



# **No Man's Land**

*Selected Poetry & Art*

*By*

**Francis M. O'Donnell**

Dublin, 2020

## *No Man's Land*

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**Motif** on title page 1: The heraldic badge of the author: *In saltire a sword hilted or the blade proper point upward behind an olive branch of the last*, symbolizing the military heritage of peacekeeping, and the fruitfulness of making peace hold. The full heraldic achievement of the author, as recorded by the Chief Herald of Ireland, is portrayed on page 104.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

# Introduction

For over fifty years, I have periodically written but never published some poetry. After much hesitation, and whilst I still have enough vitality to bear the critiques that might ensue, this selection, about twenty per cent of the total, is the first such publication, presenting an insight into this hitherto discreet dimension of my life. It somewhat reflects a multicultural heritage, and the richness that diversity of experience brings to the human being as an individual and within society.

My life has been an itinerary of long periods living abroad in the Holy Land (Judea and Galilee), i.e. Israel, Palestine/Jordan, and Syria, and later in France, Belgium, Sudan, Lesotho, Mauritania, Niger, Switzerland, Turkey, the USA, Yugoslavia/Serbia, Ukraine, and Austria.

There is frequently a close relationship between my hitherto equally-discreet visual art and my writings, especially particular reflections, prose or poems. Certain themes in poetry or prose are picked up, cited or visualized in the paintings. Allusions to scripture or spiritual references also occur.

As I have often also written poetry during the same periods of visual artistic expression, I have tried in this volume to present some of the better poems, and to twin them to paintings or sketches with which they have an underlying resonance. Many of these date from the 1970s, a decade of late secondary and later university education, and the early years of life abroad in Africa, but some are more recent.

They include several poems of self-doubt, romantic disillusion, and young adult futility. I share these because many of us may go through such personal anguish about the meaning of life, or our own life in particular, and I believe that notwithstanding the errors of my life, then and later, it shows that if one imbues particular purpose in one's life, its meaningfulness can be enjoyed, the more so if this purpose is centred on the well-being of others. A little sage in later age?

None of us therefore, including in our tender adolescence and struggling adulthood, should ever abandon hope or some modest measure of feasible ambition. Usually if not always, time will not only heal the wounds of hurt, failure or despondency, but our expanding horizons and social interaction will allow us to situate our individuality in broader frames of experience.

Perhaps even, our existential journey can become an adventure of fulfillment, one that can transcend the apparent or felt limitations of our circumscribed lives.

Challenge the many views herein, and enjoy the read.

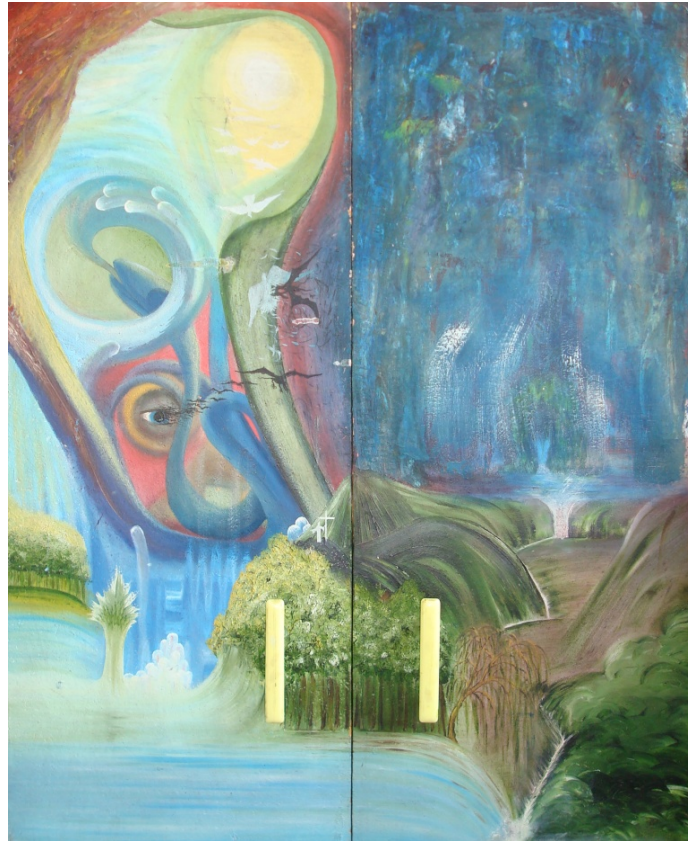
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## *No Man's Land*

### **Selected Poems & Paintings/Sketches**

#### **Principal works**

The early work from the late 1960s mainly depicts an existential period, and focus on the contrast between light and dark, on solitude and suffering. Most of the more intense works date from the mid-1970s, with earlier works being more experimental in treatment.



*Diptych*

*Diptych* is an undated (late 1960s) fantasy depicting the clash of good and evil in a surrealistic cosmogony on two door panels. The upper right quadrant remains confused. Two yellow door handles frame a forested island. A brilliant sun outside a swirling world of confused directions and variable gravities penetrates with light and doves that stream to battle sinister pterodactyls emerging from an evil eye. Water streams down, but also upward to form a snake of fertility absorbing a vortex of beings that arose from the swerving ocean. The serpentine turmoil yields from an encircling inferno. A lone enrobed sage, stands with a cross upheld, on a verdant Calvary. It was painted in Dublin, where it remained until gifted and taken to Cornwall, and thence to Scotland.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **PREDICTION**

In reminiscence, I ponder those glorious days,  
When crystal springs gushed forth,  
And glistening streams of water pure  
Deluged the weeds and algae-covered rocks,  
While on their course to distant shores and seas;  
And the sweet air of the billowing breeze  
Sifted freely through the mountains, plains, and trees,  
And all Earth's creatures stood in awe at all this vast creation,  
This World was pure, and clean, and fresh, and full of life,  
Before our wandering impact brought extinction.

### **LAST QUARTER**

Man, blasted forward, streaking out,  
Flung away to a dot,  
Not to be seen now ....  
Gone a distance never walked by man,  
Nor will ever be but sped as far so fast  
To touch a point, a dot.

Greater in infinity than himself .... Yet  
No dot so near – a sphere inanimate,  
An inspiration source, soul-prodding,  
Ever Man a captive, taken by burst technology.

Another world to corrupt, although already dead?  
Dead, that never lived, but pure.  
Can its lifeless sterility be impregnated,  
With life by Man as he destroys his own?

The bell tolls and yet it does not ring there.  
Will humanity swap a world of life for one without?  
And leave behind a squalor of abyssal poverty  
A death-wrench, a sacrifice, mass extinction?

Would Man forge for Ba'al  
And struggle on the barren Moon,  
Not just heretic but lunatic?

## *No Man's Land*

### **ORB**

Beautiful planet, orbiting sphere in space,  
Peopled by a squalor-saturated race,  
Goliath germs in your face,  
Autolytic epidemic filling up  
Your last virgin place.  
No loving embrace  
A trot to rot every grace  
And poison every cup  
And creep within  
And seep without  
The spoiling smothered surface.

*Orbicide*, is a quirky piece of cynicism, annotated “*Somebody had to paint before it happens as there won't be anyone to do so or otherwise after it happens!*”



*Orbicide*

It shows a devastated lifeless sulphurous world, reduced to a poisonous desert, with city ruins and dead trees submerged in toxic sands, and a skeleton in the foreground. It was painted on Tuesday, 4 July 1972, in Dublin, where it remains. Many years later, the artist came across such skeletons emerging from windswept dunes in the Sahara when he lived in Mauritania in the early 1980s.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **SHELL**

How much a shell I am,  
Holding a different face to differing waves,  
A shell with no opening, shelled self,  
Presenting sides to suit the tides that never stay,  
Turning hopes away to graves behind and passed.  
Futures lost, as Atlantis, lie,  
Destroyed on the rocks of bitter neglect.  
Self-interest pouring out,  
With nothing inwards growing but,  
A sourness, distaste, acid of the self's embittered self.  
Shell, splintering shell,  
A life of waste lived, you wither, wear,  
Cracking down, broken spell,  
Useless anymore to dwell.

### **SKULL-PAINTING**

In victory, you smile down from the wall,  
Your naked grin dares to have the gall  
To mock away, sneer, jeer, laugh at me  
With nude teeth, fangs, polished ivory  
Mellowed with artificial age  
I bestowed on this skeletal sage.

Red-streaked whiteness, glaring just for spite,  
You will always stare down from that height,  
Greeting arrival and departure  
With imperial purple pallor,  
Gracing those brows and empty eye-pits;

Cynic, stoic, goddamned hedonist,  
You are a merciless treachery  
To the dreams of our transcendency.

## *No Man's Land*



*The Dove*

In this sketch, a dove brings comfort to an emaciated old man, surviving still in his impoverished old age, and resembling a victim of Ireland's Great Famine in the 1840s. It was inspired by sketches made occasionally during the artist's service as a hospital orderly on night-duty, attending to destitute geriatric patients in their last days of palliative care, and during his university student days in Dublin. Some of these were elderly folk abandoned, who received no visitors, let alone family. As a result, the orderlies and nurses were sometimes the only ones who had the time or inclination to chat, and the artist was on some occasions the only one to hold vigil during the last moments and the quiet passing of an old one.

The hospital, St. James's, not far from the famous hospital originally established by the Knights Hospitaller of Saint John nearby at Kilmainham, was a grim granite structure with wards of up to thirty patients each and the shifts were twelve hours long. Ending a shift at 8 am, would bring the artist through streets of once-medieval Dublin in the Liberties quarter, past the St. James's Gate Guinness Brewery, the smell of its yeast awkwardly blending with the rich scent of roasted coffee beans from Bewley's Café, the blend more awkwardly still mingled with the odour of the River Liffey at low tide. This sketch was done in January 1976 in Dublin, where it remains.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**PUBBERS**

*Vomunt ut bibant, bibunt ut vomant*

What should we do now,  
Having left that room, spirits and food,  
And watched them talk and bow,  
To new acquaintances with shrewd  
Smiles of delight,  
Like Elegabalus reincarnated  
In hordes of unrepentant youth?

Exuberant in excess  
Seems no use for intellect,  
But what can we expect  
In the toil and aftermath  
Of mind-numbing stress?

Has wisdom or wizardry been the path,  
Or do any see the light  
That comes from the sight  
So pathetic inside tonight?  
Would daubed wattle better  
Shelter their souls than the bottle?

Or is it now alone  
That these toss small talk  
And like pillars of stone  
That move in circles, circulate,  
Forming and dispersing one by one  
Clouds of little depth and lesser fate?

Are they druids in disguise,  
Seeking revenge for Stonehenge?  
Or are they just average,  
Addicted to their beverage,  
Yoyos spinning up and down,  
Hobos, and I their only clown?

For them I'd rather pray,  
Live another day,  
Than stay, be their prey  
And let them slay their life's opportunity.

### *No Man's Land*

*Joie de vivre* (Joy of life) is a cynical amateur piece depicting five devastated skeletal specters weeping, rejoicing, gasping, imploring, and just confused, as they hold, exhalt, lose or cherish collapsing roses. It was painted on 16 March 1976 in Dublin, where it is stored.



*Joie de Vivre*

A substantial number of early paintings were done in the space of a few weeks in an intensely creative period of April-September 1976, sometimes several a day. This was a time that marked the end of the artist's university years, an interlude before he left Ireland for a short assignment of two years abroad, but which he endured for over thirty-two years in fact in a diaspora career of international assignments and endeavours. This one was painted on 16 March 1976.

Later works become more extroverted, with attention to water and landscape, sun and shade, places and people. In due course, the artist's focus and expression has gone from inner life and its quandaries to the wider tapestry of the human in his environment and community, indeed perhaps to society's contradictions, and the challenges of contemporary survival.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**WE, THE PEOPLE**

Do I pass it off with a shrug or is it deeper?

Those little things that irritate or ruminate,  
The petty incidents that saturate our lives,  
Things that last but for an instant,  
But absorb our total interest,  
Enslave our whole existence,  
The things that subjugate and dominate.

The myriad millions of people, teeming  
More and more of late, seeming  
To ever all conflate,  
Running rings around their eyes,  
Looking ever searching,  
For that of most importance,  
That speck to illustrate  
A eureka moment.

They come and go,  
We come and go,  
Seeking a label of achievement,  
A brand, to own and be.

*We, the people,*  
Hardly know what we want,  
But the self-appointed  
Or our own elected,  
Will tell us what it is,  
Then not deliver.

If, at the end of life,  
We all become an "it",  
Or something other,  
No longer he or she,  
But some de-gendered blather,  
Neither you, nor I,  
But some de-personalised matter,  
Will worry too much,  
But enjoin, enjoy, as we become  
The great hereafter.

## *No Man's Land*

An early socio-political commentary is *The Clash of Ideologies*, begun 3 October 1974, completed 8 April 1976; it is annotated “*as an essay on conflict from ideologies exalted over the humanity they feign to value; the humanity that is their victim – a black ugly evil violence*”. In storage in Dublin.



*The Clash of Ideologies*

\*\*\*

Bury the dead! Bury the dead!  
The hot sun rises and will reek its vengeance  
On the unburied bodies that dare  
In daylight's rays to bathe indolently.

\*\*\*

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **ENSEMBLE**

Nous sommes d'accord  
Mon coeur et moi  
Que nous t'aimons, oui,  
Je t'aime,  
O comme il batte  
Contre ta poitrine,  
En essayant d'aller vers toi,  
Mon amour.

Je te vois maintenant,  
Si belle, visage si doux,  
Et quels cheveux.  
Tes yeux, plein d'amour,  
Qui m'attirent doucement,  
Très doucement,  
Lèvres caressant,  
Esprit adoucissant.

Si seulement tu existait,  
Rêve de mon âme,  
Mirage de ma volonté,  
Plaisir de mon désir.

### **OU NON**

C'est passé, passé.  
Je reste seul  
A l'ombre qu'elle m'a laissé.  
Les oiseaux chantent entre eux,  
Et aux arbres nus,  
Frémissant au vent.

Tout est parti:  
Femme, feuilles, et paix.

*No Man's Land*



*The Dance*

In contrast to social conflict and in a more positive depiction of encounter, *The Dance* shows two vibrant line figures, male and female dancing a naked tango in darkness. It was painted on 5 October 1974 in Dublin, where it remains.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### CAFÉ CAFARD

There is no “*truth*”, he said; that is the truth.  
Nothing “*is*”; indeed, would you believe “*is*” *isn't*.  
Now as if that was not enough codology, he added  
“*everything is all, is nothing, isn't*”.  
Well, I tell you, that won't get him very far.

I think he was not feeling very Cartesian that day;  
He had taken the 19A  
Down Berkeley Road.

But it made me think,  
*Is was, will be, but can't, isn't;*  
So what's the problem, there isn't!  
No need to check into the Mater,  
Nor Grangegorman for that matter.

Somehow, as he got up to leave,  
We glanced around – or didn't,  
But certainly seemed amused if not confused,  
- Or weren't.

It seems we are to believe,  
As an act of faith,  
Not science, or rather philosophy -  
– now was it metaphysics or epistemology?  
Anyway, it wasn't.

Heck, nothing can't – let's be clear, can can't  
Not even the Folies Bergères, who weren't there,  
Sacre Coeur!

That is the truth –  
Which therefore can and is, even when it can't and mustn't.  
Because there is no truth.

- I'm somehow feeling ontological  
Even if not too logical today.

It's probably time to be  
Phenomenological, or just go away.

