

# *I Sing the Sonnet*



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A Snakeskin e-chapbook, 2011



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## The Birth of a Poet

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

### i) *Busker*

I'm working at a gentle pace,  
a rhythm of my own;  
it isn't hard to find a place  
where I can play trombone.  
I simply stand and improvise  
to music in my ears,  
a line of work that might surprise  
Pete Needham at Careers.

And when I stop, say half-past five,  
it's not as if I'm sad;  
the very fact I'm still alive  
and kicking makes me glad.  
The pay's not great, but I survive.  
Poor Papsie thinks I'm mad.

### ii) *Vagabond*

I'm living like a vagabond.  
Why 'settle' for the best?  
I chucked in uni for a blonde.  
That's how to 'pass' a test!  
I act according to the Tao,  
'a real nowhere man'.  
I'm happy in the here and now  
and seldom have a plan.

So when I'm heckled on the road  
by people asking why  
I choose to have my fixed abode  
beneath the open sky,  
I treat them to my latest ode  
before they walk on by.

*iii) Lunatic*

I always knew I wasn't scared  
of people acting God,  
but never thought that I'd have dared  
to turn on PC Plod  
and leave my victim shrinking as  
I thundered down the hill.  
Well, that's what comes from all that jazz  
and too much time to kill.

I hung a left, and soon I'd found  
a disused railway line.  
Deserted. Not a soul around.  
It wasn't by design,  
but nonetheless I've gone to ground.  
And look! Sunshine!

*iv) Poet*

Home is where my heart is light;  
home is where I'm me;  
home is where I'm out of sight,  
autonomous and free.  
I'll sing my sonnets on the street  
until the day I die.  
And even then, perhaps, my feet  
will tap for passers-by.

This walk of life, a subway star,  
is close to my ideal;  
I'm learning how to play guitar  
and finding out what's real.  
It doesn't matter where you are:  
just trust the way you feel.

### Lucky Charms

The sun had been surrounded by a gang of clouds out west;  
I felt serene and thought about the way that *I* would rest.  
The moon appeared, invigorated by a day in bed;  
I sensed I'd better find a place that *I* could lay my head.

The silence of the countryside was music to my ear;  
I listened briefly to a blackbird singing loud and clear.  
The roaring of a car nearby turned out to be a brook;  
I noted I was thirsty and resolved to take a look.

The water was delicious, and the air was sweet and good;  
I walked upstream and came upon the shelter of a wood.  
The ground was buried under leaves, a million lucky charms;  
I tumbled down and pulled them to me with my legs and arms.

The stars conspired to close my eyes, and there, beside a log,  
I found myself enchanted by the calling of a dog.

### On Esperance Bay

So pebble-rich a beach will never miss  
a mere fourteen shaped oval, heart and pear.  
Here, a reddish, orange-brown one. There,  
a semi-oval, semi-kite. Then this:  
a yin-yang dancing on a heart of gold.  
But now it's gloaming time; it's hard to see  
their glamour any more. And only three  
of these fourteen will have their fortunes told.  
I somehow doubt these sleeping beauties mind.  
What's it to them this Scottish sonneteer's  
account's soon twenty-two in terms of years  
spent sheltered on this shore? They're deaf and blind  
to rise and rush and fall, to this kiss blown  
across the sea, to now being left alone.

## Hope

At last the day is dead and gone,  
its greedy star a passing flame:  
but our desire remains the same;  
in darkest night it still shines on.  
Despite the squalor on the street,  
despite the tatters of our dream,  
despite a never-ending stream  
of deadlines we may never meet,  
that wild old whisper still wakes spring,  
still ushers rivers into flood,  
and we still feel the rush of blood  
each time we hear the blackbird sing.  
You walk beside me in a blend  
of soul mate, sweetheart, muse and friend.

