

A LENGTH OF RUSTED CHAIN

(for Tony Conran)

They sang in Welsh their Saxon Reservoir: Llyn Celyn would
speak

—let by-gones be gone—not a word of English,
would breathe not a gable, not a drowned branch
to excessively stir the memory's silts . . .

a lake,
a lake in Wales,
a Welsh lake . . .

the anglers their fish, the poets, the painters their English views
and generous compensatory terms, the full mod con.

I give you, Tony, breathlessly late for your festival,
this chain plucked, in the year of heat and literature,
from the sun-crazed silt of Cwm Tryweryn,
and call, south to north, *in the iron of our chains*,
on the lightning that glims when rocks bomb in the boiling Twrch
to fire this hand,
to boulder down all the rivers of Wales
a restorative rage, a dam-dementing intelligence.

There are chains and there are chains. Yours of gold unites,
twines back to *the warm belonging root of us*, and sings us on.
This too unites, from Venta Silurum to Holyhead,
link by rusted, impotent link.

Ddys cwd bî ôl ddat wî haf leftt.

Gone, for blind profit, the stealthy copse and holy guilted fields,
gone harp and hymn,
gone the sanity of walls, the ruminant boulders,
gone bridge and drunken moon,
gone cymhortha and cynghanedd,
gone bro Tryweryn, the untranslatable, non-re-locatable life,
gone even the dead, their carcasses evicted
that not a bone embarrass this murderous simplicity.

We are good at water: rivers, lakes, the dripping tap of elegy.

Beauticians of defeat, failure junkies,
we cwtsh at last into 'never again',
for Plaid Bradwyr vote ever again—

and it's

Cofiwch Dryweryn, Cofiwch Selar, Cofiwch Olew Aberdaugledau.

One golden day that Indian summer
I stumbled down from the fast new road to walk along the old,
and my eyes were not dry, I could find in my heart
not a sliver of postmodern irony to defend me from the history
that—rubbled, dynamited, scorched to the stump—
had lain for parched months wide to the sky:
the skeletal walls bereft of pasture; the streams gouging mud
to find again the stone of their beds;
a slate, a spoon; and here, whole, Celyn's bridge
bridging again a resurgent Tryweryn . . .
And at Hafod Fadog, in a room of air, a secret room,
I found creatures ungrasslike of silt and dew, found
where harrows had sung good heart to the field
this crippled torc.

Rattle it, shake it, send its cracked peal
to the malls and brasseries where the liberators doze.
Come, you deconstructivist smilers, come you requirers
that Celyn like Cymru never is, was nor ever shall be.
Come and stand on the grassed and Tarmaced heap of it all,
feel beneath your feet
the very stones of the houses, the chapel, the school
that seasoned the packed rock of Cymru's damnation.

About the Yangtze dams' uprooted millions
we deserve no say
who do not hear, for the jet-skis' narcotic whine,

our own lost—of Eifrynwy, Clywedog, Cantre'r Gwaelod . . .
Felly, Cofiwch Dryweryn!
—and cofiwch too the carcass-worrier's sweet inertia . . .

Consuriwr, mentor, poet of our country's future tense,
may this chain I send you translate in transit
from a thing of enslavement
to the links that learn us unity
and like you remember, sing like you, remember tomorrow.

THE RESIDUE

Carboniferous limestone, oil:
the collective memory . . .

We nibble at light,
forge from stars dead and a living star
the cells that invite us
to linger awhile
as they die, repeat, die, repeat . . .

Though we lose in a life
—buried in carpets,
sewered to the sea—
ten more or less material selves,
the singularities persist
: rough face and name,
guiding loves, precise guilt . . .
persist and leap each body's leaving.

Unrepeated, unrepeatably
from here to before and after all . . .
then smoke, ash,
when? blue sky, blue sky, who?

Vanished tricks of dust and light
tapping like snowflakes
at the tides of the living.

THE BALLAD OF CWM TRYWERYN

Cofiwch Dryweryn, the slogans cry
From walls all over Wales:
Remember, then, for tomorrow's sake
This most infamous of tales.

Three days before Christmas '55
The Scousers delivered their gift:
They wanted the Cwm for a reservoir—
The natives would have to shift.

[Chorus:]
*So dam Wales, dam Wales for England,
The Taffs may not like it much,
But they're snug in the pocket of the British State,
And a lucrative soft touch.*

The multitudes of Liverpool,
Her Corporation lied,
Were desperate for water—
Their thirst could not be denied.

Some sheep-bitten acres of soggy land,
A failing peasant or two
Could not be allowed to stand in the way
Of progress (and revenue).

Yes, the tricky Sais omitted to say,
Though Wales soon caught wind of it,
That their plans had nothing to do with thirst
And all to do with profit.

[Chorus:]
*So dam Wales, dam Wales for England,
The Taffs won't like it much,
But they're the first to fall to Bringlish rule
And a lucrative soft touch.*

At the heart of Cwm Tryweryn lay
The village of Capel Celyn
Where Welsh was the tongue that greeted you
In every single dwelling.

Famed were they throughout the land
For their poetry and song.
They kept the faith and ploughed their fields,
And helped each other along.

'Flood Tryweryn?' they gasped at the news,
'A barbarous, nightmare scheme . . .'
But the sight of surveyors unrolling their maps
Was no figment of a dream.