Epoché – he said: Touché!  
Café in a mug, laced the usual way, - *correto*.

*No Man's Land*



29/12/1974 ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN (5/7/1976) = 12

St. Stephen's Green

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN**

In this hollow bowl of colour,  
Steeped in tall buildings stealing skyward  
And shining in glass and glistening metal,  
I sit, swallowed, perhaps shy.

Haywire rainbows, psychedelic, dazzling,  
Blooming still in autumn, as sunlight flows,  
With carpets of brown, orange, and red hues,  
The fading green of leaves, much else to amuse the eye  
Exist here.

All amid a pool of rising structures, spires,  
Tall blocks, steel and concrete, hidden wires.  
Swelling, then waning, noise,  
Drills on roads, traffic, gaining losing,  
Roar outside this haven of green and countryside,  
A city's familiar garden.  
All close beside me, but so distant  
To one peering inward, out of sight.

There is a forcing of surroundings,  
A dwelling upon mind, insistent,  
As skin tones and wakeful eyes,  
Among so much of all kinds, arise,  
And volleys of discord and spite entrench,  
Understood at another end of the bench.

And all with sweet perfumes in the air,  
Pretty faces, shapes, fresh hair,  
Creaking of creasing shoes beneath smart suits,  
Odours of petrol and cigars,  
Children's disregards, charging, yells of exultation,  
Meetings in poverty of withered bodies rich with age,  
Discussions, exchange, over an open page,  
Laughs, giggles and love whisperings,  
All impressing upon me, unavoidably,  
Distracting sullen introspection.

There is a clash and then a resolution,  
A new merging with all around  
With every scene and sound,  
Sometimes serene, always newfound.

*No Man's Land*



*Selected Poetry & Art*

**UNFINISHED**

We shudder the shock waves of history unfolding,  
Foiled in believing its purpose,  
Holding forward the promise of progress,  
Unrevolting in its human complacency.

The terrible truth of human unhappiness,  
Unsatisfying materiality, social fools  
Striving and consuming nemesis,  
Ambient ambition, failing, tolls.

Is there is a higher calling,  
Away from this mortal falling?

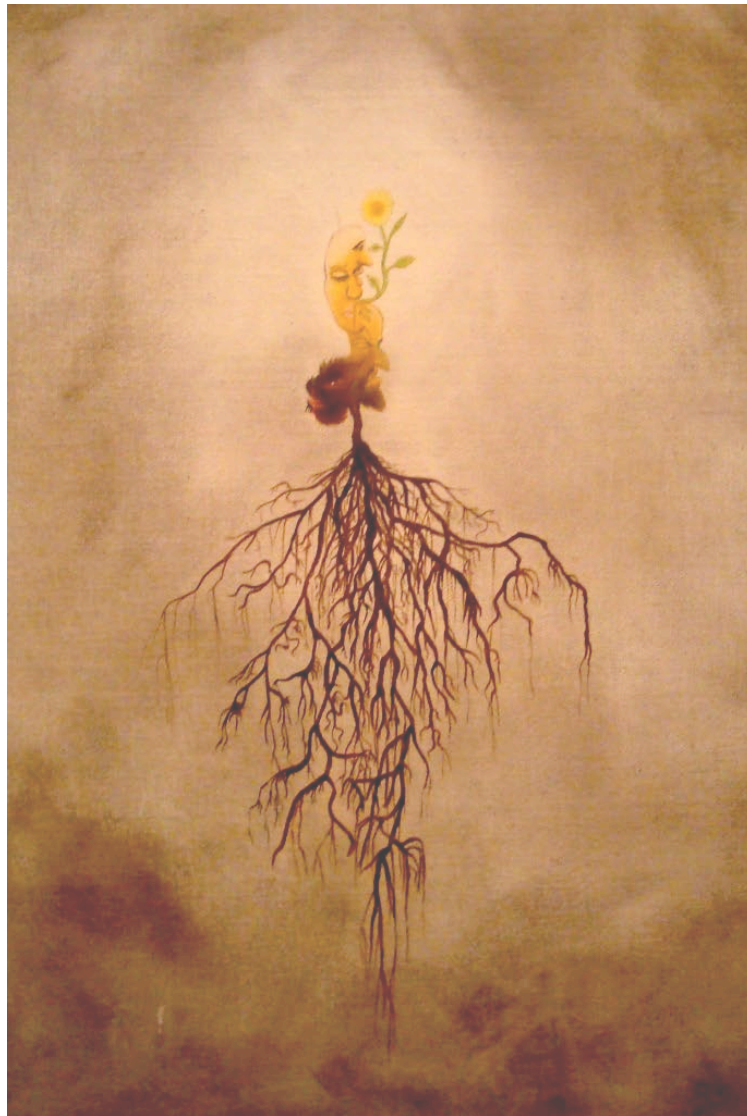
There is a warmth within the heart  
That holds a hope in purpose beyond,  
As a light within the dark  
Illuminates around.

World ever more complex  
Sophisticated in its chaos  
Belies the simple truth  
Of its nought,  
And the meaning of meaning  
in its unity  
Sought by me.

The piece of it is the end of it  
Ending where I start  
In peace beyond it.

There is the victory over it.  
In this, sign.

## *No Man's Land*



*Uprooting*

Amongst the earliest paintings is a simple one, *Uprooting*, about exile and exposure, which contextualizes the confusion of emotions through life. An uprooted animal-human-plant floats with roots dangling. The roots seem to be figures struggling to move, walk, climb, dance, hang or die, but feeding a stem that grows from wild if not bestial savagery, through adult male anger, and female serenity, to flower in an enlightened break in clouds otherwise turbulent or darkening. *Uprooting* (originally *In Blue*) is also sub-titled *The Evolution of the Human Species*, with some allusion to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and was conceived on 9 February 1975, and painted on 13 March 1976 in Dublin. The work is also a commentary on the materialist reductivism of evolutionary theory divorced from divine creation or grace, as Man hangs uprooted but only illuminated from beyond through the mystical *Cloud of Unknowing*. But see later *Unseen Presence*, focused exclusively on the Divine.

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**BRUSSELS SOLITUDE**

Who knows, more than he,  
The depth of his being?

When alone in alien worlds  
He is in the midst of fellow beings,  
Yet which others have a common past,  
And live an old familiarity,

Who knows then more than he alone,  
The acuteness of his solitude?

When surrounded by strangeness  
Which endures its own harmony,  
And he, flung there, as it were, by fate,  
There standing in the middle,  
Unknowing where to turn,  
Lies paralysed in writing,  
Anxious in an anguished isolation  
For the next moment, gate to the unexpected,  
The unheralded revealing of otherness,  
A far obtruding existence,  
Smothering him, overpowering him,  
Reducing him to nought,  
Plunging into a cadaver of meaninglessness  
All ersatz, schmaltz, dada,

Who then really knows the ponderous alienation  
Of the lone among the many,  
The one in strange otherness, vast,

Who knows isolation?  
Who knows diaspora?

*No Man's Land*



Ich und Du

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **PUYOO**

The music plays softly in the background,  
An echo of the past, old sights, old sound.

There is a faint hum of voices restfully  
Talking above the gentle clash of cutlery,  
The slow sipping of hot coffee,  
Beans well-ground, olfactory,  
In the dim light all around,  
Words mingling, then a pause again,  
Sighs, eyes, and the women and the men.

She sits smiling in front peacefully,  
Eating her pizza as my mind drifts delicately  
South to Puyoo, over land and sea,  
And to that late evening like a dream,  
When we stopped at the station,  
A weary bus load from San Sebastian,  
Breaking the journey to Tarbes and home again.

Delaying in a café, departure seems overdue,  
As darkness settles the morning dew.

The café was quiet then,  
Deserted but for a few, silent until it grew  
With our many voices all chattering an alien tongue.  
Outside, a juke-box sung  
An old jazz tune,  
As no trains came and we two left that room,  
Walking together, pacing the platform.

We caught our last glimpse of the farms,  
The fields, Gascony and Béarn,  
The trees, black forms against a dying sun,  
And stole a fleeting glance of a stilled wagon,  
Railed there at dusk by the sleepers framed forever.

It was cool as we left through an iron gate.  
Now the hours have passed and it is late.  
The last bus lies waiting in the city center.  
We rise and leave down the street.  
Many months and memories later,  
Walking into the future.



*Selected Poetry & Art*

**REQUEST**

One tear, droplet of sorrow,  
Holds a heartful of heartache,  
Salted with bitter regret.

Do not make tomorrow forget.

Pained, panged, purging the pity,  
Pity the plight of it moulding me.

Light the urgency unfolding,  
To be free.

I saw the cloudburst,  
I felt the thirst of the thunder,  
I soaked the pouring out of it.

And I hear the heartbeat beat.

Do you?

Listen to the silence of the self,  
Rest your motion, emotion.

Bestill it, distill.  
Remember the will of it.

You cannot still the passing of time,  
You cannot put it back.

I hold an empty hand in wait.  
Weight it, and be heavy,  
Heave your heart to mine,  
Cleave not our time,  
Leave not.

I seek.  
Find me, and I will find  
Us again.

## *No Man's Land*



*The Cell*

The most expressive painting from this period is *The Cell*.

A torso and arm reaching out, it consists of a solitary figure with arm outstretched in desperation, and an eye seared with pain, in a head the whiteness of which appears to expose the skull, a Golgotha, in the Calvary of the soul.

The outstretched right hand reaches into the darkness, and the left hand is obscured in the turbulence of the heart.

The painting was influenced by compassion and sketches by the artist at bedsides of terminally-ill elderly patients in their last moments, in St. James's Hospital, in Dublin, where the artist served as a part-time orderly during his university years.

*The Cell* is so titled with dual allusion to an organism in isolation, such as an amoeba, and to the feeling of penitential incarceration. It is hence also subtitled *An Intentionality in Darkness*.

It was painted on 16 March 1975 in Dublin.

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**THE CELL**

Having held heartbound passions  
Poised barrenly beneath my skin,  
And watched withering undernourished  
Vague grains of love within,  
And seen the weeds of waste flourish  
On seeds of anguish, and begin  
My seas of suffering to swell  
Beyond bare anger and its hell,  
In loss and absence to win  
A heavy solitude, despair, a wearying  
Of sense and discipline,

How the quietness crawls now so calmly,  
And the trees turn so tenderly  
Towards the soft sun's  
Warm wind, so lovingly  
Washing the laced leaves  
With its gentle caress,  
And the silence slips peacefully,  
Wafting its web in tranquillity,  
As the world spreads easefully  
Into a delicate repose

That I have not.

For there is nothing touched,  
Nothing moved,  
No germ of passion stirred,  
On my account.

*No Man's Land*



*The Drip*

Another such painting, less surreal and more narrative is *The Drip*, depicting a terminally-ill patient in last hours in a hospital bed, existing on a drip-feed. It suggests exhaustion with life, and is articulated in dull and dreary tones. It is annotated: *as light throws shadow in dark, life flows in and out, sight grows dim, and limb goes cold, and breath expires.* It was painted on 22 May 1976 in Dublin, where it remains.

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**NIGHT DUTY**

By the faint light does Tom sleep,  
Puffing air through his thick cheek.  
He is old, grey haired head still  
And lies by the window sill.

We meet without a greeting,  
And so his glance is fleeting,  
Flying timidly around,  
Stopping slowly at the ground.

His Ariel tulip special  
Watches as guardian angel.  
Another such sits by Bill  
Who showed how to kill.

All sleep deep in the dim light  
Though Jack to the right  
Groans on an aching back  
His bed a torture rack.

The night is long, delays the dawn.  
The stasis of the minutes grows undrawn.

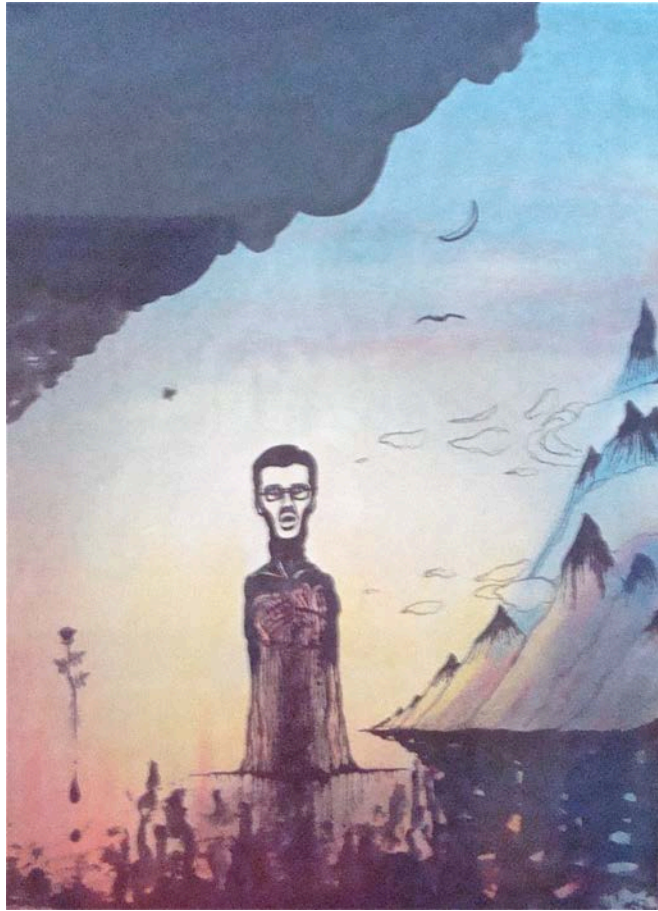
The snoring builds to its crescendo,  
'Til footsteps come diminuendo:  
The nurses come and go  
Throughout the night,  
Whispering out-of-sight  
But not of Michelangelo.

Who breathes a faltering breath?  
Which horseman carries death?  
Another speech in the banquet,  
But Isaac's hour has not come, yet.

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**TI'AMAT**

Gone, the skeletal nakedness of winter trees  
They stand now proud of their leafy plumage,  
Quite foliage-flung, well nested.  
And those relentless birds  
Never cease to engage a wonderer.  
Their dawn-time gliding  
And early morning calls  
Beckon envious sympathy  
The urge to soar above a shrinking world,  
And yet, they glide down  
Always gently returning, caressing waft, wind, and water,  
Ocean, sea, lake or river, brine or banks,  
Flirting between Abzu and Ti'amat,  
And all their offspring in our ranks.



Fragmentations

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**FINITE MINDS**

Neutralise the problem.  
Pour cold hardening fossilising  
Intellectual cement to freeze the problematic  
And insulate yourself from it.

But it still remains  
Haunting through memory,  
Waiting to arise again once more.  
The openness breaks out of enclosure.  
Reality is too much to be comprehended  
By finite minds.

There are times  
When I suddenly perceive  
My engrossing surroundings deeper and deeper,  
In more and more all-encompassing aspects  
All at once,  
And I shoot out to infinity,  
Trying to comprehend all past, present, future  
Everywhere,  
But I fall back shuddering,  
In ruins,  
Having seen and collected  
Only fragments,  
Bits of the incomprehensible.

I shatter down to dread,  
To nothingness,  
Utter insignificance,  
Bordering on a defeat, failure,  
Close to the boundary of sanity,  
Being myself so open to all so intuitive, perceptive,  
So unable at times to hermetically, protectively,  
Phenomenologically  
Ignore, isolate, select, close off,  
Switch off open authenticity to live heuristically,  
A lie that would be  
A vehicle to security, intentionality, meaning,  
That I come close to freaking out  
In disordered, collapsed, withdrawal,  
Until upheld in the cloud of unknowing.