## Silver Anniversary

You walked across that street in summertime,  
the sunlight glinting on your golden hair.  
I almost slipped, the shift in paradigm  
a sucker punch. Then, trying not to stare  
– my thoughts, all scattered, falling into place –  
I watched you walk across that sunlit street  
and almost didn't want to see your face.  
I knew it would be strong; I knew it would be sweet.  
And then you turned and flashed a cheerful smile  
as if I'd made an innocent request.  
I took my chance, and we chatted for a while,  
until you had to go. Ann, who'd have guessed  
we'd meet again before the week had gone,  
still be together twenty-five years on?

### **Dunderhead**

You have no earthly means of challenging  
oblivion. Its menace snags your fears;  
its malice smothers love; its madness sneers  
at composition. Every note you sing  
might just as well, well, never have been sung.  
You think by fastening your windows tight  
you'll cheat that hound from hell? Hell, every night  
it stands outside and drools with triple tongue!  
So much for noble dreams. So much for rules.  
So much for truth and beauty. In the end  
you'll go out howling. How can you pretend  
compliance is a safety net for fools,  
yet practise it yourself? You dunderhead!  
What good is recognition once you're dead?

### ***Horror Vacui***

For all its beauty, Venice has been cursed.  
The shades of Shylock and von Aschenbach  
lurk behind closed doors. Soon after dark  
Sebastian Flyte inspires a giant thirst  
on balconies above the Grand Canal,  
where discontented sons of millionaires  
console each other, high on Baudelaire's  
philosophy of life, *Les Fleurs du mal*.  
Come Carnival they'll all be sporting masks,  
assuming alter egos by the score.  
They'll carry on the way they did before  
but now feel free to flaunt their pocket flasks.  
A lethal dose elicits no surprise.  
Each gondolier is Charon in disguise.

## Just Rain

*for Maz*

You died two months ago, a coastal-town  
recluse. This bloody rain's now making sense.  
For you were married to the present tense  
and what it brought. In daily life you'd frown  
on wilful arrogance. You put it down  
to carelessness – a cardinal offence,  
you thought – and so you started to dispense  
poetic justice. Margaret, here's your crown.  
You celebrated life, ignored taboo,  
implored the world at large to do so too,  
adored wild animals, abhorred the zoo,  
championed natural habitats for all,  
and didn't give a toss the cuckoo's call  
contained no message.

Let the rain fall.

## Deceit

*Probitas laudatur et alget.*  
(Honesty's praised and punished.)  
Juvenal, *Satires*

With Esbjerg/Fanö reeling in defeat,  
you zoomed right in. They said: "This case is closed."  
You prised it open, carefully exposed  
the vice-PM's corruption and deceit.  
But white with rage the vice-PM denied  
the evidence; he even had you sacked.  
Both Press and Parliament refused to act.  
At Question Time the PM simply lied.  
There's something rotten somewhere. Justice sleeps  
in poverty. Yet she survives. They bring  
her to her knees; she does the only thing  
she can: she hopes against all hope and keeps  
the negatives that beg to be displayed  
on every inch of every street arcade.



## Remorse

You advertised the flutes of birds  
at dusk, their latest domicile  
the forks of lightning in your smile,  
the cracks of thunder in your words.  
The notes they sang were sweet and clear,  
each one a joyful piece of news.  
“At last,” I thought, “the playful muse  
my cheerful soul has longed to hear!”

What tiger was in me that roared?  
That stormed across your unmade bed?  
That picked your pocket, swiftly read  
the poetry your heart had poured?  
No later action could redress  
that stripping of your nakedness.

## Who Needs an Easy Love?

*Heaven knows it's not enough  
when the going's getting tough.*

I thought we'd be stupid with bliss on our own:  
you'd tumble through clover; I'd move every stone.  
I thought we'd see Cupid: he'd prove to be shy;  
you'd mumble “It's over” and kiss me goodbye.

I saw you go barmy ahead on the beach;  
my heart turned a somersault, bursting with speech.  
I saw you go by me immersed in the street;  
my Archer had come: there was lead in my feet.

