

## BLOOD-LETTING

Know your history or else  
be a prisoner of it,  
fated to repeat it  
over and over,  
opening old wounds,  
again and again:  
blood-letting.

I grew up in a world  
where names carried history,  
and conversation was like spying;  
where old wounds were preserved  
and bad blood stirred,  
behind the barriers.

Sometimes the blood  
spilled over,  
to foray in enemy territory:  
Once, in the street behind my grandmothers house,  
I met with a raiding party  
of young bloods,  
like me:  
two older,  
their rank marked by the yellow gloves  
they had borrowed from their big sister.  
As I stood mesmerized by the regalia,  
the blows fell like rain squalls,  
and gusts of words  
I didn't know but understood  
clearly enough:  
Fenian bastard, filthy Taig.  
The sudden shower,  
quickly passed and  
I ran to my grandmother's,  
spilling blood and embarrassment,  
and my uncle made the symbolic pursuit.

Later, my grandmother told me  
they were not bad boys,  
they simply didn't know any better,  
and didn't my friends do the same thing,  
it's just the way they are taught:  
cold comfort, it felt then, but

it went to the heart's core,  
unlike the usual treatment which  
only staunches the blood  
and covers  
the wound.

The way we were taught,  
the myths we maintained,  
to keep us in our tiny worlds,  
to reinforce our prisons of perception,  
that we paraded every year:  
King Billy on the 'Twelfth,'  
to celebrate the irony of  
a royal family torn by differences,  
inflamed by religion;  
father against son-in-law,  
then brother against brother.  
Or an Easter Uprising  
producing only martyrs  
whose blood inspired more blood-letting  
until enough had been spilt  
to justify  
a shakey agreement.

In the 60s,  
a civil movement,  
designed to unite around  
common values,  
and shared blood,  
collapsed inevitably  
onto the battlefield  
of old warriors who  
gave their sons a taste  
of the bad blood  
that had dried in them,  
and called again for release.

Then  
we close ranks and  
pretend to defend ourselves,  
but instead simply tolerate  
the blood-letting,  
inflamed by the taste  
of frustration and fear,  
knowing there is no defense,  
once the blood has been stirred;

and we must see it through to the end,  
to a place of exhausted satisfaction,  
when the flow will congeal and  
the skin grow over the wound,  
which will wait its time  
till the blood breaks it open again.

Only if we are taught  
differently;  
only when we know  
better;  
only when we see  
each other,  
and hear the names,  
and see the lens,  
and know the history:  
only then  
can we get beyond  
the bloody history,  
to a new  
world.

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