## *No Man's Land*

The next painting, *Alienation*, is a bizarre seascape viewed from a desolate if not intimidating land. Influenced by the artist's former philosophy professor Patrick Masterson's philosophical treatise *Atheism and Alienation*, it exposes a diminutive figure, itself surrounded by an emptiness extracted from the ground, lost in the vastness of a gargantuan vista. The figure stands alone, overlooking a deep sea, momentarily calm, below a sky reflecting a settled turbulence.



*Alienation*

Peaks form a montane horizon, comprising sober if not sorrowful profiles. *Alienation* was painted on 24 April and 1 May 1976, in Dublin. On the reverse side, it has complex subtitles *The Voice of Solitude* (The Loss of Authenticity, in the Slavery of the Spirit to the Shadows of Existence), *L'Être et le Néant*, and *Lo Sagrado y lo Profano* (Irony and ambiguity cloud the clarity of the Light of Lights in the Chaos of the Dark), with allusions to novels by Jean-Paul Sartre and Mircea Eliade. A detailed reflection states

*Distance, and Division in the Self beneath the Mountains of Mournful Domination – the Erosion of the Integrity is the Autolysis of the Soul.*

And a further handwritten inscription in classical Greek is quoted from Sophocles' *Antigone*, and means *Much there is that is weird, but nought is weirder than Man*, as taken from Rudolf Otto's 1917 work, *The Idea of the Holy*.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**A WINTER BURIAL  
(Our Loss)**

*He will keep her in exile no longer (Lam.4:22)*

Cast-away remnants of unease,  
Unrounded of their Sycorax  
By the incessant glide of seas,  
Provoke the heart-heavy thorax  
With their tearful tissue-piercing  
Of feet weary of life-pacing,  
And drive, in their relentlessness,  
To nail our tired crawl to stillness.

The sore heart flounders on pebbles,  
The debris of another age,  
Rocky remains of boulders' rage  
Against the tides that roll ceaseless  
In their sad sweeping of the shores.  
Broken massivity endures,  
Beyond its obituary  
To Time's silent passing sea-spray.

Why are whispers of beach sounds,  
The utterings of the brink-edge,  
So mercilessly loud around  
The orchestrations that are wedged  
Out of our ill-timed bereaving?  
The heavy grief of her leaving,  
Renders a distraught season  
All asunder without reason.

The salty trickles mild staining  
Of that jagged fragmented stone  
Draws in tears, stinging sorrow flown  
From our eyes at her departing.  
Why are we here, shore-propped against  
The cruel waves and wind that wrenched  
Her from us, unwarned and straining  
Toward, stranded from, her drowning?

I, undone this withdrawal day,  
Beachcomb for pieces of purpose  
To offer, too late to delay  
Her irrevocable repose.

### *No Man's Land*

(And here, we remain ashore now,  
Bracing fate with each rugged brow  
As skyward, ocean swells high,  
Separating both you and I,  
There where she will no longer go  
- Nor chose to die.)

In a similar setting, *Vulnerability* casts a figure, now a delicate pale indeed ghostly female, exposed in naked profile, but appearing pregnant, with who knows what possibilities awaiting her future and her child.

With her hands held over her breast, demure, she advances with trepidation over a jagged landscape, rough and painful, towards the crashing waves of a highly agitated sea in stormy weather after dusk as night is falling.



*Vulnerability*

*Vulnerability* was originally also entitled *Forbearance*, *Adversity*, and was painted on 7 June 1976.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**A POET'S BOOK**

I read a poet's book, voyeur into his soul,  
Disturbed to empathise this self-defying role,  
And thank the stars that he is gone to rest at all  
Bequeathing the window of his craft to recall  
A life so short, but in his time this world did gain  
His every word carved out, so strongly etched in pain  
His lines, the suffering to which he'd not belong,  
Cauterised his mind beyond catharsis, yet so strong  
His lunging drive a drill that leaves a bleeding hole,  
The plunging psyche will, itself become a mole.

Frustrated incongruity of limb and life,  
Cut from the sapling youth by a serrated knife,  
Disrupted by the cruel and piercing shards of fate,  
With judgments and distress borne out of so much hate  
Tearing apart an infant yearning to be loved,  
With imagery and pain all spawned in tears and blood,  
Vestiges haunting ruins, the world that was at war,  
No longer so much near nor yet so passed nor far,  
Cities, countries, cultures all left entombed below,  
The past's rekindled toll, recurring its echo.

As we embrace our futures all but still unknown,  
Extinctions, doubts, debates destroying all we own,  
No viral meme nor hyperbolic algorithm  
Can replicate the meaning of reason or rhythm.  
It takes a mind to know, a heart to feel and be  
The mirror of his soul, a spirit now gone free.  
His book I laid aside, his words still ringing loud,  
Screaching inside the man and to the swelling crowd,  
Depressions, expressions, that cannot be reversed,  
Even when hearkened in a newborn grace immersed.

\*\*\*\*\*

### *No Man's Land*

In this agitated picture, a submerged figure struggles beneath the troughs and crests of a stormy sea, dark and drowning. *De Profundis*, from the prayer “*Out of the depths I cry unto You O Lord, Lord hear my prayer*”, is annotated: “*a submerged being, between hope and despair*”. It was painted on 27 July 1976 in Dublin, where it remains in storage.



*De Profundis*

The next work is *Lunar Vigilance* (on page 38) a more abstract expression of a surreal nocturnal land and waterscape, with a crescent moon reflecting in a stream that flows from a distant waterfall.

In the middle ground, it seems that a group of beings is trudging from the stream, in a direction which includes, to the left a more prominent couple ostensibly enflamed. Yet, these apparent beings are portrayed by scraping away any overlay of paint, exposing the raw white canvas.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**ODYSSEY**

The sun's circling glow fell slowly  
Onto a tired, hazy world,  
And as the light grew paler,  
The warmth retreated  
And afternoon died away into  
Cool evening.

Beyond our small horizon  
How were we to know  
That great spheres of light and warmth  
Burnt effortlessly onward?  
We saw them only momentarily,  
As they graced a black night-sky.

We embarked at the water's edge,  
Avoiding with ease the eternal ripples,  
And launched quietly into the darkness.

But soon the mists swarmed,  
Enveloping each movement;  
The currents swirled mysteriously,  
Unfriendly, and wild,  
And we seemed engulfed.

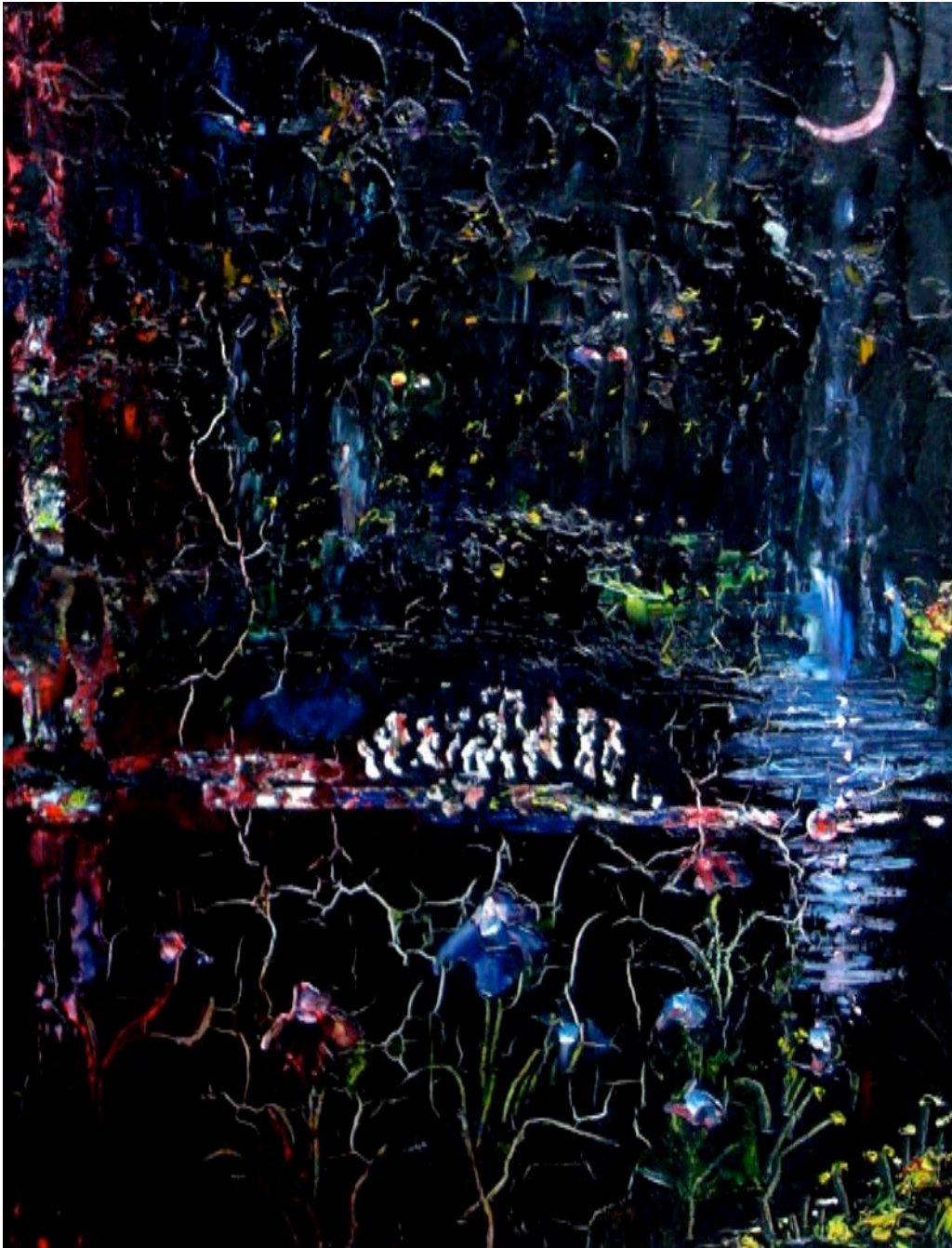
The cold crept beneath  
And conquered even our hearts.

We drifted blindly, blindly,  
And in the great vast emptiness  
We were lost.

With each faint touch  
We slipped further apart  
For longer and longer,  
Until I felt you there no more,  
And feared you drowned.

And only at the breaking dawn,  
Did I see you, far far away,  
And know then how we found  
Each, a distant, separate ground.

*No Man's Land*



*Lunar Vigilance*

Equally, the scene is stricken by apparent lightening, itself actually expressed by cracks in the canvass, which in the foreground seem to dance around a cluster of blue and red irises. In the distance, bright specks in the sky seem to be pairs of eyes of otherwise invisible dark creatures, watching and hovering threateningly over the scene. Lunar Vigilance was painted in Dublin on 7 June 1976.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### REQUIEM

Tints of ecstasy and expectancy  
Flauntingly took my hands  
And tempted me off to play in low lands,  
Where I did stay, seduce them,  
And slay my opportunity.

Those days I gazed astray,  
Heedless of the future fray,  
Until now, weak, at short respite,  
The foul fight brings me light,  
For I am now in bleak night  
With blind and fallen mind  
Murdered in Hell's display.  
Wounds, rare, and lint dropped at a hint,  
Jilted at the hilt, built body  
Broken in my snare,  
I have borne my share,  
Shorn to a hair,  
And torn asunder.  
Blundered in a hundred ways,  
Now gaunt and dazed,  
My spirit in an inferno razed,  
Lies haunted tauntingly by me.  
Morbidity and wretchedness  
Enveloping my body,  
Battered, bruised, and beaten,  
My sordid soul shaking, sickening,  
Shattered dreams feed my fire,  
Frequently and readily,  
And it consumes my energy unsparingly.

Gone, are my romantic dreams,  
Shed, fled, and sped, away.  
My glow of hope is dead,  
My body bled,  
My soul is fading grey.

\*\*\*\*\*

A complex spectrum of themes and emotions is revealed in *Quasi Una Fantasia*, also subtitled *Vanessa Atalanta*, the species name for the Red Admiral butterfly. It derives from a series of sketches of abysmal streets stretching to infinity, inspired originally by the artist's experience of Brussels where he lived briefly in 1974. Some of the original sketches were given to friends in Dublin in the early 1970s.

### *No Man's Land*

In this painting of 16 July 1976, it is not a street, but a river canyon in a surreal city of sinister cemetery-like scaffolding. In the foreground, an apocalyptic horseman charges fleeing skeletons as a modern warrior fires his machine gun at a Red Admiral butterfly, a totemic allusion to mass hysteria as people used to panic in medieval times when blood appeared to rain down from the sky, being only the *meconium* of newly-emerged butterflies arising from their chrysales. The horse rears, and turns its head to a rosette the seared bleeding heart, like a bullfight's victim, of a ghostly but sad young bearded youth in polo-neck above whom floats a dangling skeleton, underneath a bleeding crucifix.



*Quasi Una Fantasia*

On the other side of the abyss, a weary male tries to follow a rebuffing female, but is consumed by flames, as she advances through fertile verdure towards a shining white figure awaiting her. Through this abyss, the river of life and love leads ultimately to a brighter horizon, beyond which may lie love's dream.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**ON THE EIGHT DAY**

As on a cliff, I slipped and fell  
Out - Oh, Hell, for a newborn.

I never reached the bottom rocks,  
But stopped, suspended (by a foot?),  
As the clock stopped,  
Stuck somewhere in an abyss;

- but I don't hang there now,  
I drift and drift, floating nowhere here,  
I am lost, listlessly afloat,  
And have no confidence in the flesh.

I do not know where is up,  
Nor where is down - nor care now.

Methinks parfois I must be dead now,  
This can't be life: toil, tears, and strife,  
I'm but a boiling row, balanced on a knife,  
As doubt divides my hemispheres.

But I do know this:  
Someone removed my prepuce,  
And tipped me to the precipice.

I feel uncovered in the most naked way,  
Deprived of my most basic overlay.

It wasn't enough to be born,  
They soon had me shorn,  
First born, man-child, torn.

So I would not be broken off,  
But am I a new creature,  
Or less of one?

Be it of the heart,  
Be it of the mind,  
Be it of the soul, dear Anam-Cara.

That I may bow my head for a Curtana?

### *No Man's Land*

*Quasi une réalité, sans Sadak* is a work that predates *Quasi una Fantasia*, and was an intermediate study on the theme of abysmal profundity, influenced by the abstract geometry of intimidating streetscapes, but also by the renowned painting by the Romantic, John Martin, "*Sadak in search of the Waters of Oblivion*".



*Quasi une réalité: sans Sadak, dans l'abîme*

A rocky ledge perches in center foreground, with a red-hot rim, and below the red rims of other loftier ledges, in this quasi-volcanic canyon. It was painted on 16 April 1976 in Dublin, where it remains. The earlier works from which the above two "*Quasis*" partly derive, include *La Chaussée d'Oubli*, painted in 1974, and given to a college friend in 1976, before the artist left Ireland.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**DEAD GODDESS**

Must you merge my convalescence  
With petite columnar presence  
Challenging my resilience  
In your haunting absence?

You do not then differ much  
From others who left touch  
Despite white silk or black beret,  
Shy reluctant Salomé.

They too returned feigning distance  
With sweet smiles and normality

O this dissociation leaves me  
Disseverally bereaved  
And I grieved of my façade  
And of hesitancy.

And you would worry  
Of my knowing, and hold back  
In a great deceit  
But then perhaps it was not conceit.

