

(from) IEPER - Martin Burke

Hard to believe the world is what it is yet it is

Beauty and brutality slung on your shoulders as a yoke with two buckets of
water too precious to spill

So will I sing in ecstasy or will I in sorrow where one choice is the denial of
the other?

Whatever the world is this is what it is –

Dry earth, spilled water, too much and not enough

An imbalance that must be balanced

On shoulders willing or unable to carry the weight of wood

Yoke and cross hacked from the one tree left to suffer or rot

Hard to believe this is also the world where willow and oak are splendid

It is spring but the mood is autumn

Sorrow in the veins of leaves where the cherry-tree has no fruit

Truth or lie have no meaning

Enemy a faceless word

The living do not recognise each other and the dead have cares of their own

When the calendar says it's Christmas a season says it's hell

A map says there is a wood with a mill and a village but there isn't

There is no one to ask where they've gone

Hard to believe that this is the world but it is

Hard to believe that what's human endures to survive being human

Blank eyes more no-mans' land than the land they stare at

Visions of ghostly bowmen

(We believe what comforts' us when we have need of comfort)

The lie but also the truth of the crucifixion parody

Hard not to believe this is also human

*

As for faith, as for doubt, as for bayonet, rifle and sword, leave them under
the oak

Cower in a mud-hole

Crawl away (if you are lucky -and you may be)

Difficult with the weight of a gun -leave it under the oak

Rightly or wrongly it is easy to accuse both dark and day while he who is
lord sleeps in his necessity

Anger, bitterness, calls for revenge -leave them under the oak

As you did passing four bright stones at a clearing in the wood but will you
pass them again?

As if your body's wounds were the entrance of Christ in a radiant poem from
under the oak

Yet easy to mistake him in the dark

I will never be rid of the mud or the rats of these guts

These you must carry, cannot be left behind

Tin hat with the slack-sling of it

Your clumsy prayer aiming for radiance even as you crawl towards tetcher-
bearers crawling towards you

Yet easy to miss them in the dark

*

Once, in these woods, Pan's flute, verse and painter

Textures and contours

Colours, shades, degrees of light

Until the past was taken into an impious core

Darkness gathering against the earth-lord as if, thereafter, in rat-hole or
bunker a redemptive grace...

That certain words might teach us glorious wounds...

That from an amulet worn against a bullet, carved from a bullet..

That a saint's ivory might...

Yet easy to miss it in the rat-hole dark

Awaiting judgements

Condemnations

Where a cock crows

So who amongst us has denied when who amongst us has not?

*

But if the fields are wounded the crocus do not show it

You have left your heart under the oak

Hell burns but you have hidden your heart under the oak and the crocus
does not betray you

Fields are your ally and peace is sought in this conspiracy –no, the crocus
will not betray you

The wounds of the fields are not unlike your own where the crocus grows
near the oak

Hell burns everywhere but the oak maintains its calm

Crocus form a bouquet of innocence and their silence is either memory or
prophecy

Come with your questions but leave them under the oak

The world is wounded but the crocus does not show it

The oak is composed of memories and prophecies yet come with unknowing
and leave it under the oak

Walk back to the world where your report will be no betrayal

You have left all guilt for forgiveness under the oak

Hell burns elsewhere but not under the oak

Hell burns elsewhere but not under the oak

*

Now Flanders my Flanders

The scent of apples as forgiveness on the crucifix of the world illuminated
beyond despair

The road tree-lined with shadows where the brightness of life joins what
they hoped would be

The brightness of an afterlife

Remember

Forget

Even as the birds in sighing orchards begin to sigh and remember

The air is not empty where a human strain is stained into the ground

To give things back their proper names

Ieper (not Ypres) word and world

Human mud and history

Wailing and wound

Even as you love the mould and earth of it

Pluck crocus to forget and poppies to remember

This is their season and there is no other

Gravestones

Earth and air repossessed

Innocence and slaughter where oak and willow grow on ground which gives
our words

Their human worth