

Theresa Wolfwood: poems from 2019

I saw Gernika

A postcard town,
homes and trees aligned on a valley slope;
a vision of peace and prosperity.
Street signs in two languages;
laughing residents greet strangers in open cafes.
Beauty that hides history.
April 26 1937
Children leaving school,
meals simmering in kitchens,
workers walking home,
fruit trees in bloom.
The Gernika oaks in fresh leaf,
shelter of democracy where citizens
met to govern under the loveliest of greens,
when Operation Rügen hailed its horror,
a gift to Franco from friends Hitler and Mussolini,
devastation from a clear sky,
unknown until this day which
changed forever the nature of warfare.
Explosions ripped
the bodies of thousands;
rubble was the ultimate gift in the remains of Gernika.
Left standing by design, beside the river,
an ugly gray building, an arm factory to serve Franco,
later Jan, then Morocco's war on the Saharawi,
a factory where silenced workers
created death on assembly lines.
I saw this building still standing;
now with a tower of colour
as an entry portal.
Gernika reclaimed this place,
exorcized the evil, transformed it to a community centre
where peace conferences meet,
children play, creativity for all is nurtured.

I saw Gernika
in all its beauty reclaimed

In a Mexican Café

A small café sky lights high above
in an old entry hall of an apartment
house, a young woman,
pretty in a quiet way
sat silently crying.

Her tears were steady streams
on her soft cheeks.
She was near us,
only four tables in all.
She sat c by a blue tiled
sink with plants and
two alert cat faces
on poles, as though on guard.

Maybe her cat had died
run over by a speeding
driver on a busy street.

But no, maybe she
lost her job in spite
of free overtime.
Not friendly enough,
said the boss in a sly way.

Maybe she had applied
and failed from the start,
looked too serious.

Only lost love could
account for all those tears.
Betrayed and rejected
by a man she thought was
honourable and caring.

I wanted to lean over and say;
my dear, he was not worthy
Of you, you are too good
For him; love yourself.
One day another will
love you for your
virtues and quiet beauty.

I left, silenced by
language and reticence.
The cats remained on guard.



The Smallest of red Dresses

Red dresses heaped on my porch
Tucked in those large enough for grown women
The smallest of dresses
the size of a large man's hand
Red flannelette with lace trim
I save it, say it is too small to see in a tree.

Ready to send for the Unistoten
Symbols hanging in trees
Signing the memory
Of loss and pain
Blood soaked into the soil and snow
Blood red as dresses now marking
a route of violation of omen
Of girls when man camps
set loose Violence and lust.

Marie a small girl in denim overalls
takes a short walk on the highway
Her mother knows
Marie has gone to play with a friend
Her arms cradling her favourite doll
Soft and cuddly with thick
Black braids just like her own
A doll in lace trimmed red dress
Her granny lovingly stitched.

At lunch time Marie's mother
Walks the same way to collect Marie
Sees ripe berries and fireweed
along the dusty roadside
She learns too soon
Marie had not arrived
at her friend's home
no one has seen her
Some one knows
Someone in a white pickup
has stopped
some one sped away
in the dust of stirred gravel
stealing a child's life.
Shattering this peaceful community
Marie's mother running home
Running fast running in fear
inching to call friends, running to outrun fear
maybe even to call distant police
running to grasp hope

the day will end happy
While deep inside knowing
As she runs it will not.

On a shaded bend in the highway
she sees Marie's
doll, dirty with one arm
missing and dress torn bit
Glowing blood- red in the gravel.
A dress like all the others
A flag of of searing e pain
and endless grief
To add to hundreds of dresses
Telling history on a pipeline route.



Riding the Bloor line

Above the ground,
the cold of Toronto
Minus twenty and windy
Below in another world
of darkness and strange lights
The Bloor line tunnels
from Ossington to Danforth.