Please extend a head,  
A stretched neck gratefully  
Guillotined.  
Nor was that what you  
Meant at all, as I descended  
Into a mournful catharsis.

I will not implicate you all,  
My forbidden regiment,  
But remember those whose eyes  
Cried echoing within me,  
Without the play of words  
Nor their pithiness.

Suicide will not be used,  
I have learnt,  
Owing a great debt,  
To my dead goddess.

## *No Man's Land*

A more surrealistic work is *L'Abîme du Mal en Chaussée vers Dieu* painted on 14 April 1976, with spectral figures scattered in a lunar-type landscape on a strange planet, with an abyss separating them. This work remains in Dublin in storage.



*L'Abîme du Mal en Chaussée vers Dieu*

## CREATION

Earth-mound universe, cosmos-part and self-contained,  
Bounding brown life, being,  
The soul stark in the dark yet flung out forth,  
The spark-splash existing unrestrained.

Muck-hill damp, doused yet fire of further being, life,  
There within all your myriad million world untold,  
Each an own, a self,  
I probe yet penetrate not without strife,  
For each only being right on own  
Defends whilst unfolding.

Striving I a captive of the otherness of you,  
Brown earth, your own being -  
And so you, yet further down deep within,  
Are others holding selfhood,  
As the cosm within the cosm each world-atom flung beyond,  
Each a mystery movement, symphony-sung,  
God-flung-to bondhood.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**THE LOST LAND**

Where in this land can we make an offering  
To send for peace, to open the chance to cease the pain,  
That all might live again?

All was once happy, faces say,  
A world where smiling children used play;  
Living a bliss, idyllic harmony,  
A love-kiss, a ray, serenity.

All gone away...  
Doors of time lock the past behind now,  
As toil and strife bring blood on brow.  
Tears and sweat begin to pour  
As each one gropes for ever more.  
Darkness here forms such a lure,  
That goals, desires, become obscure.  
All stray, in quest, from their aims,  
And lose their faces, then their names.

And so we drift and sink below,  
A place so deep, and yet, shallow,  
Where dismay will fall away to bring despair,  
Where we already have sown the air  
With sweat and cold and misery,  
Our dirt clings to us tightly.

The unborn crawl in agony,  
As mothers wombs are torn apart,  
Tombs now of tragedy,  
Scarce soothing a weak heart.

Footsteps, heavy from behind,  
Come to drag our children from us  
And give them a concrete mind.

Voices whisper death, agony is promised,  
Still wooden hearts are all we find.

This land bereft of faith  
Is sown with too much hate.

### *No Man's Land*

Blood spills not far away,  
As others grow angry and old ways fall.  
Old bodies crumple against the barren wall.  
Faces withered and souls released, flee,  
As death's rumble moves forward silently,  
To tear the weak away.

There is no place to stay anymore,  
As we wander through the gloom,  
Along the floor of this ethereal room.

Pools of tears do not console the forsaken  
As they search for the unattainable.  
Their dreams persist as hopes shaken  
By fears and minds unstable, unable  
To withstand long this suffering,  
Yet forced to endure it, a malodorous offering,  
And bear it to a sour end  
to taste the acid bitterness their hearts send.

We seek in the dark now, blind.  
Tears trickle as we tremble,  
Sadness is all we find;  
Shadows are all we resemble.

The deeper I delve, the more lost I am,  
And there is nothing now more there than a femtogram,  
Though all grasp for it and cry aloud.

As we gasp at murky clouds,  
This pain grows by day and night,  
A vacuum we cannot fill nor fight,  
But must immerse in as nil, oblivion,  
Vague beings with no haven,  
Doomed to an eternity of existence,  
A suffering void without heaven,  
Offering futile resistance  
In a silent space where time rules not,  
Where boundaries are gone but not forgot,  
Where one can go forever in sorrow seeking,  
But bounded by never reaching  
A vanished prize  
- A place that deludes the spirit's eyes,  
Vanquished.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

It grows slow and so unkind.  
All that is blows the mind wild  
And though to the eye mild,  
It pierces deep the soul  
And makes a wound  
That grows so stark,  
It throws a wall of dark  
All around,  
Crippling the spirit eking out its stay,  
So wearied now,  
It cannot pray  
Nor die,  
- one of these am I -  
Beings that are that rather weren't,  
But by so being, aren't,  
Yet suffer.



*No man's land*

*No man's land* depicts a lone penitent, carrying his cross, between two mounted war-lords, opposing and ready to engage in a bitter fight to the end over the devastation their enmity has caused. It was painted on 3 September 1976, and given to a life-long friend in Ireland.

*No Man's Land*

*Red-hot in ice-blue* is a simplified abstraction again from the Alienation/Vulnerability/Quasi themes, and depicts the upper warmth (and lower cold, etched-out) of a human along a shore in an Neptunic landscape below a glacial ice-cliff, and a moonlit sea.



*Red hot in ice-blue*

The warmth of distant others recedes into the cold. It was painted on 24 April 1976 in Dublin where it remains in storage.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**THE COLD SEA**

Slowly, then in haste, I change,  
And am ready to run down to the shore,  
And see the water, cool, cold, refreshing,  
And though the sun shines on, I feel a chill,  
And excited eagerness lapses into nervous caution.

I timidly approach the water's edge  
And dare to almost touch it,  
But I stop as if halted by some strange force  
Repelling my audacity,  
Almost as if I feared to breach and stain  
The sacred mystery the sea holds deep.

Its sanctity and awesomeness  
Hold me mesmerized, somewhat motionless,  
Engrossed in its weird and wonderful  
Beauty, brilliance, power,  
Magnificence and mystery,

And then I am shocked backwards  
And my once wary foot  
Leaps from the icy cold of this  
Boundless body of water,  
Where it gently slipped,  
My attention to it waning,  
In my idle musing of beyond.

The sea has no time for us  
Mere mortal men,  
Nor even yet our women.  
Our whole human enterprise  
It keeps at bay,  
Quite literally.

Many a treasure lies sunken in its bowels,  
Many a truth forgotten in its wake,  
And yet the fisherman trawls,  
And harvests all he can take,  
Which is why the sea has no remorse  
As it beckons to its depths,  
With many a mariner lost,  
And no regrets.

### *No Man's Land*

If *Quasi Una Fantasia* seemed to be about mortification in life, then *Journey to Afterlife* is about death itself, and what hopefully lies beyond. It was painted on 13 July 1976 in Dublin, and depicts a family bereavement group of ancient Greeks launching a burning funeral barge on its journey to immolation and the sea. At the water's edge, a young woman consoles a crouched widow in morning black, as others gaze in lament from a more sheltered position on the shore.



*Journey to Afterlife*

The other figures are in white, and line the foot of a vast steep mountain in scattered groups, some reaching out in yearning loss. The landscape depicted was inspired by the memory of the artist's childhood voyage with his family en route from Beirut to Bari in 1967 as the ship passed at one point through the Greek islands of Kefallonia and Ithaki.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**LOSS OF AN INNOCENT**

What consoles the loner,  
Haggard traveller  
When the pyre  
Cremating by the riverside  
Is the last breath  
Against an infant's innocence?  
It is an absurdity.  
Life becomes a drug,  
*Quare viae impiorum prosperatur,*  
But it is the having that corrupts,  
The addiction fires the waning soul  
Where I did slay my opportunity.  
Feeble integrity is eaten away,  
Unto the death, ash-black night,  
Of four horsemen, sped and bled away.  
A soul fades to grey,  
Murdered in Hell's display,  
Age, like a dagger,  
Slaughters youth,  
Too soon, too soon.  
Through the tunnel of darkness,  
We are reduced to elemental truth  
Laid bare in Eternity,  
Seeing all through One.  
It is an Infinity.

**LOTUS**

How quietly it goes unnoticed,  
This thieving Time, slow flowing lotus  
On a gentle stream into the past.  
The yawning years if one ungrasped,  
Would break the hold of memories.  
Sentiments of melancholy  
Breath heavy penuries  
Over dead months, cut at ends,  
Drying into centuries.  
How quickly last year's harvest  
Is forgotten, laid to rest,  
Unwanted child of the mind  
How soon the loved are loosed,  
Allowed decease behind.

## *No Man's Land*



*The 1<sup>st</sup> Reduction*

Still on a general theme of solitary existentialism, the two paintings, *1<sup>st</sup>* and *2<sup>nd</sup>* *Reductions* treat of progressive abstraction.

In the first of these, *The 1<sup>st</sup> Reduction*, a solitary ship lies adrift, motionless in a gently undulating sea, where a dull mist is penetrated by a rising sun, and a lone bird passes over. *The 1<sup>st</sup> Reduction*, was painted on 27 April 1976 in Dublin where it remains, and is annotated “*Apparition afloat, adrift and aloft*” (24X20 inches; signed).

The second in this pair, *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Reduction*, portrays dark figures, vertically afloat and layered between undulating sky and sea. In a remorseless progression to infinity, they proceed outside and sometimes inside traced cubes or boxes that represent frames of reference. But though they seem to converge, they remain isolated in parallel directions.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**DRAMAS**

Where are those great dramas  
Of life, that unfold, untold,  
Where all is understood,  
Understood magnificently  
Between two strangers,  
In a silence  
That melts away the strangeness,  
Binding them together?

There are no adventures in life,  
I have heard it said;  
It is no story  
With neat beginnings and endings;  
Perhaps there are no adventurers.

I have played the accepted way,  
Displaying the known gestures of approach,  
- To no avail.

And the signs I see  
Usurp all interpretation.

The rules seem thwarted,  
- Changed secretly.

I can no longer play the game  
The old expected way,  
- Or any way at all.

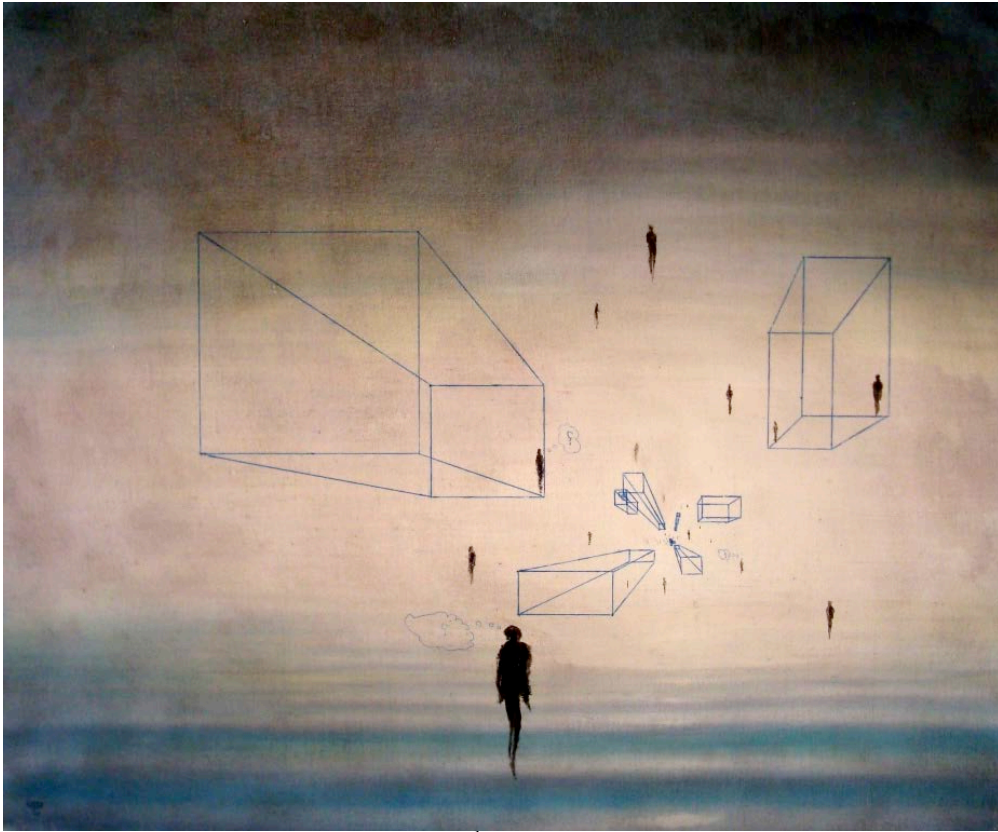
And what should I think  
At the end,  
Knowing neither beginning nor end?

- Nor any other?                      Shall I talk to myself,  
- Or even bother?

Life is a game, we said (for fools),  
And she replied:

- - - "There are no rules".

## *No Man's Land*



*The 2<sup>nd</sup> Reduction*

Painted on 29 July 1976 in Dublin, where it remains, this painting is annotated “*man in his entirety lives for nextness, existing beyond self, ingesting worlds, a universe possibilising the void, actualising possibilities, potentiality. The dynamic of intentionality creates his essence, reveals achievement, achieves being*”

### **INCIDENT**

There is a little creature floating on endless sea  
Who wonders what his stature in life could ever be.  
He contemplates his essence between the drowning waves  
And in an answer's absence, he then visits the graves  
That grace the ocean's floor.

Despite his zeal and seeking, he never finds the shore  
For the water is now reeking of the dying and the dead.  
He knows not where to turn, a fire within his head.  
And so his faith will burn, and hope fade away, cease.  
Only death then, will bring peace.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**CHIMERAS**

How April was a full month,  
What affairs, affairs,  
And brief lives snuffed out,  
Quick ends to chimeras.

What enigmas I lived,  
As we all did then.

I gazed eagerly from distances  
Of seeming impossibility,  
And as the gaps narrowed,  
As we each grew closer,  
These far-off dreams  
Becoming real.

I saw that all there was  
Were dreams,  
My impossible dreams.

For as I engaged further  
It became too reflective,  
My participation lacked involvement,  
Emotions dried up.

In my approaches,  
I soon withdrew.

And so I had to terminate  
These chimeras, illusions.

I had to hurt,  
But how reluctantly,  
How unwillingly,  
Only to save us all  
From a false hope,  
My doomed illusions,  
My treacherous dreams  
Of counterfeit worth.

### *No Man's Land*

*Redemption*, painted in April 1976, is a more personalized reflection on human life and on its origins. It is also titled *In Search of Innocence* and sub-titled *Two Portraits of the Artist as a Human Being*, as it articulates a larger foetus, imprecisely contoured, rising above and beholding a worried young man below, *Ecce Homo*, whilst offering an olive branch of peace. It carries a hand-written text on its reverse side which begins:



*Redemption*

*Life beyond the womb can be a fiasco. The supreme inter-human relationship is,  
Perhaps, not in the world, but in the womb, mother-child.*

The inscription continues to become the poem on the next page.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**IN SEARCH OF INNOCENCE**

*Portrait of the Artist as a Human Being*

Life beyond the womb can be a fiasco.  
The supreme inter-human relationship is  
Perhaps not in the world, but in the womb,  
Mother-child.

Beyond, I am but  
A greenfly impaled on a thorn,  
A beautiful rose-thorn.  
There are many thorns,  
Just as there are many ants also  
That can encounter one,  
Exude friendship,  
But only to enslave,  
That I might exude my life  
As food for them.

Night, like a dagger, stabs the moon  
And I am a cell, too soon,  
Words swirl, hypnotic and fatal –  
A fetal slavery follows  
A womb's fruition,  
And this fruition is exile.

À la recherche de l'innocence:

*"Mary, Mother of us,  
Where, where is your comforting?"*

*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"*

Yet Thy will be done.

Elohim offer a shekinah I wear with pain,  
But my thorn is a heart one, not a crown.

The emptied tomb lights the unseen womb.