I knew it was certain just yesterday; I'd  
discovered you waiting to leave with the tide.  
I knew it was curtains; I'd grieve for the past:  
recovered too late, now it's destined to last.

If only I knew you couldn't be true,  
I wouldn't be lonely; I wouldn't be blue.

## Regret

*Inopem me copia fecit.*  
(Wealth made a pauper of me.)  
Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

In retrospect, I never thought I'd get  
to wrap my hand around your naked breast  
until your boyfriend's timely absence blessed  
our secret love. You begged me not to fret,  
insisted that your boyfriend was no threat,  
till I believed your leaving him was best  
for everyone. And neither of us guessed  
we'd each in turn be ravaged by regret.  
A heavy price for such a petty theft:  
but then again we could have been more deft.  
I waited two long months for you to call.  
Your valentine arrived too late; I'd left  
for Italy. Quite innocent, I'd fall  
for someone else. I meant no harm at all.

## The Big Smoke

We took a flat in central Hammersmith –  
students both, but working several nights  
at some hotel – and wooed the modern myth  
of being where it's at. We scorned the sights  
we never saw. The day you said you'd scored,  
I thought you meant a girl, not Mary Jane,  
yet I too fell under her spell. We bored  
of books and in our loneliness and pain  
mistook the kindness of a nurse that smiled  
for promises of love, too blind to see  
the 'girl' you'd found was no more than a child  
that stroked the ego till it proved to be  
collapsible – a folding carry-cot  
she jubilantly folded, then forgot.

## *L'Homme Révolté*

*In loving memory of my uncle, David A. Liddell (1945-2003)*

Youth is a blunder; Manhood a struggle; Old Age a regret.  
Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby*

### *i) Child*

*My father has this box of matches he won't let me hold.  
He says: "They're very dangerous. It's like they have the sun  
concealed beneath their hats. They're not designed for childish fun."  
I shouted back: "I'm not a child! I'll soon be six years old!"  
But he just smiled and laughed at me in front of everyone.  
Though normally I try to do the stupid things I'm told,  
it's different now. I'll show them how. I'm very big and bold.*

So Pháëthon, his mind made up, sees Helius go out.  
He finds the box of matches, and he soon gets one alight,  
but when it burns his fingers he releases it in fright.  
He's petrified by what he's done. Can no one hear him shout  
in horror as the carpet, drapes and furniture ignite?  
They'll call it misadventure, but there's hardly any doubt  
he couldn't go ahead till there was nobody about.

### *ii) Teenager*

Don't try to stop Narcissus in the middle of his dance.  
For once the one he loves loves him. For once it's not the case  
that Echo comes to comfort him. No longer does his face  
communicate disaster. For once, he took a chance  
and fell into the water at the local steeplechase.  
He knew his own reflection wasn't worth a second glance,  
but second-hand he saw it and was thrown into a trance.

He stared in blank amazement. There was nothing to commend  
those muddy eyes, that greasy hair, that corrugated chin,  
those twisted lips, those crooked teeth, that acne-riddled skin,  
yet out of curiosity he yearned to comprehend  
the alienated genius crying out from deep within.  
And when he saw it was himself, he couldn't help but bend  
to kiss his spitting image. Now, at last, he's found a friend.

*iii) Torch-bearer*

Prometheus is drinking hard – neat vodka all day long.  
He used to be devoted to the service of mankind,  
but now he seeks oblivion, with nothing on his mind  
except the next delivery of vodka. And this song:  
“Why was he born so beautiful?” Come morning and you’ll find  
him sprawling in the same old place. And yet, there’s something wrong.  
He’s not the wreck you might expect. He’s fighting fit and strong.

