died; generations come and go.
What names survive the sands of fate?
No Red Sea will part for me, this I know.

19 October 2012

Brian P FitzGerald