The artist lived in the Middle East in 1965-1967, which left a deep impression, spiritually, existentially. Hence the influence of these allusions coming from the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the *Pater Noster*, as well as the Gospel's crucifixion cry, the Incarnation and the redemption of the Resurrection.

### *No Man's Land*

Moving beyond the dark and anguished period covered above and its expressions, the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias) forms the landscape for a series of paintings reflecting various tranquil moods. It was often observed by the artist at the much earlier age of twelve when he lived in Mizpa in 1966. In the paintings the sunrise is depicted from the shore-line near Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene, where eucalyptus trees line the shore and swayed above a beach of shells of freshwater mussels, often fragmented into translucent faint mother-of-pearl. Here, with his parents and two sisters, he would gather up some shells, before they proceeded to ride horse and enjoy rose-drinks at Vered HaGalil, or visit the two Franciscans, custodians of Caphernaum, where Christ had preached in the Synagogue whose pillars remain standing, and where St. Peter's mother-in-law lived in a house the foundations of which remain a site of veneration.



*Eucalyptus Dawn III*

As a child of 12 years, the artist used to rise early enough to watch dawn break over Mount Susita and the Golan Heights across the Sea of Galilee, from his then-home in Mizpa, overlooking Tiberias. *Eucalyptus Dawn II* was painted on 8 May 1976 in Dublin and given to an elderly aunt. *Eucalyptus Dawn III* (above) is depicted next, painted on 12 July 1976, in a different vein, without the clarity of the other two, and in cooler blue tones. A small stream slips motionless into the wider lake that will eventually feed the River Jordan downstream. It was gifted and remains in Belgrade.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**CRACKED ROCK**

Why, why this agony?  
I am cracked rock, crushed stone.  
I am burnt leaves.  
I am the shattered walls,  
    The battered hills.  
I am the twisted fuselage  
    Painted in dry red,  
    The skulls and skeletons  
    Covered in tight sinewy ornament,  
    The blood-red earth,  
    Barren of growth.  
I am the litany of images of death,  
    Your shell-shocked zombie,  
    Legless peasants,  
    Headless leaders,  
    Your decimated fetuses,  
    Bodyless corpses.  
I am your mirrored self, mirrored back,  
    Your poison, your suicide.

**A PILGRIM'S SUMMER**

Such rich drenching  
Of unshaded sun,  
Scattering gold on green,  
Have I not seen  
As densely unrelenting,  
Since those leaf-flung  
Petal-filled days,  
That sweetly throng  
The heat and haze  
Of a Hebron or a HaGalil,  
A Gizeh, Gaza, or Ghouta.  
This burnt brown hill,  
Arid Golgotha  
Above cracked wadi-clays  
Beneath a snake-skull,  
Recalls a way  
Of sorrowful calm,  
As a blossom-blown Tabor  
Will transfigure  
A winter Beit Lahm.

### *No Man's Land*

In equal nostalgia for those bygone years in the Holy Land, the landscape, *Hattin*, portrays a view of the Horns of Hattin seen through the valley of Mount Arbel beyond the shore of the Sea of Galilee at Magdala, and as seen from near Corazim. The scene is redolent with memories of the artist's childhood as he lived nearby, deeply aware of this being also the childhood and early ministry neighbourhood of Christ in Galilee. The Horns of Hattin is an extinct volcano on which the final battle of the Crusaders (Knights Hospitaller and Templar) was fought against Saladin's muslim armies, at the end of crusader rule in Palestine. Four thousand knights were martyred at the sword when they refused to convert to Islam. Visiting Hattin on one occasion with his father, the artist fell in a hornet's nest, and was stung multiple times on the legs. Only decades later did the resonance of this painful experience on the very fields of martyrdom of the Knights, strike home to the artist when he himself was invested into the modern successor Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the world's oldest humanitarian organization.



*Hattin*

The painting was commenced on 10 July 1976, from a photographic slide, and remains partly unfinished, in tandem with the artist's own life. The artist's late father, Patrick, also an amateur painter, had painted a similar scene from the identical viewpoint.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**WISDOM AND A FLOWER**

They call it circumcision  
But it was derision  
For a small boy at school,  
Feeling less than full  
At a decision  
For excision  
That made him  
Less than whole.

It made him tender,  
Sentimental,  
Feeling vulnerable,  
And gentle,  
Reeling fetish,  
More like sisters,  
Almost female,  
or else Jewish.

And if not to relish,  
Being just so Jewish,  
Though deeply victim,  
Not quite fully male,  
He learnt some Yiddish,  
From a Hasid's tale.

And as Buber would be Other,  
He dreamt to be a mother,  
To dance and twirl,  
And throw like a girl,  
Out from the eyes,  
And into the skies,  
His two irises,  
Two flowers to ponder,  
To feel and to fondle,  
The moral and the younger.

And so he took his cross,  
And dressed it,  
And in a fantasy,  
Expressed it.

## *No Man's Land*

Other paintings of a religious nature include *Discourse in Light Rain*, which portrays two Hasidic rabbis strolling in an imagined Galician countryside lane near Rivne amid undulating fields and hills, deep in debate on the finer points of the Baal Shem Tov.

The artist had spent some spare time during his university years studying the writings of Martin Buber (*Ich und Du*, *Tales of the Hasidim*, and other writings), and Samuel Dresner, as well as the teachings of the Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, and others.

This coincided with a period of deep interest in Middle Eastern society, religion, politics, and reconciliation, equally influenced by the writings of one Karol Wojtyla, future and now late Saint Pope John Paul II, especially his *The Acting Person*, and also his efforts to bridge the gulf between Jews and Christians.

The artist considers that one cannot be a good Christian without having an understanding and special fraternal affection for our elder spiritual brethren, the Jewish people, and their religion from which Christianity sprang.

*Discourse in Light Rain* was painted on 16 April 1976.



*Discourse in Light Rain*

A second version of the same, but with two lovers, depicts their leaving a darkened grove, a secret garden, as they stroll into a brighter landscape following a passing downpour, under a scavenging crow and a loftier dove beyond. It is entitled *Rendez-vous (Discourse in Light Rain, DLR II)*, and was painted on 5 June 1976 in Dublin, where it remains in storage.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **BEYOND PASSION**

This human love and lifelong mutuality  
Between each engaging self  
Cannot overcome the individuality  
Of the feeler for its felt,  
For all the magnetising beauty  
And enchanting engagement that  
This striving driving passion  
Fuels intimacy's intensity with,  
Cannot approximate the immersion  
Desired of the soul in its yearning  
To lose itself in the fullness  
Of complete divine absorption.

And so my love for you  
Is but a pale image of what might be  
Our encountering of the Holy,  
And the loss of my or your identity  
As we surrender all our being  
In the union of creation  
With the grace of the creator.

Let us be modest then in our emotions,  
And restrained in our expression,  
So that romance and its elations  
Deprives not our devotion  
But advances our transcendence.

### **UNSTUCK MYSTIC**

Not wanting to be too bombastic,  
And avoiding a verbal sarcastic,  
I duck your every ballistic,  
I wince and whine ever plastic,  
As we stretch our alliance elastic.  
I plead for nothing too drastic,  
Neither cystic, spastic, nor caustic,  
Forever a romantic rustic,  
One day your fantastic monastic.

*No Man's Land*



*Rendez-vous*

**EVENING**

Unkempt garden of relics and rust,  
And memories overgrown with weed,  
Bark of trees now wrinkled crust,  
And blossoms, long dead to seed  
On branches thick with bulging fruit,  
Bend heavy-laden to cracked clays,  
The tired trees back to old root,  
Silent weight born of these quiet days,  
Closing years of sunset skies,  
Slumbering, to youth reminisced in haze  
On faltering steps, ripened kindness, and sighs.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **UNDERGROWTH**

In an overgrown back garden,  
I return alone and longed for this, and missed  
The garden of my youth untamed,  
Now, matured, overgrown, and pissed  
I did, its fecundity unashamed.

Overgrowth undertones of green and brown  
As autumn leaves behind bare branches  
Where old souls once toiled and thrilled  
Or yet again, their soils were tilled,  
In between their raunches in the trenches.

Kids we were, climbing trees,  
Catching branches in the breeze  
Until their bugs got in our eyes,  
And rain fell on us from the skies.

Fingal's fields we plied  
Chasing butterflies and the odd moth,  
We caught a few with pride,  
Pinned in the thorax,  
And hoist the trophies in a box,  
Whose tiny cadavers survive  
In the brittle crispness of emptied carapace,  
And the irrelevance of peurile pride.

### **STRAIN IN THE FRAME**

As I advance in later age,  
I strain in the frame,  
and must repose if not suppose  
That my recline is not yours to decline,  
But merely mine to incline, and none to pine,  
For any sage will know to go without pain,  
Is our final aim,  
With no claim to fame.

## *No Man's Land*

*Belfield* is a painting of the Belfield campus of University College Dublin, the National University of Ireland, based on a photograph taken in 1976. The artist studied there from 1972 to 1975 when he graduated, and then worked a further year there to 1976 pursuing post-graduate studies and working in the Library.



*Belfield*

The picture is a night-time scene with a windswept cloud-cover appearing to bring on some rainfall allowing the shimmer of reflection from the illuminated Library. The 1976 painting depicts the bridge-tunnel between the dull Administration and dimmer Arts Blocks, with the brighter Library in the right foreground, leading down steps to the artificial lake, where students in day or night often sat together or alone in contemplation.

## **FALLACY**

Conjure me up  
A picture of bliss  
That fills my soul  
    With ecstasy  
Where I may go,  
To be enthralled,  
Where I might stay -  
    O, give me a fallacy.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**GRADUATES**

This was an unimaginative year  
As they trickled off,  
Hikers hitching for the future,  
A knapsack of knowledge  
Burdening each back,  
With the usual ambitions.

For a long time they vaunted  
Their fashions' paltry plumage,  
Post-war shirts and skirts,  
Their elders patched-up garbage,  
Until now poverty is old hat  
At the local labour exchange.

The folders and note-books  
Have kept them warm to reminisce  
The winter's new nostalgia,  
Leaf by leaf burning gaily  
Beside the coals and logs  
Of flatland bedsits.

The students have grown older,  
And the theatres are  
But cold brick upon grey brick  
Of submission and rebellion,  
Scenarios of selfhood,  
Deserted for a coming generation.

Spring offers a new covenant  
To the worshippers,  
Another absolute to adulterate  
With theories of relativity,  
The hindsight of experience,  
And the pith of post-grad exuberance.

*No Man's Land*



*The Lull*

This painting is annotated “*beaching the boat during the storm, Loughshinney*”. This painting imagines such a scene at a bay on the Irish Sea in Fingal, north of Dublin, where the artist often went with friends to swim during the summer, and to prowl the rocky foreshore or stroll along the cliffs above, on which an old Martello Tower stands. A sudden downpour was not unusual, as bathers or boaters scurried for cover. It was painted on 4 June 1976.

**A DAWN IN NEWGRANGE**

*(Four stanzas on an enigma)*

With the encountering  
Breath of the wind  
And unfaltering  
Thresh of the sea  
Against the shore  
And the rocks that grind,  
That splinter,  
And roll into debris,

### *Selected Poetry & Art*

Eroding and receding each day,  
In the ceaseless creation  
Of clay,  
Ancient high-flown dreams  
Of a delicate age  
Are only faded memories now,  
Heavy poverties  
To weigh a brow  
Towards some musty page.

As I am drawn  
To an end uncleaved,  
This season's close  
Calls falling leaves  
To touch the ground,  
The winter's shroud  
Whose stark beauty  
In silence weaves  
A pattern, echoed  
By the cloud  
Now bleaking out  
The once-blue sky,  
And drifting down  
Past penuries  
To haunt  
Nostalgic tapestries,  
And sate them with sobriety.

I will repose,  
Unknown, down deep,  
By the flat top  
Of a vague hill,  
Below billowing grey  
And still,  
And day through night,  
Cool winds shall sweep  
Over long damp grass  
In wild waves,  
Where evergreen oak  
And yew sigh  
Above our rows  
Of girdled graves,  
And black pilgrims  
Each mourning pray  
Their solemn dawn obituary.

*No Man's Land*

But,  
With the golden sun showering down  
Such rich grains of sweetly shedded warmth  
As float softly to the browned earth,  
And stir out of their stillness, the seeds  
To rise into great splashes of green  
Radiant foliage, from need grown  
Out of exhausted lives, years gone cold,  
Strengthened by thrusting ground-ward its roots  
To flourish in the dark of old fruits,

The winter solstice  
Strikes the unseen stone.



*The Haven*

A similar painting, but set in the land/seascape of Spiddal in Galway reflects better the Atlantic vastness. It was painted on 15 July 1976, and is annotated “*beaching the yachts before the storm, Spiddal*”. The yachts are visible close up in the distance of the foreground bay.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**OLD TOMORROWS**

The restless sea  
How soon loses calm  
That I would claim for me  
As balm for my wounds  
Undone ruthlessly.

Instead, I feel cut in the gut,  
And sunken into a rut:  
The wounds of one  
Who bears again  
The losing of once-won  
Peace, now disturbed and gone  
In its shattering  
In sharp pieces,  
Pierces deep sores,  
Weeping salt sadness  
Out of tired sorrows.

Peace of heart was one of  
Yesterday's great joys -  
- how sweet it filled  
The dreams of loneliness,  
Making men of boys.  
How much a mystery it was  
Overwhelming reason  
And sometimes sense,  
But loss betrays  
The play of toys.

How soon we are lost,  
Like old tomorrows,  
As dreams return  
And maybe nightmares,  
And life becomes a furrow.

If only I could make it  
A ploughed field,  
And find the seeds  
That loss may leave,  
To sow and still  
To but believe, and  
In harvest to retrieve.

## *No Man's Land*

Except for the two years spent living in the Middle East in the mid-1960s, the artist lived and grew up in Dublin, in a northern suburb that lay in ancient Fingal, a feudal lordship originally held by grand serjeanty, now a county itself since 1994. In his youth he often cycled the country roads and lanes of Fingal, with its rolling hills, streams, orchards and fields gently descending to the Irish Sea.

In *Fingal Field*, we see a freshly ploughed field, in typical June weather in Ireland. The field hosts crows scavenging in the laid-bare sods, with trees and their branches hosting a butterfly duet in their shade, and appearing to sway under a rain-soaked sky of typically low-lying and fast moving clouds



*Fingal Field*

In the distance a sliver of the sunlit Irish Sea appears on the horizon and it would appear to be a summer's morning as the sun has risen there but still illuminates the eastern clouds with the hues of its warm glow.

*Fingal Field* was painted in his Dublin home on 14 August 1976, and given to the artist's parents. It hung in the family home in a spot which previously displayed a large painting by Frank McKelvey (1895-1974), RHA, of a rustic tinker's caravan in a country road in a similar landscape.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**AFTERNOON TEA**

There is a taste in her mouth,  
The bitter ash of wasted words,  
The phone rings, a smile;  
Ah, wrong number.

Disturbed ears echo away,  
Outside the clouds are grey.

A quiet Sunday afternoon, I sit,  
And read the papers for a while.

Buttermilk out of the wrong bottle  
The tea tastes sour after an hour,  
Poised as it is, unwanted much.  
She feels the same; and I'm ashamed.  
We children know she deserves more.

An avalanche of pounding heels on the stairs,  
Like a collapsing wall of mouldy bricks,  
Futile anger without pause – I turn the page,  
Bad humour again draws no headlines for me;  
Neither his nor hers, but  
Our military Dad always has his way,  
And keeps us all at bay.