And then, cold sober, he complains: “It’s all the fault of Zeus,  
who’s punished me for harnessing a natural supply  
of raging fire.” He shrugs his shoulders, gestures at the sky,  
and points a finger at the sun. It isn’t any use  
appealing to his common sense. He thinks the reason why  
he’s drinking is his lighter works. An item he’ll produce  
in evidence. Try telling him his argument’s too loose.

*iv) Teacher*

Odysseus is knitting – woollen socks for Penny’s dad.  
She disappeared ten years ago, and since then he’s preferred  
to live alone, quite adamant she’s given him her word  
she’ll find her way back home to him. We told him he was mad  
and begged him to forget her, until finally we heard  
him promising to activate a marriage bureau ad  
as soon as he’s completed these two socks. But we’ve been had.

It’s been three years, and still no sign of any fiancée.  
Perhaps he’s sensed defeat? A little rattled that his age  
will figure on the Internet? Afraid that once his cage  
is showcased on the World Wide Web his wounded pride won’t pay  
for licensing his ego to go waltzing centre-stage?  
Or else the Fates that smile on him conduct his hands as they  
unravel all the stitches at the end of every day.

### **Mama's Little Boy**

A tearaway with golden curls,  
he'll always be a darling boy,  
your little pet, your pride and joy,  
the odd one out among the girls.

You worshipped that precocious child  
who trusted you and shied from crowds,  
the silver lining in the clouds,  
a highland burn, remote and wild.

You'd cut him out to be a star,  
a maestro on the violin,  
a new Yehudi Menuhin.  
You never dreamed he'd play guitar;

and now see nothing to commend  
this bully charging round the bend.

### **Mum's the Word**

Mum told us if we saw a wasp to stay  
quite still. So when one chose to be my guest  
and crawl around my face, I did my best,  
lips closed. My sisters thrilled at my display  
of courage. Once the wasp had flown away,  
Mum oohed and ahed; she too had been impressed.  
The message was: do nothing, come what may!  
The incident was quickly laid to rest.  
Later, one of us upset a nest  
of bees, and Barbie, eager to obey,  
stood quite still. She didn't dare protest  
at being stung. Would she be here today  
had Mum not come at Manda's shrill request?  
Kids tend to do exactly what you say.

## **No Bloody Way!**

*for Mark and Mike, whose room it was*

A crowd of students sitting round a room  
one summer night in 1983.  
They barely move, make little sound, assume  
they've every right to simply wait and see.  
Until the college porter comes along  
to tell them that they're threatening the peace.  
It's clear to them he's got his sums all wrong.  
And what's he going to do? Ring the police?

This memory will always ebb and flow;  
a part of me has never come of age.  
So when today I find a treble "No!"  
means rattling the same old bloody cage,  
I'm back in Oxford sounding out success,  
the silent choir inside me shouting "Yes!"

## **The Misfit**

"I've had it up to here with misters.  
I might as well become a nun.  
I'd rather hug a horde of sisters  
than any bloke and see our son  
turn out to be his spitting image,  
first barking mad, then bottled up,  
his only joy another scrimmage,  
his mind set on the Eff-Ay Cup."

That's Wendy Cope. But look, here's me!  
Please take your biro, if you will,  
apart. That's it. Remove the spring  
and str-**e**-tch it out of shape. You see?  
They twisted me like that until  
I wasn't good for anything.

### **My Magic Garden**

Perhaps I'm still in love with her,  
a dilettante, an amateur,  
but still I'm slow to shred the things  
I wrote before I spread my wings.

It's not as if my bookshelf groans  
because of them; the five trombones  
I never play are surely more  
indicative of needless store.

I keep the poems of my youth  
as evidence – and here's the truth –  
of how I saw the world through eyes  
that understood no compromise,

no consequence, no checks or chains.  
And here, at least, that world remains.

