“Vulnerability”

BY DAVID WHYTE

Vulnerability is not a weakness, a passing indisposition, or something we can arrange to do without, vulnerability is not a choice, vulnerability is the underlying, ever present and abiding undercurrent of our natural state. To run from vulnerability is to run from the essence of our nature, the attempt to be invulnerable is the vain attempt to become something we are not and most especially, to close off our understanding of the grief of others. More seriously, in refusing our vulnerability we refuse the help needed at every turn of our existence and immobilize the essential, tidal and conversational foundations of our identity.

To have a temporary, isolated sense of power over all events and circumstances, is a lovely illusionary privilege and perhaps the prime and most beautifully constructed conceit of being human and especially of being youthfully human, but it is a privilege that must be surrendered with that same youth, with ill health, with accident, with the loss of loved ones who do not share our untouchable powers; powers eventually and most emphatically given up, as we approach our last breath.

The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with disappearance, our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully, or conversely, as misers and complainers, reluctant and fearful, always at the gates of existence, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door.
When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone,
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your home
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.
“Finisterre”

BY DAVID WHYTE

The road in the end taking the path the sun had taken, into the western sea, and the moon rising behind you as you stood where ground turned to ocean: no way to your future now but the way your shadow could take, walking before you across water, going where shadows go, no way to make sense of a world that wouldn't let you pass except to call an end to the way you had come, to take out each frayed letter you had brought and light their illumined corners; and to read them as they drifted on the western light; to empty your bags; to sort this and to leave that; to promise what you needed to promise all along, and to abandon the shoes that had brought you here right at the water's edge, not because you had given up but because now, you would find a different way to tread, and because, through it all, part of you would still walk on, no matter how, over the waves
“Stone” (Thobar Phádraig)

BY DAVID WHYTE

The face in the stone is a mirror looking into you. You have gazed into the moving waters, you have seen the slow light, in the sky above Lough Inagh, beneath you, streams have flowed, and rivers of earth have moved beneath your feet, but you have never looked into the immovability of stone like this, the way it holds you, gives you not a way forward but a doorway in, staunches your need to leave, becomes faithful by going nowhere, something that wants you to stay here and look back, be weathered by what comes to you, like the way you too have travelled from so far away to be here, once reluctant and now as solid and as here and as willing to be touched as everything you have found.
“No One Told Me”

BY DAVID WHYTE

No one told me
it would lead to this.
No one said
there would be secrets
I would not want to know.

No one told me about seeing,
seeing brought me
loss and a darkness I could not hold.

No one told me about writing
or speaking.
Speaking and writing poetry
I unsheathed the sharp edge
of experience that led me here.

No one told me
it could not be put away.
I was told once, only,
in a whisper,
“The blade is so sharp—
It cuts things together
—not apart.”

This is no comfort.
My future is full of blood,
from being blindfold,
hands outstretched,
feeling a way along its firm edge.
“Working Together”

BY DAVID WHYTE

We shape our self
to fit this world

and by the world
are shaped again.

The visible
and the invisible

working together
in common cause,

to produce
the miraculous.

I am thinking of the way
the intangible air

traveled at speed
round a shaped wing

easily
holds our weight.

So may we, in this life
trust

to those elements
we have yet to see

or imagine,
and look for the true

shape of our own self,
by forming it well

to the great
intangibles about us.
“Everything Is Waiting for You”

BY DAVID WHYTE

After Derek Mahon

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array:
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the
conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.