She sulks annoyingly,  
Martyred for the cause;  
It ill befits her age, this  
Bittersweet feminine rage.

Even in her silence,  
A trifle loud, and obvious,  
It grates the ears, or more the heart.

Maybe this is what life is like on islands,  
Big or small, surrounded by oceans,  
And the depths that feed our distance  
From each other,

Which is why we need such rituals as  
Cucumber sandwiches, fairy cakes,  
And afternoon tea,  
Even in the Irish Army.

## *No Man's Land*



*Dublin Bay*

Another Irish landscape is the painting of *Dublin Bay*, which reveals the sea-floor at low-tide between Clontarf and Dollymount with the bridge to Bull Island beyond.

The coastal road from Howth appears on the extreme right leading to the old wooden bridge and to the city, and indeed to a warmer, brighter distance as the sun begins its evening descent beaming under the windswept clouds above as some showers pass over.

Like *Fingal Field*, this is another 1976 finely detailed landscape painted with an attention to the climatic nuances of typically Irish weather and its impact on the interplay of light and shade, in tone and hue.

The artist painted several other Irish landscapes, such as *Cornfield Fight* (12 August 1976 and given to one of the artist's sisters), and *Ploughed Field* (3 September 1976, given to a friend's cousin).

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **FATHER, SON**

Your guided us through life, and chided us,  
Mellowing with warmth and love in the twilight of your time.

In later years your memory searched your early days,  
Recalling childhood secrets laid bare in your last reminiscences.  
We understood you better then and cherished you the more,  
As our conversations became basic, devoid of argument.

In the last months you affirmed life's fundamentals,  
By your tenderness, your thoughtfulness, and your love,  
And you inspired my fatherhood.

And in your final days, we rallied around you,  
And we took turns to watch for you, with you,  
And we prayed, beside you, over you, for you.

Your feared the terror of the night,  
And I called upon Him to be your light.

And I held you as you took your last drink,  
Milk, much like your first.

We felt your pain as you groaned each time they turned you,  
The ankle-bone rending your tissue.

Your eyes ceased to blink as they stared outward,  
And your breathing lengthened intervals  
With an occasional heave.

I anticipated your last breath, ever faint  
I watched for receding colour  
And saw your hands go grey,  
I felt them cold and watched to see any other sign of life,  
I could not find your heartbeat, and then knew your pulse had ceased,  
and only a gasp emerged from your stiffening chest.

You were gone.

But days before then, when you still could hear,  
I shared with you that you would know,  
The news that father, and son, we cheer,  
For you could love us all, beyond and near.

## *No Man's Land*

By far one of the more sentimentally positive pictures is the painting *Summer's Harvest II*, which depicts a woman and girl picking flowers in early autumn in a landscape reminiscent of Kenmare Bay in County Kerry in Ireland. This was begun in July/August 1979, and finished in 1981 in Maseru, Lesotho.

The rustic scene is a throw-back to an idealized nineteenth century vision of rural Ireland, with a small cottage on the edge of a field, on a mildly cloudy and windy late summer's evening.



*Summer's Harvest II*

The hay has been harvested into hay-stacks, and with a patchwork of fields and hedgerows leading in the distance to a sliver of a Kerry estuary beyond which lie typical Kerry mountains.

This painting is in fact a modified and improved rendition of an almost identical mural, *Summer's Harvest I*, which the artist painted in 1977-1978 on a wall that filled in an old doorway in his former rented house in Khartoum, Sudan, but where the sole character in the field was a farmer using a scythe to mow the hay.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **OCTAGENARIAN**

A Christmas afterthought, born on Stephen's day,  
A family's favourite wizened into  
The martyrdom of marriage and motherhood.

Her victimhood replicated as we flew away,  
But her struggles yielded later to  
The comfort of the dowager and her brood.

Her aging ducklings landed at Duagh's port,  
Like Lir's swans, from across the lake.  
My summoned siblings doing their sisters' take  
On yet another trip back from abroad.

And I through a lens darkly reel-in the images  
Harvested for memory's future vestiges.

Four score years already spent,  
My mother remains at the dance,  
A lepidopteran enjoying wingspread  
Before she makes angel flight instead.

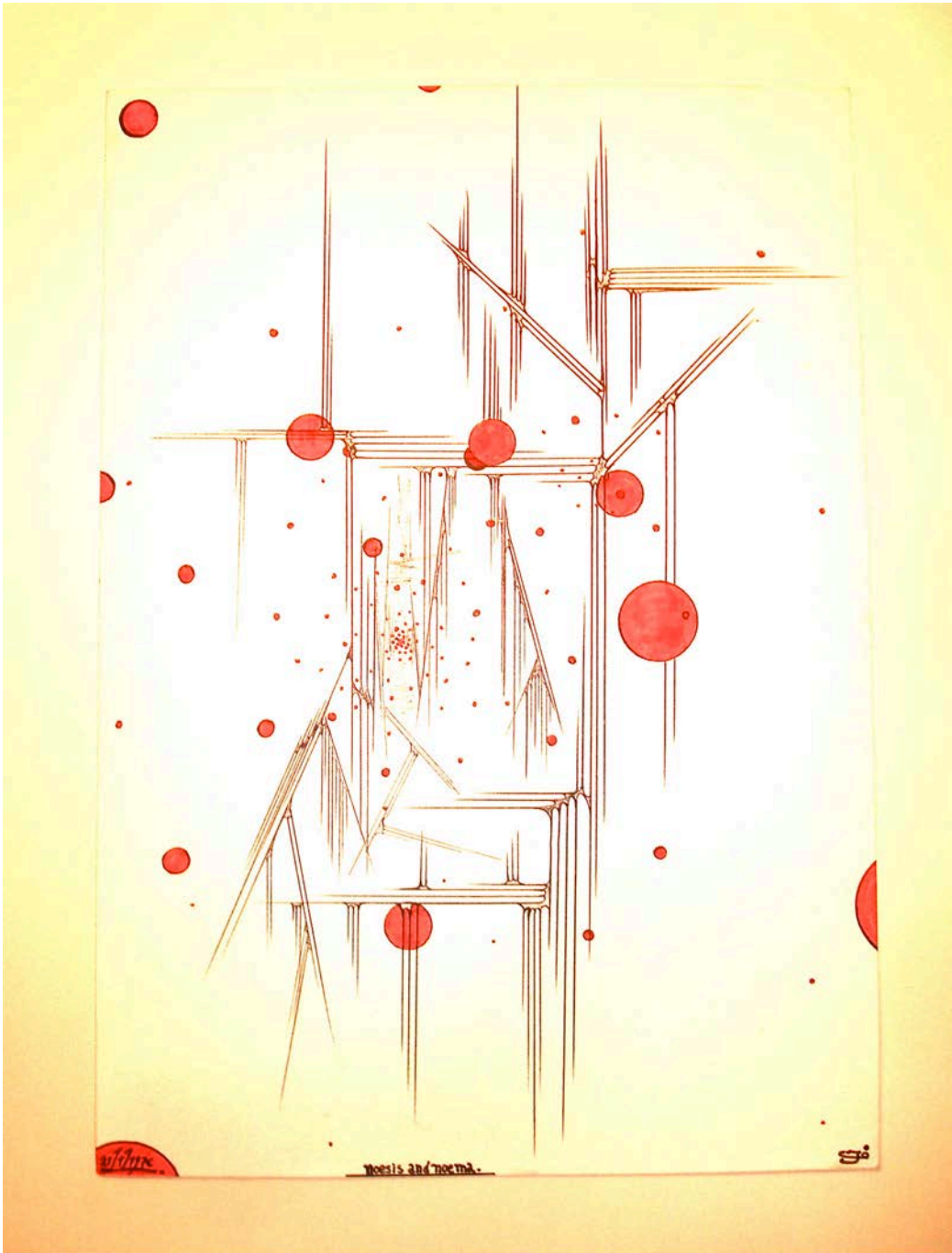
Her parents, sisters, brothers and husband gone,  
Enough to charm a lifetime's reminiscence,  
She exudes her love in an aphid's trance,  
Or shedding meconium on a geranium,

And we leave her still at home  
Watching the world go by,  
And in our separate ways we fly  
Laden with the annual pudding, cake, and kiss  
And the knowledge she still prays for us,  
And all we do and make, and miss.

### **NEWBORN**

She as radiant ever shone sunrise,  
Bore beautifully the dawn,  
Caressed the newborn daughter  
Blessed of our love belonged,  
Betokening thanksgiving,  
Our rejoicing newfound.

*No Man's Land*



*Noesis and Noema*

A sketch inspired by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's spirituality as well as his works *Cosmogenesis*, *Le Milieu Divin*, and *Le Phénomène Humain*.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

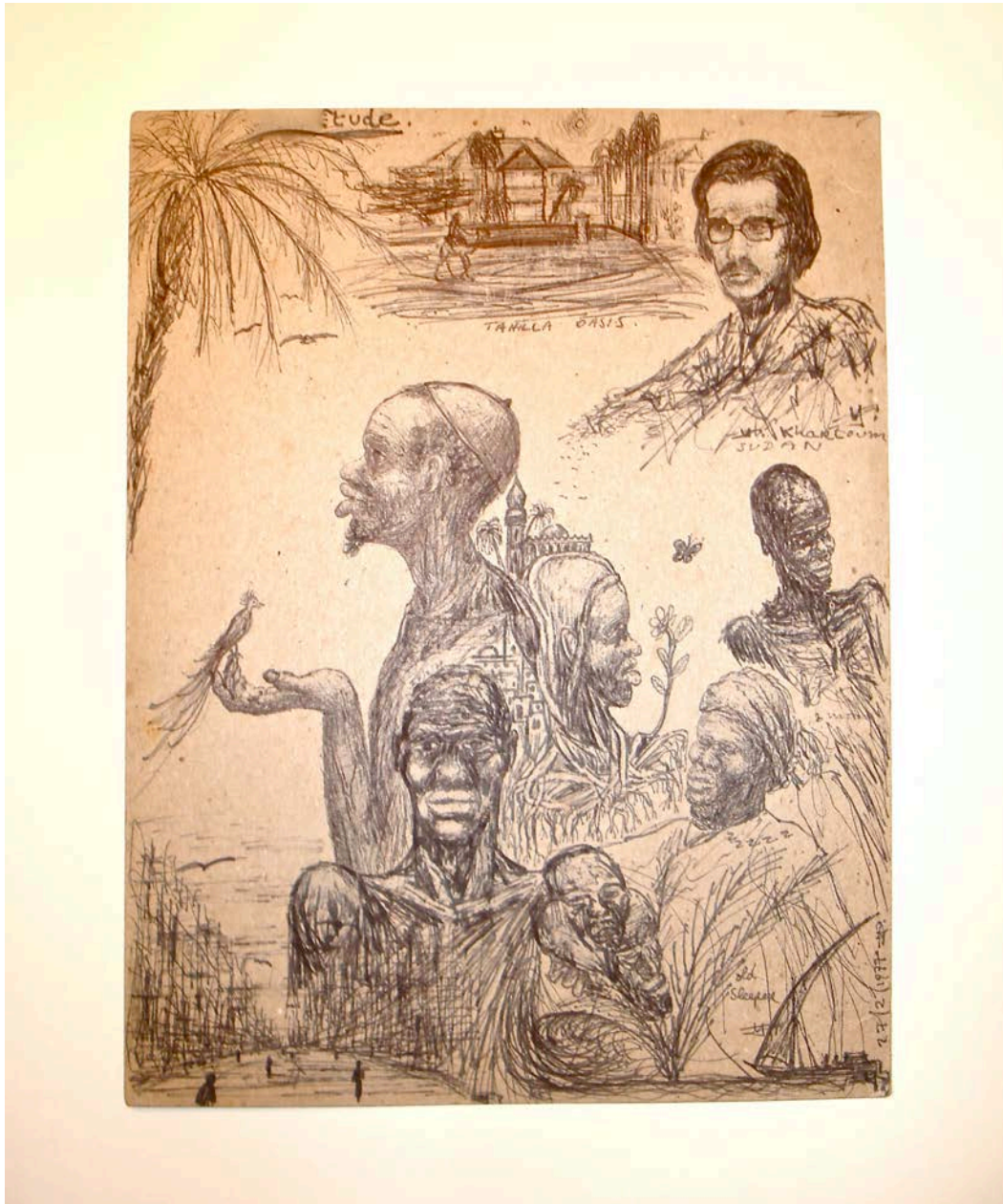
### **KHARTOUM**

Days come,  
Laden with a strange magic,  
The sharpness of eye, ear,  
Acuity of mind  
Intently focussed  
On each moment.  
Drama,  
Depth of meaning,  
Melancholy,  
The far distance of home,  
The joy of each discovery,  
All mingle, timeless  
In a conscious  
Passage of history;  
A sense of the romantic,  
The remote,  
A visionary nostalgia,  
Reborn,  
In the backwardness  
Of poverty;  
The noble feeling  
Of a great story,  
Untold,  
In a hopeless tragedy,  
Of the dark resurgent,  
Anxiety.

### **DESERT ACORN**

I am  
Torn from rootedness,  
Acorn in a wasteland  
And yet more like  
A date-palm seed that must dry  
In the killing sun  
Before the moisture of growth  
Can bring it to life.

*No Man's Land*



*Etude* (1977)

A study of themes on the cardboard base of an old sketch pad. Atop, a tropicalised fantasy of the artist's childhood home in Glasnevin, with his wizened self-portrait. Below, a treatment of Nubian and Sudanese characters in their strength, aesthetic joys at nature, and struggles of sinew and strain, with an *Alienation*-series sketch on lower left and Nile dhow on lower right.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**NEW EXTENSION**

*γνώθι σεαυτόν*

A pleasantly cool day,  
Overcast in 'Amarat,  
Relief from the overbearing heat.

As a human experience,  
Today is however thoroughly miserable;  
Loveless, friendless, useless,  
Without any satisfaction, nor content,  
And generally a derelict sense of ruin  
Pervades me, my heart, mind and soul.

I ask myself why this incongruity?  
What kind of salvation is possible  
For each of these three dimensions of my being,  
If any?

There must be, I feel, some purpose made out of this  
Moment of desperation,  
Sense of devastation.

Perhaps some major decision-making in my life,  
A moment when the first pangs  
Of a new future are rife,  
To bear forth the heart's greater desire,  
Falteringly.

Perhaps I need a new extension,  
Just not *Al Imtidad al Jadid*,  
But something more, reflection  
Of a life born but not matured enough  
To overcome internal strife.

There are particular times,  
More than moments,  
Junctures of opportunity  
That call our attention  
To realize our full potential.

It is then I need to  
Know myself.

## *No Man's Land*



*Sunset South of Tuti*

*Sunset South of Tuti* was painted some weeks later, on 29 March 1981. It depicts Mogran at confluence of Blue and White Niles, Khartoum.

Years later, in a memory of Sudan, the artist painted *Khartoum Market*, a complex market scene of the *Suq al 'Arabi* in Khartoum.

The scene is rich in warm colour, and filled with characters busy in different groups, attending stalls of fruit and vegetables under an awning beneath Neem trees, and selling produce on the ground, with a large building in the distance and the vague profile of a mosque beyond.

Whilst the scene also articulates the typical dusty haze of a hot day in Khartoum, some clouds gathering in the blue sky suggest the possibility of rain. The characters are dressed in typical Sudanese attire, with several men in Jelabiyas, one stoutly striding, and women wearing the Tob, as others wear modern gear.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **TORRENTS**

In torrents, the rainy season,  
Downpours and inundates;  
Deluges through the gate,  
Arguments without reason  
Dissipate.