### **Lisa Leaving**

*for Lisa Lind Dunbar*

For me at least, you'll always be the child  
who hated school; now never to return.  
No longer need you struggle in your seat;  
you're free to go; you'll soon be running wild,  
down to the sea, the sand beneath your feet,  
no morons shouting: "Won't you ever learn?"  
I'll miss your Scottish accent, miss your face,  
miss your independent, plucky grace.  
I yell: "Hey, Lisa! Leaving us for good?  
You made it through! I always knew you would!  
*God tur!* Have fun! Take care!" Defying care,  
you climb King Christian's horse on Esbjerg Square,  
broad-grin at all the others fading fast,  
then ride like hell into the distant past.

### **I Sing the Sonnet**

that comes unbidden out of nowhere, flies  
upstream, and finds you dangling both your feet  
over the edge of Kenmore Bridge to greet  
a golden dawn. You're startled by loud cries  
you can't decipher. Later on you knew  
you'd heard the oystercatchers long before  
you saw them round the river's corridor  
at lightning speed, their destination you,  
the listener whose needs must be addressed,  
my silent partner whose assent has willed  
this elevated song, who's just been thrilled  
by *carpe diem* at its all-time best.  
Just goes to show how much I grieve for you,  
my twenty-year-old self. And how time flew.

### **Still Life**

*for Richard Wilbur*

That roller blader might be past it –  
I'd put his age at sixty-five –  
and yet he scudded past so fast it  
made me glad to be alive.

His hair was surf. His cheeks were leather.  
A happy smile still creased his lip.  
Enjoying almost perfect weather –  
one hand resting on his hip –

he took the time to look around him,  
yet gave no sign of slowing down  
for anyone. I'm glad I found him  
visiting this part of town.

Such sheer delight! Such sure control!  
Bless his spirit! Bless his soul!



## Expanding Notes

### *i) Presence*

Looking, just looking, is all we have to do to see  
the essential truth.

Roger Deakin, *Notes from Walnut Tree Farm*

Looking at you again, afresh,  
just after making love – like Mars  
looking at Venus in the flesh –  
is purest joy. Do lucky stars  
all gaze at this sweet prize I've won?  
We ask if world enough and time  
have brought us here. What's done is done.  
To love each other was no crime.  
Do dusty scales not license snakes  
to shun dull ruts and daily grooves,  
see in the tracks of their mistakes  
the living proof that this earth moves?  
Essential beauty is divine;  
truth is, I'm yours, and you are mine.

### *ii) Persuasion*

We should do our utmost to encourage the Beautiful,  
for the Useful encourages itself.

Goethe, as quoted by James Anthony Froude at the  
outset of his essay, "The Philosophy of Christianity"

We never saw the crisis coming. Why  
should we have? Saying it was otherwise,  
do you suppose your hindsight will disguise  
our failure? Why should I be doing my  
utmost to hide the truth? Why should I try  
to let a pack of pretty-pretty lies  
encourage me to edit and revise  
the story of our love and say goodbye?  
Beautiful as they are, these hearts that kiss  
for ever, let them be the cards we pick  
the next time we go chasing married bliss!  
Useful concerns are what a lunatic  
encourages; let blind vindictiveness  
itself be proud to never miss a trick!

iii) *Prescience*

Writing is something I know little about,  
less at some times than at others.

W.S. Merwin, *The Paris Review*

Writing verse as often as I can  
is not as simple as it sounds. To write  
something noteworthy often takes all night.  
I fumble in the dark without a plan,  
know only this: it must both rhyme and scan.  
Little else matters. Why, then, get uptight  
about how much it weighs? Let it be light!  
Less can be more. Why tyrannise a man  
at work? Just let him do what he does best!  
Some pieces are a wrench, yet still good fun;  
times of woe are better met in jest  
than rancour; I, at least, prefer to run  
at them straight on, then turn as they protest.  
Others are a doddle.

Like this one.

iv) *Precision*

All that is gold does not glitter;  
not all those that wander are lost.