The heat of steel wheels
on steel rails
Makes the trains
around zero inside
Sitting on cold plastic seats
Grateful for all many layers,
heavy boots, I sat across
from a huddled man
A flimsy ward cheater,
the hood pulled over his face
I could not see his skin or eyes
But he looked young
His knuckled hands clasped
Together on his boney knees
Sharply opining through

The thin fabric of his trousers.
Averting my eyes
not wanting to embarrass
I looked down at his feet
Bare, toes hanging over in
half-broken flip-flops.
He was still motionless
in his huddle
When I got off wondering
If he would ride the tunnel
under a colder city all day
Because it was the warmest place
he could sit undisturbed.
Finally having to leave to walk
skin on ice and snow,
bonding together
on a perpetually wounded earth.

The wild side

I As a child

Innocent with no sense of fear, the girl
liked to walk over the Fraser canyon,
high above the torrent
of dangerous water
rushing to the sea.
Whit no parental knowledge or consent
she and her dog, Perky,
trekked the narrow boards over the rail ties.
The CNR bridge arching
from east to west was her secret path.
She, always tingled with anticipation,
hoping to see a cougar
or something else new and exciting:
Perky, not to be left at home, but
reluctant, was coaxed along the boards.
The river roared so loudly
approaching trains were inaudible.
Engineers in the snorting steam
sounded the alarm; holding Perky,
she jumped onto a side platform,
waved as one hundred fright cars
rolled down to the Pacific.
Reaching the west side,
wild with no homes or roads,
dense bush coming close to the tracks,
dep in shadows;

she could see the east side, sun setting
on homes, barns, roadside shops,
trucks pulling on the gravel highway
to the north as she explored the hillside forest.
Before darkness the pair headed home
so their absence would be unnoticed.
Back on the fields of grass and asparagus,
Perky rushed to the orchard
barking under trees filled with ghosts
of long gone bears, squirrels, birds.
In bed the girl dreamed of building
a log cabin, a secret retreat,
on the wild side.
Perky always curled up against her knees,
content with pursuit of never caught creatures.

II As an adult

Decades later, far away,
I dream the bridge of my childhood.
I walked it again, silent,
alone on the wild side.
No train disturbed my reverie.
Thinking of Perky, I feel her
warm against my legs in my dream.
The child I once was, an outsider,
in a world with no place for
wandering girls and lone women.
I stood on the edge of the bridge,
looking across the still roaring river,
into that world of commerce and community.
I saw you standing over there,
planted in the familiar comfort
of your garden in life.
In my dream I had to decide
to walk towards you,
hoping you might meet me halfway;
or if mine would be the long walk from
the wild side to you.
The dream ended before I made my decision.
I awakened filled with intense longing,
longing deeper than the canyon below
of fierce rapids and crashing rocks,
longing that you would find courage
to walk across the chasm between us
to join me on the wild side.



How far a bullet can travel

A soldier shoots a child
running frantic on the road
before him screaming in terror.
The bullet has an easy task
no fatigue only ten metres to go
in a jungle village a verdant land
this place of peasants once happy
in belief in a certain god
who must now die for their faith.

The bullet has travelled
before it met the child before
the gun fired in instant readiness.

The bullet travelled on an airplane
accompanied by so many others
identical in form and purpose
from a factory in the distant desert
near Galilee a land of another god
a land that loves death.

Bullets by millions all the same.
That child was only one
unique beloved
no factory can replace her.

Welcome to this home

Welcome to this home
where arms are open to greet you
where hearts enfold you in love.
May the bounty of food and friendship
nourish us all in spirit and body,
and when we part may we
remember this circle of companions;
may we be forever together
in spirit and compassion,
holding fast in our lives of committed love.
For now, we meet to share food by the fire,
be held In the warmth of flame and friends.

Bienvenidos a esta casa

Bienvenidos a esta casa
donde los brazos están abiertos para saludarte
donde los corazones te envuelven en amor
Que la abundancia de la comida y la amistad
Nutra a todos en espíritu y cuerpo

Y cuando nos separamos podamos
Recuerdo este círculo de compañeros
para así estar siempre juntos
en espíritu y compasión.
Manteniendo firmes en nuestras vidas el amor comprometido.
Por ahora, nos reunimos para compartir estos alimentos al lado del fuego y
mantenernos en el calor de la llama y los amigos *translation by Claudia Barrata*