Women take to Zar to trance,  
Children waddle off to dance,  
The donkey gains respite  
From their ecstatic delight.

Resurgent verdure leaps out of ground,  
Bursts to blossom,  
The deep breath of trees  
Rewards with fragrance in the breeze.

The desolation of arid plains  
Is consoled, relieved;  
Herds begin to roam,  
Run-off courses down wadis,  
Undermining an adobe home;

Even the Merkhiyat jebels  
Bloom in a kind of modest way,  
Worth a camel day, or 4 by 4,  
Like a trip to Glenmalure  
On a fine Sunday.

Fecund dirt revives  
Stinking humidity  
To resurrect odours of decay,  
And strains of everyday  
Again irritate.

Tension of romance  
Laden with haboob,  
Tsunami of dust overpowers,  
The scents and the sense.

If they flog women in Omdurman  
For no hijab nor thoub,  
Pity the donkey then,  
Who has no ombudsman.

*No Man's Land*



*Khartoum Market*

This painting was based on a sketch the artist made on 28 December 1977, itself based on a composition using three actual photographs of the market scene, taken on 21 July 1977 after a night of heavy rains. The scene suggests the mixed cultural and ethnic diversity of Khartoum, and the vibrancy of its traditional way of life even in modern times as people go about their business, buying for their families, perhaps a Ramadan evening breakfast, or some other feast.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**PREPARATION FOR A FEAST**

A night's pervading dust  
Obscured starlight of aeons ago and beyond our time,  
Settling at dawn to a crimson veil  
Caressing with clouds the horizon's renaissance.

The night-cool lingered its faint moisture  
Through blossoms, flowers, fruits,  
Bearing awhile the sweet fragrance of desert life  
Across the corrugated roof-tops and their adobe courtyards.

The slaughtered lamb swung from the porch lintel,  
As the last spasm of life shivered out of it,  
Daylight at last entering the open eyes,  
A night's fatal agony had blinded forever.

Three paces away a drying pool  
Echoed the morning's claret glow,  
Drawing flies to their frenzied debauchery,  
Buzzing cacophony drowning the lingering whine  
Of the night's last drunken mosquito.

Scenting sanguinity, dogs of the street,  
Flea-bitten and pockmarked strays,  
Arose from their sandbeds to hunt,  
But tail-wagged their greeting  
The old Nubian milkman astride his wizened mule.

The sizzling of roasting coffee beans  
Mingled with splash of awakening ablutions  
The aromas both delicious and fresh,  
Like the scent of Nefertiti's perfume,  
Before her rest entombed.

By breakfast time, the fleece was rolled away,  
And I remembered *Ecce agnus Dei*.

*No Man's Land*



*Nile Sunset – Mogran*

*Nile Sunset – Mogran* is another typical Sudanese scene in Khartoum. In this, the sunsets over Tuti Island at the confluence of the White and Blue Niles. The overhanging Banyan trees shelter a quayside where an old steamer has docked, having made its way down the White Nile from Malakal in the far south.

People come and go, overlooked by a traditional musician playing his flute as the sun beams across with great power before it sets for the day. The sunburst streams energy in all directions, and the texture of this painting reflects that energy vividly and harmoniously.

The painting was based on several photographs taken by the artist when he lived in Khartoum, and is a realistic image of life as it has been, and largely still is.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### MALAKAL

We flew in, as the Shilluk swirled around,  
And led us into a mesmerized world,  
Forgotten era clashing with faint modernity.

A handful of expats building boats and teaching nomads how to fish  
Belied the incongruence – “*get them ready for the great canal!*”  
Lord Jim would be at home here,  
In the heart of deepest Africa.  
Derelict vestiges of colonial domesticity.

Vultures patrolled pathetic plots,  
As ravens romped on roofs,  
Lethargic lizards on walls,  
Goats and hens roamed through yards,  
A tukul and tents,  
Everything loose and limpid  
No broken box nor fence made sense,  
In this weevils wonderland,

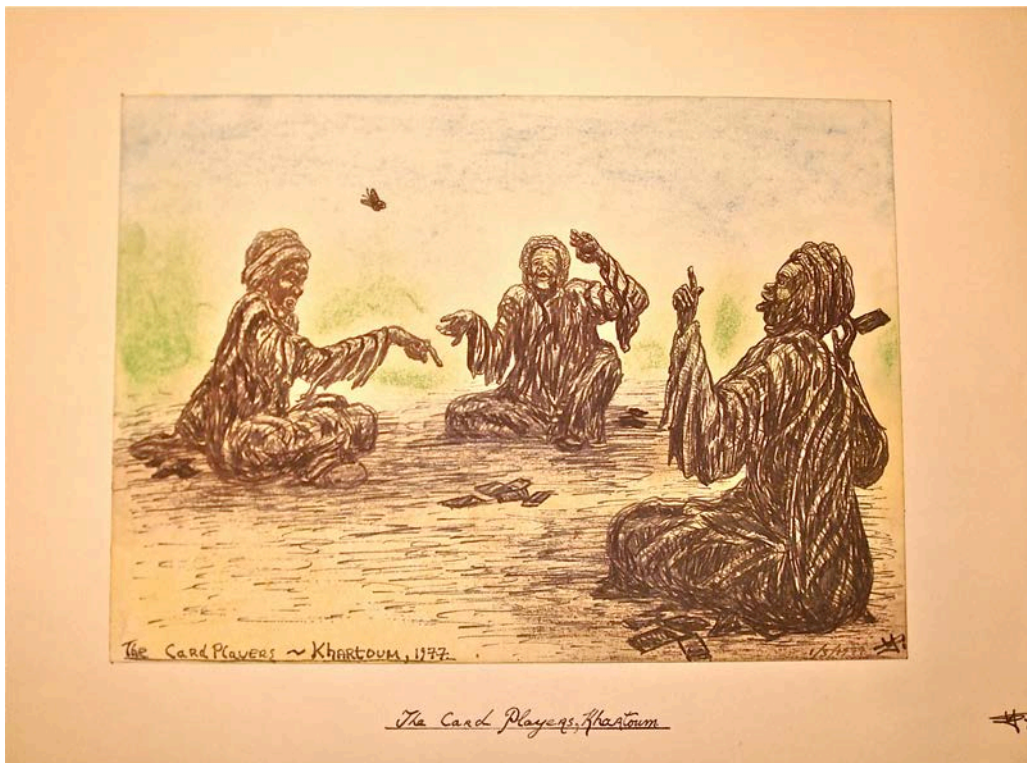
Yet we feasted on papaya breakfast,  
With the usual fish, fuul, and fowl.  
And Awiel’s alien rice in a bowl.

Broken villas housed families, their chattels, and their spears;  
As the dancers trampled the dried mud,  
Already cracking deeply after miring for months the inroads and pastures;  
Barges slowly creeping up the Nile,  
Laden with food aid stocks, in Africa’s future granary,  
Steamers struggling through the choking water hyacinth.

And on the other bank, tired Anyanya encamped in a fragile peace,  
Hidden by papyrus that once recorded ancient civilizations downstream.  
Who even remembers whether Fashoda was worth it, or any Pharoah?  
A place of transience, a moment of impending, a decrepitude in solitude,  
A place where the action is on the other side, not here,  
But where here seems the center, not there.

Little could they know of the great Jonglei fiasco to come,  
Nor of the next wars and their toll in human suffering.

*No Man's Land*



*Khartoum Scenes (1977)*

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **MERRION HILL**

Sipping a cold beer  
On the banks of the Nile,  
As the sun set over Omdurman,  
And Mogran merged with Tuti's isle,  
I thought of the late evening  
Fires of summer raising  
Their wisps of smoke  
From Glasnevin to Merrion Hill,  
Of tall beech, birch, and oak,  
And the gardens' smell  
Of fresh clippings of grass edges,  
The sun casting long shadows,  
The rectangular hedges,  
The tennis lawns mown,  
Darkening as the sun set,  
The dew settling on the crisp umber leaves,  
Rendering them soft and wet,  
Swallows homing on their thatch and eaves,  
Bending blades of greenery,  
And the courts' white symmetry,  
Love, set and match.

### **THE DICE**

My dust is gathering, my shedding years unfold.  
And soon a time will come that I am but a story told,  
Yet another one of love and failure, wine and gold,  
Temptation and resistance beckoning their hold,  
The ebbing waves and troughs of illusions manifold.  
And my life but a flutter in the wind, young passing old.  
Gone, like a used-up and discarded antique sold,  
Raw material for a new thing, the dice rolled.

*No Man's Land*



*Desert Sunset, Nile side during Habool, Sudan.*

*A*



*Sudanese Khartoum Breakfast, taken at about 10 AM.  
"IL FUTUR."*

*Just to give you all an idea!*

*19/1/1917*

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**DESERT WINTER**

The sun slumbers over the distant emptiness.  
The glow, orange-blue, bears upwards  
And over the cold terrain.

The wind weaves through mud-brick  
Baked in an earlier month;  
Cuts icily to the vein, the bone,  
But it is so dry.

No dew arises in the vast vacant plains,  
No moisture arises in the warming daylight.

The sere cold cracks rock into hot noon,  
Arid out of all proportion.

Unvariegated continuity,  
Barren uniformity.

The hawk soars off out of the dead tree;  
The sky sentinels loom and sweep  
To the forgotten crust,  
The discarded husk.

A pontoon drifts listless,  
Relic of antiquity.

The work, casual as it is, stops;  
The coffee is poured into the small porcelain finjan,  
Swirling thickly in ginger and cardamom;  
It is gone quickly, like a shot of whiskey.

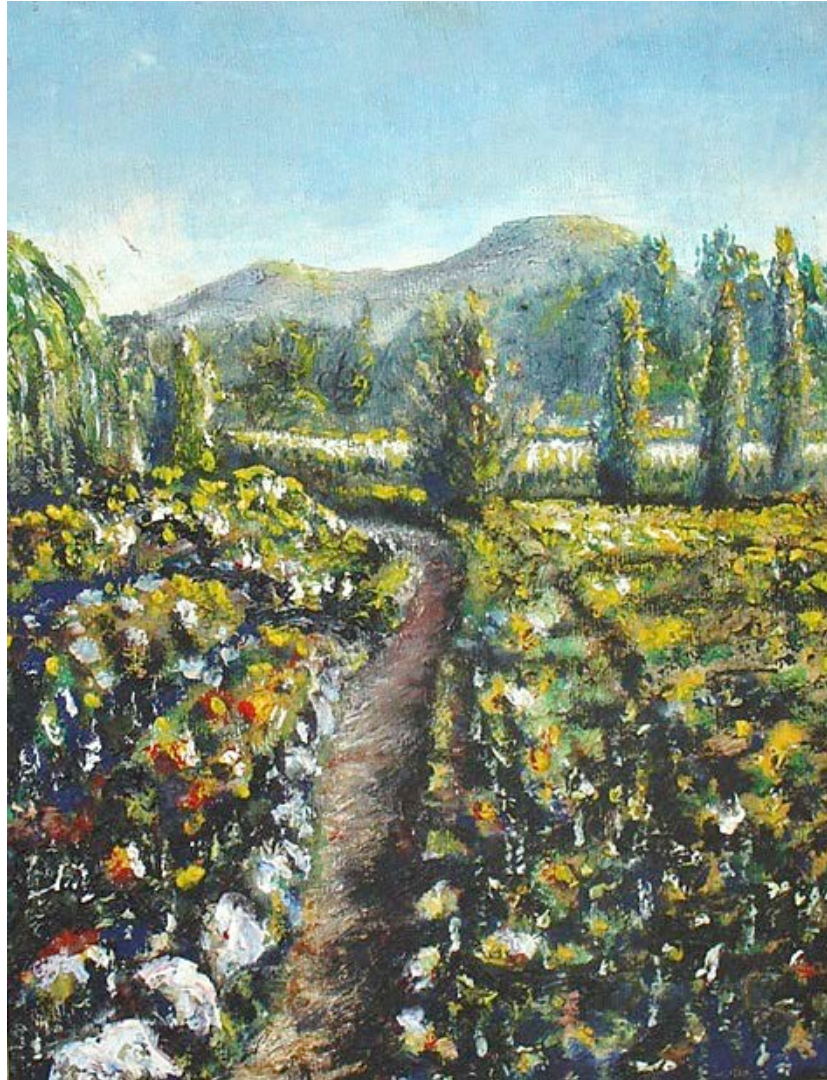
By the early hour of noon  
The day's dust has been well stirred-up,  
The street's haze  
Obscures,

And I rush my head to the fridge  
For a breath of cool fresh moist air,

A moment of Kerry mist  
On the edge of the Sahara.

### *No Man's Land*

In addition to *Summer's Harvest II* (page 76), the artist painted four more landscapes in Maseru, Lesotho where he lived during the period 1979-1983. These paintings are paintings of Lesotho itself, mostly painted in 1982-1983.



*Maseru Garden*

The first of these, *Maseru Garden*, depicts a garden path through a garden grown on a gentle slope, with a willow tree to the left, and poplar trees to the right middle distance. In the far distance lies one of the hills surrounding Maseru, in the neighbourhood called New Europa. This neighbourhood was a complex of small villas, where the artist lived. From there, one could see South Africa across the Mohokare or Caledon river. The actual garden was on a hillside above, and was terraced in the autumn of 1979 by the artist, who laid the garden path depicted in the painting. The painting is rich in impressionistic colours evoking stones and rocks, and brown earth, with marigolds and many shrubs as well. A corn field lies in middle distance.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **OLD LEAVES**

Some old leaves, worn out, past prime and past time,  
Blown to rest in Autumn's gusts,  
Huddle around the stems of belated rose blooms,  
Residues of a warmer clime,  
Like the fatigued wooden cross, itself only too keen to recline,  
Its dedication turn to rust,  
Like the old soul it serves to remind us of, gone to dust,  
In the parkland that now conceals the relics of so many,  
Unknown victims of a former regime's prison,  
As its notoriety now reveals, political prisoners of a dynasty  
Since dethroned, unable to amnesty, and unfit for  
Whatever revolutionary purpose pretended to do better,  
But to witness and expose, belatedly,  
That no ideology has ever, nor will,  
Guarantee the wisdom of its leaders,  
Nor the compassion of its system.  
The best intentions of ancient heroes  
Lie in the ruins of past civilizations.

### **SOBIESKIPLATZ**

Astride a bench in Sobieskiplatz, I was -  
As the autumn sun probed through falling leaves, and saw  
A wasp in search of old fruit or scent of wasted pith, while  
A gust breezed gilded sheddings past the statute, standing,  
Of saintly Johann Nepomuk, where toddlers swirled amok, and  
Roused me from my slumber, as I dozed in wait for schnitzel,  
Highlander's fare for Alpine forays, and respite between the algorithms  
Of important tweets, their likes and RTs, obliterating the primacy of authentic being  
The organic sentience of an unrepentant sting;  
A screech rings out – a child in open rebellion  
From an inattentive mom, immersed in selfie addiction,  
As a tree's discarded foliage somersaults, weaves, and glides from a branched past,  
Through aerial present, and future mulch.  
There lies the rub of renewal generations trod  
In their great migrations, crusades and lamentations,  
Whether devastators and destitutees, penitents before their God,  
But merciless in their relentless striving and exactions,  
Yet occasionally saving a civilization from hostile invasions,  
As the man who saved Vienna and lent his name to this modest Platz,  
Jan, the *Lion of Lechistan*.