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

All this and more, yes, everything  
that should enrich both you and me  
is meaningless. Why give you three  
gold bracelets? Why this diamond ring?  
Does it convey I hope to sing,  
not bind you? When we watch the sea  
glitter with gems, we yearn to *be*,  
not *have*: *he* does not strive to bring  
all creatures great and small to heel.  
Those jewels have not been made for slaves  
who soon will die; the ocean's waves  
wander forever. When our graves  
are plundered, let it be to steal  
lost memories. These too are real.

## Looking for Gold

### i) *To a Promising Teacher Candidate*

(for *Sabrina Buch Hansen*)

Always that work is more pleasant to the imagination  
which is not now required.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude*

Always be on time, but if you're not  
that well-prepared, it doesn't really matter.  
Work on your technique. A bit of patter  
is nice. Fine-tune your wit, and try to spot  
more ways of making character and plot  
pleasant. Transport yourself from mad as a hatter  
to patient as a lamb. Contrive to flatter  
the less astute. Don't bully them. They've got  
imagination, some creative spark,  
which, down there somewhere, dancing in the dark,  
is aching to escape. Try not to scold,  
not even with a humorous remark.  
Now go and do the things that are, I'm told,  
required of you. And may you find much gold.

### ii) *The Acrosticist*

The singer, under all circumstances, must be more interesting  
than the songs he sings.

David Craig, *On Singing, On Stage*

The sweet sang-froid of Jutland suits this foreign  
singer. "Despite the fact I'm not unbending  
under pressure, somehow I'm transcending  
all the hype," says Duncan G. MacLaurin.  
"Circumstances may dictate, but poets  
must expose the lie that man's required to  
be a slave to man. What I've aspired to  
more than anything is memoir. So it's  
interesting to bring in others, rather  
than just quote myself. I know the brutes,  
the big boys, think one poem's worth a thousand  
songs, but I don't think so. Blame my father!"  
He puts his pen and pipe down, rises, bows and  
sings: "The sweet sang-froid of Jutland suits..."

iii) *The Lessons Learned from Vietnam*

(for Tim O'Brien)

The singer, under all circumstances, must be more interesting  
than the songs he sings.

David Craig, *On Singing, On Stage*

The lessons learned from Vietnam. A foreign  
singer comments. "Fearing those unbending  
under pressure, cheering those transcending  
all the hype," says Duncan G. MacLaurin.  
"Circumstances may dictate, but poets  
must expose the lie that man's required to  
be a slave to man. What Tim aspired to  
more than anything was memoir. So it's  
interesting he brings in others rather  
than just quote himself ad nauseam.  
The stories that he wrote are worth a thousand  
songs. A kind of tribute to his father.  
*He* dreamed of being a writer once." He bows and  
sings: "The Lessons Learned from Vietnam."

iv) *Sitting Smoking*

Poets need to say what you, Joe Bloggs,  
must keep unsaid. Your mottoes are: "Do not  
expose to sunlight. Cross the 't's and dot  
the 'i's. Mustn't complain. Let sleeping dogs  
lie." You survive to fight another day  
that never comes; you'll never fight your one-  
man's war: you're programmed just to run, run, run;  
required by law to run, run, run away.  
To where though, Joe? There's nowhere you can hide.  
Be sure your dreams will find you in the dark.  
A poet may at times be but a fuming  
slave to spleen, but there's another side  
to him. He's over there, that unassuming  
man just sitting smoking in the park.

## Notes

### p.3: “Busker”

The epigraph is a quotation I was fond of repeating to my dad when, as a teenager home from boarding school on holiday, I often slept until noonish. He figures in the first sonnet as Papsie. This is actually an anachronism considering the date of the original compositions inasmuch as this epithet for my dad was first applied by one of my nephews fifteen years later. But I like it so well that I have used it here. Peter Needham was a friend of my mother’s who gave me a ten-point list of possible career choices in London in 1984. ‘Busker’ wasn’t on his list.