They turned for help to their local MP
And other Labour grandees,
But with Labour the lords of Liverpool,
Plaid Bradwyr were deaf to their pleas.

'Do not drown our homes,' they begged
On a demo through that great city.
Howls and curses, flying goblets of spit
Were the measure of Liverpool's pity.

[Chorus:]
*So dam Wales, dam Wales for England,
The Taffs may not like it much,
But with boundless faith in London control,
They're a Parliamentary soft touch.*

Democracy will take its course,
The restless Taffs were assured:
Tryweryn's fate would be ordained
By five (unelected) lords.

They set in Wales not a lordly hoof
In deciding for Liverpool's Bill.
The path was now clear for England's MPs
To gather round for the kill.

At last but too late the whole of Wales
Awoke with anger bristling
(Except for George Thomas, Eirene White
And the usual True Brit quislings).

From Pembrokeshire to Point of Ayr
The refusal was full-throated,
But outnumbered as ever, our futile MPs
Were—democratically—outvoted.

As the engines of destruction loomed
Great meetings in Cardiff were held
Of councils, churches, parties, people—
A congress unparalelled.

In vain they called for a scaling down,
In vain they petitioned the Queen—
For what England desires England shall have,
Brit imperial routine.

[Chorus:]
So dam Wales, dam Wales for England,
The Taffs may not like it much,
But they're all for Elizabeth, Charles and Di,
And a royalist soft touch.

Five years it took to build the dam
And destroy the farms and village.
Not even the civilized violence of MAC
Could put a stop to the pillage.

As MAC hit Tarmac's plant with its bombs
(To Plaid Cymru's pacific groans),
Tarmac blitzed every building in sight,
And heaped the dam high with their stones.

Not a wall, not a tree did they leave in place
Lest memories should linger;
They even evicted the dead from their graves
That no bone should point a finger.

As the river rose and flooded the cwm
Despair swamped the living departed,
And many a bungalow, jobless refugee
Died early, broken hearted.

Never again, the Cymry swore,
Never again such shame . . .
But mad roads, dead jobs, the scourge of opencast:
The rape goes on much the same.

And will go on until we find
In our long unquiet deeps
The road that will lead us out again
From the dark where our freedom sleeps.

[Chorus:]
Until then it's dam Wales for England,
The Taffs may not like it much,
But they're snug in the pocket of the British State,
And a trouble-free soft touch.

BYZANTIUM IN ARFON

This too is no country,
at least on Saturday nights,
for old men
or a 46-year-old from Swansea
with a group of (thank god not English) students.
The young in one another's mouths,
gulls machined from the ramparts by
the blitzpop blasting from disco-bars,
the vomit-falls, the can-kicked crowded streets,
fist, yell, or yowl, commend the whole night long
whatever is youthful, loud and Welsh.

'This,' says Zach, 'is madder than Manhattan!'
As well, Zach, you're not some Mercian Mike—
they'd have you bundled into faggots
and scoffed with mushy peas
quicker than you could squawk Segontium.

This conquerors' first, most counter-Welsh of towns, this
Constantinople of the western vertex
where Rome ends and the Raj begins
is by now the Welshmost town in Wales,
exulting anew in the ancient iron
and arcane discriminations.
In the Black Boy a jilted bonker
whines at his mount as she leaves with someone else.
'Look,' she shouts back, 'Rwy'n i ffycio fo heno
a chdi y-ffycyn-fory.'

Caught in that nasal music all neglect
the dazed Yank, the inadequate Hwtw . . .

If, come Sunday, I bid their walls
a glad enough farewell
it's not to say I won't need to return
to their hard fold, this necessary north
where empires come
and empires, diolch i'r Cofis, go.

ABERGWAUN '97 (for Ozi Osmond)

Had Jemima and co. been less Brit and more Cymric
Et un petit peu plus frolicky,
We'd be living today in a red wine republic,
Not a moribund weak beer monarchy.

THE CREATION

When God clocked off from work one day,
Having put the finishing touches to Wales,
The Archangel Gabriel begged the Creator
To divest His opus of some of its veils.

'She's the finest,' said God, 'of all my creations,
A land of quite extraordinary charms,
From her alpine peaks and salmon-packed streams
To her golden coast with its prosperous farms.

'Her people I have blessed with laverbread and cockles
Cwrtw Felinfoel and great mineral wealth,
They'll be wizards of rugby, singers and bards,
And they'll speak the language of heaven itself.'

'But haven't you, Boss,' the Archangel demurred,
'Haven't you somewhat overpaid 'em?'
'Not,' replied God with a devilish smirk,
'Not if you look at the neighbours I've made 'em.'

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

'And Moses,' said God, 'I almost forgot:
For Wales, a land that's so devout,
I think we should add one more to the list:
'Thou shalt not, ye sinners, be found out.'

OBSERVATORY

A cloudless night:
and we have come, the public,
to peer at the stars
from a dome in the cowfields.
Impatient kids orbit
the parental queue; they
manifest now and then
in a gloom of red light
that spills from within
across the sludgy turf.

Though we are less to a star
than half a twitch of a gnatlet's wing,
we wait what seems
a long cold hour
to slot briefly inside
with the 'scope and some words
of professional awe.
One of time's younger assassins,
chasing through the dark,
trips and takes a fall—
'Rhodri,' comes a voice,
'You are here, boy, to consider
the cosmos, not to go
flailing around in the mud.'