*No Man's Land*



*Morija Lake*

*Morija Lake* is an authentic rendition of that lake, south of Maseru, Lesotho. In it the sun will soon set, though not yet. It shimmers across the lake, as it beams through breaks in a largely cloudy sky. The soft breeze of the clouds above is mirrored in the gentle ripples on the shore. The painting is detailed in its birds, shrubs, branches, and leaves, down to the glint of the sun on some ripples and waterside reeds.

The scene is relatively tranquil but not without some animation, if not an air of expectancy. The artist would occasionally fish at this precise spot for bass to provide for the family table at weekends.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**NO LETTERS**

No letters, only solitude;  
And much great distance  
Yawning between.

Far in memory, in space,  
And bridged only by a yearning;  
No letters.

Yet so many humans, so many,  
And so alone, alone.

In a vast empty desert and great heat  
A lone struggling spectre  
Cries out of the depths  
Of its seemingly infinite loneliness,  
A dreadful gaping plea  
To the heart of the Universe.

And life turns to tragedy.

The strains play on into  
The dim-lit night  
Of descension.

The stomach reels empty.

The rains have come too late  
For the dead herds  
Parched into the cracked soil;  
Too late for the dry skeletons  
Of plant, beast, and man,  
Now washed away  
In the rising flood  
Of oblivion.

The irradiation of solitude  
Anguishing the yearning,  
Alone.

No other souls.  
And no letters.

## *No Man's Land*

*Maloti Mountains* is an imagined landscape, in that although it depicts a possible scene in the Maloti Mountains of Lesotho, near the Drakensberg of South Africa. In actual fact the peaks are imaginary, and between the two large peaks across the valley, in the distance stands a much larger mountain, which with the slope in its foreground, actually depicts the complete map of Africa. The scene was originally sketched immediately after a dream by the artist in which he was hiking with friends through such a landscape.



*Maloti Mountains*

In the painting, a Mosotho shepherd is walking on a mountain earthen track with two animals in front, sheep or dogs, as they pass under a small hamlet with a Basotho family group between two rondavels or thatched huts. A third rondavel lies on the slope below. The vegetation includes aloes and poplars, and brightly illuminated cornfields in the valley below where the sun streams from the right, as the wind blows from the left.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**LE BERCEAU DE MON COEUR**

*To the mother of my child who understands it best*

Avec tant de retard,  
Meilleure amie,  
Nous réunissons nos regards,  
Et mes rêves se jettent à ton égard  
Te désirant muse de ma vie  
Et je te dédie ces vers,  
Pas pour autrui.

Trop souvent seul dans mon sommeil,  
Je pense à ta souffrance pendant de longues années  
Dont je ne pourrais jamais suffisamment compenser,  
Ni par mes regrets tristes et douloureuses,  
Ni par ma culpabilité d'être trop souvent absent  
Aux moments clefs de survie.

La douleur approfondie de la perte,  
De notre ange d'amour et la tragédie  
D'une blessure toujours ouverte,  
Nous tracasse à travers les années -  
Que son âme nous pardonne  
De notre insouciance,  
Lamentable manque de conscience,  
Notre faiblesse peu pardonnable,  
Notre échec de devoir.

Seul le bon Dieu saurait à quel point  
Nous devons nous pardonner l'un à l'autre,  
En réconciliant tristesse avec le bonheur de notre enfant grandissant,  
Dont l'avenir reste incertain,  
Mais notre responsabilité toujours plus exigeante  
Doit lui rassembler la sagesse d'une moralité tendre sinon parfaite.

Inoubliable et inlassable chérie,  
Ta poitrine est le berceau de mon cœur,  
Et tes seins l'oreiller de mon esprit.

*No Man's Land*



*Sarajevo Library*

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

*Sarajevo Library* is based on a real scene of the artist, dressed in Kevlar flak-jacket and UN blue helmet, as he visited the ruins of the then-national library in Sarejevo on 28 April 1993, shortly after its willful destruction during the Bosnian war in 1992.

On the day of the visit itself, Sarajevo was shelled about 250 times, and three children were killed. In a sense the destruction of the Library symbolized the death of Yugoslavia as a multicultural state.

The library was an exceptional piece of architectural heritage with features that mirrored the complex and diverse tapestry that comprised not only Yugoslavia but Bosnia and Sarajevo itself.

The features included Classical, Venetian, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian, Muslim and Jewish motifs, and the incendiary destruction was so complete that the heat even shaved shards of stone off the columns.

Only one window stood largely intact, a stained glass window above a staircase, which the artist points to from the staircase in the painting. In the painting, the view is from an inner darkness of destruction below, towards the figure beckoning towards the window above, as light streams through the slightly damaged window, through the rich colours of the stained glass, and seems to offer both a pathway beyond this destruction, and a promise of hope outside, above and beyond.

The beauty of the multicolored window reflects appreciation of once-celebrated diversity and multiculturalism, against the dark and somber uniformity of exclusivist ethnocentrism.

The building was finally renovated and re-opened in 2014 as Sarajevo's City Hall. It is again restored as extraordinary monument to Sarajevo's rich, diverse, and multicultural and multi-faith heritage.

Its destruction was a terrible act of cultural as well as human atrocity.

*No Man's Land*

**THE SUNDIAL GARDEN**

Wild green overgrown, lilac blown yellow,  
Sugar on the tongue, cuddles in the meadow,  
Seductions of red, blue, and white proliferate  
Below the stars and stripes that infiltrate.

Above cracked ladybird carapace  
And ailing ragwort, sirens entice  
Away to shelters underneath the rock  
Under ballistic tracery like Jackson Pollock.  
Children picking posies play  
Dangerous games offending harmony,  
Amid a dose of depleted geranium  
Stuck in asphalt, and the rubble of an army.

Years on, a farmer, junkie for Monsanto,  
Tills alien crops in a rustic Balkan biome,  
To feed the world on GMO, even in Sarajevo.  
Trojan foods, for a gastronome.

Here is a beauty, in the month of May,  
Shattered glass of conservatory,  
Here is a duty, tranquil and heavy,  
Collecting shards for memory.

A Council divided procrastinates,  
While investigators exhume,  
And DNA confirms the worst fates  
Among the dead wood in layers strewn.  
In a ditch not meant for planting,  
They find evidence not wanting,  
Dark yews wafting the scent  
For many a lament.

The light of old days, many regrets, hovers  
In the mind at dusk, remembered,  
And this aging sun glows little embers  
Dropping below the horizon.  
Reflecting untended absence,  
Authentic in its fate of late,  
Dying aubretia inhumes itself,  
Allowing seed to germinate.

## *Selected Poetry & Art*

### **THIRD AGE**

The daily news, parading now as infotainment,  
Makes no positive contribution to quality of life.  
Rather, it feeds anxiety and stress.

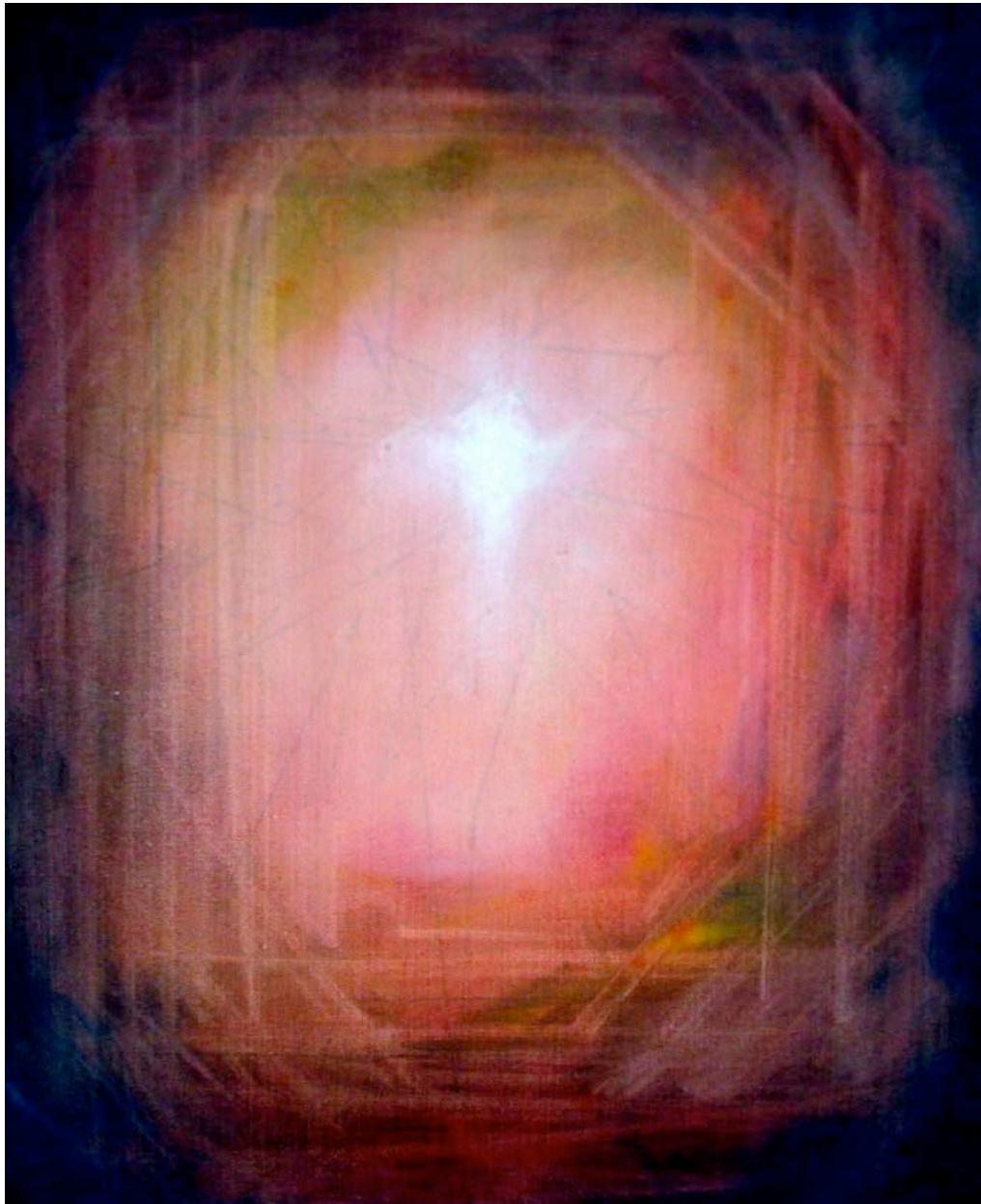
Whatever pretensions one might entertain  
During a prodigal youth or one's career,  
Whether at the "lofty heights" of institutional or corporate structure,  
Believing in or trying to wield an influence no matter how modest  
On shaping the course of people, politics, or policies  
In some small or larger part of this world,  
On retirement one fast realizes  
With one's quickening irrelevance and shrinking communications  
That it was not my head but hat that made the difference.

And then, liberated from the self-importance of opinion or audience,  
And freed from the excessive workaholism  
Of target-driven performance metrics,  
I breath, feel, hear and see life in all its surging thrall,  
Observing the microcosmic jungle below the meadow's carpet,  
As I did when a child on the garden's lawn,  
The clouds swirling over again.

And I feed the sparrows in my hand,  
Befriend and chat to ones in need huddled from the cold street,  
Reach out to jaded dimensions of old relationships,  
Covet the times and opportunities lost  
To live the inter-human and inter-species affection  
That our nature gifts upon our innate being,  
And rediscover the prayer intrinsic to the humility  
Of simply going about one's amended daily routines  
And happenstance encounters,  
With the pleasure of engaging the Other,  
Regardless the nature of that being,  
And in gratitude to the cosmic almighty.

For if I cannot influence the planetary trauma  
That the daily news now reports,  
Perhaps I can at least nurture  
Some care and affection in my sparse encounters,  
Perhaps sow an occasional grain of insight if not wisdom,  
And perhaps repay an old debt of friendship or love,  
And repent if not redress a harm,  
Or pretend to inspire someone to live a better life than mine. Perhaps.

*No Man's Land*



*Unseen Presence*

An abstract painting, *Unseen Presence*, on the theme of the Resurrection, is annotated “*illuminated geometric/prismatic crucifixion theme*”, and shows a brilliant white presence, suggesting both a cross and a person with outstretched arms, illuminating through a mystical *Cloud of Unknowing*, depicted in imperial purple, and facets of a gemstone, a counterpoint to the related painting *Uprooting*, showing a dangling humanity in its evolutionary pretension, hanging in a Cloud illuminated beyond. This later more metaphysical rendition transcends in its teleology. It was painted in August 1976, in Dublin, where it remains.

*Selected Poetry & Art*

**EPITAPH**

If come you must  
To weep my dust,  
Then be divine  
And bring some wine.

And sit you down  
Without a frown,  
And drink a toast,  
To me, your host.

For life is but  
A passing taste  
Inside our gut  
Before we waste.

But afterlife  
There is no strife  
So make the most  
To love us all,

And pray my ghost  
In God enthral,  
To serve at home  
Beneath his throne.

*No Man's Land*



**The Arms of the Author**  
Motto: *In Hoc Signo Vincet*

(and in no man's land, but His)

*Selected Poetry & Art*

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### **The Book**

For over fifty years, this poet/artist has written but never published his poetry. After much hesitation, he now brings forth this first selection, a fifth of the corpus. It reflects a multicultural heritage, and the richness that diversity of experience across the globe brings. There is frequently a close relationship between writings, especially particular resonance between this poetry, and his occasional art. Certain themes in poetry or prose are picked up, cited or visualized in the paintings. Allusions to scripture or spiritual references also occur.

### **The Author**

Francis M. O'Donnell, born in Dublin in 1954, graduated in Economics and Philosophy from the National University of Ireland in 1975 and later read International Law and Diplomacy in Geneva. The author was briefly schooled in the mid-1960s in Collège des Frères, whose walls were the Old City walls overlooking *No Man's Land* in Jerusalem, at the heart of a fragmented Holy Land. The former Irish-Arab Society, proposed by him in 1968, played a key role in promoting trade, cultural, and diplomatic links with twelve countries in the Middle East and North Africa in the early 1970s. Joining the United Nations in 1976, he spent twelve years in African development. Later, he pioneered rapid humanitarian deployment of UN volunteer expertise to forty war-torn countries across the globe. In the 1990s, he managed support to post-conflict countries and promoted economic and governance reforms. He retired from the UN after thirty-two years of service, latterly as senior UN representative in Yugoslavia/Serbia-Montenegro (2000-2004) and Ukraine (2004-2009). From 2009 to 2013, he was Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the Slovak Republic.

For several years recently, he has participated in or moderated policy panels mainly of current/former presidents, prime ministers, and other international leaders around Europe, under the auspices of several policy networks. He has lectured at the Sorbonne in Paris and also as guest speaker in Berlin, Brussels, Helsinki, Kyiv, Madrid, Riga, Segovia and Vienna. He also serves as a director of the School of Civic Education under the auspices of the Association of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe. He is chairman of an investment company in Ireland. He is a member of the Institute of International and European Affairs and the Military History Society of Ireland, and of county historical societies for Donegal and Kerry. For several years he also served as delegate of the O'Donnell Clan to, and as director of, an association of Irish Clans. His mammoth history "*The O'Donnells of Tyrconnell – A Hidden Legacy*" was published by Academica Press LLC, Washington D.C. in 2018. He is also published in scholarly journals.

**Cover illustration:** *No Man's Land* (oil painting)

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