### p.5: “On Esperance Bay”

Esperance Bay is a small stretch of water that extends from the Skallingen peninsula, which marks the northernmost point of the Wadden Sea, up to the lighthouse at Blaavandshuk (“Blue Water Point”), the westernmost point of Denmark. The bay takes its name from a brig that was registered at Copenhagen. Hit by a violent storm just out of Hamburg en route to Rio de Janeiro in the autumn of 1874, Esperance was driven off course and foundered on the sand of Horns Reef (also known as Devil’s Horn), ten miles west of Blaavandshuk, one of nine ships to run aground there in that storm. Her crew of nine perished.

### p.6: “Hope”

The first quatrain is a rewrite of the first quatrain of one of the sonnets in my collection, *Red Moon*. The third quatrain is a rewrite of the third quatrain of another of those sonnets. These two sonnets were the first poems I wrote with my wife, Ann Bilde, in Ancona, Italy in May 1986.

### p.7: “*Horror Vacui*”

“*Horror vacui*” is a Latin term that means “fear of emptiness”. It refers to a theory initially proposed by Aristotle stating that nature “fears” empty space. Therefore empty space would always be trying to suck in gas or liquids to avoid being empty. In visual art *horror vacui* is the filling of the entire surface of an artwork with ornamental details, figures, shapes, lines etc. It may be considered the opposite of minimalism. It may also be used in reference to the fear of the ancient Romans in stepping beyond their own boundaries.

Von Aschenbach is the narrator in *Death in Venice* (1912), a novella by Thomas Mann. He is so obsessed with a beautiful young man that he ignores warnings about a cholera epidemic and dies from it. The film of the same name in 1971 starring Dirk Bogarde made the work famous.

A rich drunkard whose father lives in Venice, Sebastian Flyte is one of the main characters in the novel, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), by Evelyn Waugh. A television mini-series from 1981 starring Jeremy Irons, Anthony Andrews and Diana Quick introduced the work to a wide audience. A film version directed by Julian Jarrold was released in 2008.

### p.8: “Deceit”

While still a policeman in Odense, Bendt Bendtsen turned to politics. He was elected to Parliament in 1994 for the Conservative Party. After an extended period of tumult in the party Bendtsen assumed the leadership in 1999. In 2000 his lobbying was instrumental in saving Marstal Navigation School, which was in his constituency. Situated as it was on the fairly remote island of Aerö, the school had long been having difficulty attracting students. Even though no one in the maritime industry was interested in saving the school, the argument was that it was the life-nerve of the island. In 2001 Bendtsen became Minister of Trade and Commerce, as well as Vice-PM alongside PM, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Blinkered by his own interests, and apparently oblivious to those of the country he had been elected to serve, he went about unscrupulously achieving his aims in the most undemocratic way imaginable.

Bendtsen plotted the downfall of another maritime education centre, MUV in Esbjerg and on the island of Fanö, in conjunction with an expansion of Marstal. Using the lessons he had learned from how

Marstal Navigation School was saved, he acted in secret with a couple of others. Ignoring the fact that Fanö was also an island with maritime education as its life-nerve, Bendtsen closed down MUV on 4th June 2004, the last day of Parliament before the long, long summer break. He then turned off his mobile phone, giving Esbjerg and Fanö no chance to speak their case.

The official reason for the closure was to save 5-6 million kroner of the state's annual budget. Peanuts when one considers that Denmark's maritime industry earned 160,000 million kroner in 2006 and 200,000 million kroner in 2007. Bendtsen omitted to mention that it would cost 100 million kroner to close the schools and expand Marstal. In fact, MUV was not only the second largest maritime institution in the country, but it was also by far the best. Furthermore, it was the institution that best lived up to the industry's future needs, not least because it was part of a thriving centre of industry and research. Denmark's maritime industry was in urgent need of more navigators, skippers, marine engineers, etc., and Esbjerg/Fanö had the culture, tradition and expertise that could provide them.

