

Story as Resistance

Sid Marty

When the idea of Story as Resistance was first posited, I asked myself “Resistance to what?” since there are so many aspects of life today that I find myself opposed to. In particular, I have long been opposed, in my various books of poetry and prose to the human subjugation of the natural world and the species trying to survive within it. As Canada finally came face to face with the dire visitations of Covid 19, I cannot admit to being surprised at the fatal consequences which had long been predicted by specialists in the field of epidemiology. Back in March, thinking of the Convergence Weekend to come, I wrote this poem to try and look beyond the grief and shock to some of the root causes we still have to face up to when this current plague finally subsides. NB. Most of the poems I write go through countless revisions, and that may prove to be the case with this poem. Contemporary poetry, like nonfiction, has sometimes to be revised in accord with factual outcomes. This one is as current as I can make it just now.

THE PANGOLIN

i

Under the scales of the Pangolin
was a strand of RNA
left by the tongue of a bat.

It passed unread,
spiked to the value-added
keratin, that cure-all remedy
and Voodoo Viagra
in the wet market --was it
fresh out of civet cats

that day?-- where endangered
species await the cleaver
of dread, and the state declines
in its steady state of mind
to press its levers,

to stop the spread from pole

to pole of such novel fevers.

ii

We arose from the sea,
so at first we listened
to the tide, when Earth
still spoke to us.
No need to hide
from each other. That voice said
Take only what you need
sisters, brothers.

But with our machines
we shattered time, blurred space,
lived like gods and then
like gods on holiday,
refused to compromise;
talked seriously, of the good
in Greed

forgot our mortal tides,
scattered oil, filth and plastic
on the proud, brooding face of the ocean,
ripped the crown from the sacred mountain:
carbon became a creed.

We poisoned the lungs of Gaia
in our rage to be free
of Nature, free of Fate.
No, we will not heed.

So she sent us her moratorium
to be printed in our cells
by the unseen spikes of a virion

We breathe it in, this
bill past due
wake up choking on the words
so proudly ignored

the signal in the noise
of the fake-news blur:

*You are the disease
The virus is the cure.*

But just for a moment
as the engines and the chimneys
grow cold, we down our magic
weapons and tools, turn to each other
at last, subdued, forced to keep
our distance,

while the lungs of our Mother
fill again, for a little while,
with the sweet fresh breath
we bestow,
by our absence.

As a child of the sixties who paid his dues as a songwriter in the bars and folk clubs of Calgary and Montreal, I wrote many protest songs and anti-war songs over the years. Writing such songs, and poems, is a way of bearing witness, of making an emotional and factual record of events for those who come after us. Here is one of them entitled "Arrows of Pity" from My CD "Elsewhere," offered with thanks to Myrna Marty and Denise Withnel for the angel chorus.

ARROWS OF PITY Sid Marty

Little boy where are you bound
With your head hung low?
Will you climb these hills of spring
where golden poppies blow?

If I climb these hills of spring
Where the poppies blow
I'll pick them for my father's grave
*In the highlands high
In the lowlands low
Wailee, Wailee
Wailee wailee*

Little girl where are you bound
With those tears upon your face
Have you torn your pretty dress?
Ah sure that's no disgrace

Wasn't I that tore this dress
and I only want to go
To lie down in my mother's arms
In the highlands high
In the lowlands low
Wailee, Wailee
Wailee, Wailee

Little boy where are you bound
With that weapon in your hands?
You should be at your lessons son
Or playing in the sand

Sir I learned my lessons well
At my father's broken door
Now like a restless demon
I am compelled to roam
Until I strike his killers down
refrain

I lived my whole life in a dream
Far from those violent bands
Thought we'd build Jerusalem
In a green and new-found-land

But Jerusalem has fallen
We're tearin' it apart
Loose your arrows of pity, Lord
In our furious hearts
In the highlands high
In the lowlands low
Wailee wailee
Wailee Wailee

Finally, and for what its worth every once in awhile, I get a bit too much CBC --Find the victim, tag the oppressor, move on rinse and repeat-- and have to scream, "Good God—Enough already". I hear so many people talking about their rights to this and that, but very seldom do I hear people talking about their personal responsibility for the only life they have been granted, their own. This is called Banjo Song, which I only wrote recently with this theme in mind. It does poke at a few currently sacred cows, but I think in a basically friendly (absurdist) and constructive way. I really apologize for the lousy recording. I can't meet with my pal the recording expert just now--his studio space is just too small for the current crisis-- so all I have at hand are the built in mics on my laptop.

Banjo Song May 9, 2020

With apologies to Banjo Paterson,
Stephen Foster, Pierre Berton, Wallace Stegner and Gary Larsen.

A PART

What's the point of all this
Self-righteous anger all the time?
No one's gonna get
Out of here alive
So pack up your troubles
In your old kit bag, and
We'll waltz down to the billabong
And count up all our swag

I came from Alabama
With a banjo on my knee
Mr. orthopaedic surgeon
Get this banjo off of me

Baby pawned my favorite bagpipes
She said they drove her mad
And ran off with a cowboy poet

Name of Texas
Tad

CHORUS
Nobody said
It would be this way
Somebody said
It's always been this way

B PART
Last night I was in
This nightmare scene
Riding on a train
Called the National Dream
A young woman cried
“That colonizing myth is blown
You’re living in a country
That was never your own”

I was tweeting virtue signals
On my iPad semaphore
But no one pays attention to
Old white guys anymore

A PART

Too many people
Talking out of their heads
Nobody grateful
Except the Grateful Dead
Politicians mine excuses
Click the link if you agree
Only terrorists these days
Accept responsibility

CHORUS

*Nobody said it would be this way
Somebody said
It's always been this way*

B PART

Mother Nature has decided
We're a cancer in her home
She sent a plague to send us
Back to the Twilight Zone
The band has played Amazing Grace
A quarter million times
The people in Mumbai looked up
Amazed to see the sky
You can Blame it all on Donald Trump
He'll blame the Chinese
Blame it all on everyone
Let's start with you and me
Blame it all on everyone
Let's start with you and me

A PART

Where the Blue Bird Sings
To the Lemonade Springs
If the blues is a bird
Let the blues take wing

The more that we have
The more we are afraid
Somebody's gonna come along
And take it all away

So pack up your troubles
In a reusable bag
I'll meet you by the billabong
We'll count up all our swag

Nobody said it would be this way

*Somebody said
what does he know anyway?*

B PART

We've got a little time
Before the Troopers One, Two, Three
Ride up and arrest me
For this banjo on my knee
We've got a little time
Before the old world fades away
To think about the new one
And the changes we must make
We've got a little time
Before the curtain closes down
To hold each other tighter
And be glad we're still around
To hold each other tighter
And be glad we're still around

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