The publication of an exposé, *MUV-affaeren (The MUV Affair)*, by freelance journalist, Ann Bilde, in January 2006 prompted MP Kim Mortensen to confront Bendt Bendtsen, and later PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Parliament. Both of them lied when they claimed that the closing of the schools had been part of the original overall strategy proposed by the Maritime Authority. Quite the opposite was true.

Despite overwhelming evidence of Bendtsen's corruption and deceit he was never brought to account. Instead it was a case of shooting the messenger. Ann Bilde wasn't popular with the powers-that-were. The vice-director of the United Shipping Companies, the very organisation that lacked Danish mariners, complained in the press that the campaign to reopen MUV was harmful for recruitment. Even on Fanö the campaign met huge resistance. Not least from the Conservative Mayor, who saw it as an indictment of his own failure to react at the time. A vice-director of the Maritime Authority approached Ann Bilde's biggest customer, the director of a fishing organization, and told him to sack her. At first the director refused. But he was then threatened with the suspension of the entire 1½ million kroner PR allowance, so he had no choice but to comply. Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Bendt Bendtsen are still collecting fat fees in politics to this day.

p.11: "*L'Homme Révolté*"

The title refers to Albert Camus' work of the same name, from 1951. It is often translated as *The Rebel*, which disregards the fact that "*révolté*" means not only "in revolt" but also "revolted", i.e. "appalled".

p.16: "I Sing the Sonnet"

My family had a summer cottage just outside Kenmore, in Perthshire, in the heart of Scotland.

p.20: "The Lessons Learned from Vietnam"

Tim O'Brien wrote a collection of short stories, *The Things They Carried* (1990) based on his experiences in The Vietnam War.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to the editors of the following magazines and e-zines, in which these poems first appeared:

- “Regret” in *14 by 14*
- “Just Rain” in *The Barefoot Muse*
- “Remorse” in *Bringing Sonnets Back*
- “Hope” & “Lucky Charms” in *Candelabrum*
- “Dunderhead” in *The Chimaera*
- “No Bloody Way!” in *The Flea*
- “I Sing the Sonnet” & “On Esperance Bay” in *Lucid Rhythms*
- “Who Needs an Easy Love?” in *Quantum Leap*
- “Horror Vacui” in *The Shit Creek Review*
- “Expanding Notes”, “*L'Homme Révolté*” & “Still Life” in *Snakeskin*

And thanks to Erling Petersson for “Lisa Leaving” on Esbjerg Gymnasium’s website.

Photo/painting by Teun Hocks (Untitled, 1995, Torch Gallery, Amsterdam)

## About the Author

Descended from the Scottish poet, John MacLaurin (1734-1796), Duncan Gillies MacLaurin was born in Glasgow in 1962. He studied Classics at Oxford, left without a degree, and spent two years busking in the streets of Europe. He met Danish writer, Ann Bilde, in Italy in 1986, and went to Denmark with her. He took degrees in English and Latin at Aarhus University and since 1995 has taught these subjects at Esbjerg Gymnasium.

**Duncan Gillies MacLaurin explains:**

**These 36 sonnets have been in the pipeline for over 25 years.**

Six of the sonnets here are revisions of pieces in my first poetry collection, *Red Moon*, published under the *nom de guerre*, Gillies Crisp, in 1987. These are Parts I, III & IV of “The Birth of a Poet”, “Lucky Charms”, “Hope”, and “Who Needs an Easy Love?” I had also written the original version of Part II of “The Birth of a Poet” at that time.

In the next fifteen years I did not write a single sonnet.

On the day my uncle David died, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2003, I began writing “Teacher”, inspired by the photo/painting by Teun Hocks. In 2005 I joined the online forum-cum-workshop, *Eratosphere*, and soon afterwards *The Sonnet Board*. These inspired my poetry writing in general and my sonnets in particular.



**A Snakeskin e-chapbook, 2011**