



THE MOON & WAR

BY MARK CLEMENT





THE MOON & WAR

Poetry by *Mark Clement*



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First full collection

Islands in the Shadow

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Foreword

The Moon and War – two human obsessions that fill history from our shrouded tribal past to our global tumultuous present. How different are we from our so-called primitive past? Does technology mean we have advanced or is humanity still in its infancy? It would seem that magic and conflict continue to dominate and as we sit around our campfires, we are still afraid of those demons in the night.

These poems do not have answers but are one person's meagre reflections about the state of our being. I'm not even sure they hold any real understandings and are more likely to be simple explorations through a small window to the world.

As usual, I present them in a small homemade chapbook for your consideration. If even one phrase or thought sends a reader veering off into previously unexplored territory, then this book will have been a success.

Mark Clement

The Moon and War

When I get up at five and see the moon
clutched firmly in the branches of a tree,
I wonder why men go to war, and gods
and folly were invented for that time.

Unseen from here, the great long sea
stretches and chases this bright lamp
that hangs still as silent gods and foolish men
cry beneath a sun that burns that distant land.

That long supple sea cannot reach this black
tree that cradles the moon, the men and me
with our foolish gods who, with hidden thread,
bind this morning scene like some whole cloth.

The birds chirp and chatter at each other,
the leafless tree releases the slow moon
and the sharp sun cracks the black horizon
before I can unwrap the cloth or hear
the gods speak about why men go to war.

Published:

- *Along the Path* – chapbook
- *From My Window* – CD w/booklet
- *Islands in the Shadow* – collection
- *Witness* – Anthology, Serengeti Press, 2004

Sounds of War

Rat-a-tat-tat precedes attack.
Click clack and crack builds a stack
of simpering sand and whimpering
winds swoon their tune that clatters
those matters at noon. It's time
it's rhyme, let's find those flights,
those roomy tunes, those gloomy
sights of abstract flack, that sad crack
in the windy, lingering sky of sound.

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The end,
spoken loudly,
causes undue worry
and graves are coveted
above all else.

Cartouche

We all wish to be appreciated
as a King with our name carved
on a hardened earth that many
believe is the devil's domain.

I look at the symbols of those
who have flown to their light,
trace their memory in the stone,
wonder what it was like to be King.

Their subjects, left alone, moan
about their loss and wonder how
they too can become a King
with stone memories and a flight to peace.

Their stories clutter the world
and the grace of a bird in flight is lost
in the rumble of competing convictions
that leaves no time for carving stones.

Footnote to Hell

Pitched battle in Milwaukee.
White youths
batter black,
frenzied attack,
clubs, pipes, knives,
clenched teeth.

Determined eyes reflect
aberrant redress.

Impassive watchers crowd.

For further information,
see archives,
AP photo, Oct. '79.

Galactic Hockey

I imagine God and Allah with tears
streaming down their old faces as they sit
in a local galactic pub, drink beer,
watch the world hockey game and have a fit

as their favourite teams muscle the puck,
Ignore the referees and sacrifice
any skating skill to score and think that luck,
high-sticking or boarding will win the ice.

“Well”, says God, “it seems that our minor league
experiment has failed, despite carved stones,
prophetic guidance, and all our intrigue.”
“Yes” says Allah, “I thought we made them clones.”

“Barkeep, change the channel, and bring more ale,
we’re gonna put these losers up for sale.”

Published:
- *12 Poems Read at 66 King E.* - chapbook

Adventure

There is a garden
filled with flowers.

There is a large field
filled with rough weeds.

There is a tall fence
with tempting holes.

Published:
- *12 Poems Read at 66 King E.* - chapbook

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Islands in the Shadow

The sun needs to be in the sky
and shadows need to cover
in the lee side of light.

The yin and yang of the world
hold hands tightly and if sun
or shadow dominates, the world
burns or freezes, and we
cannot distinguish the small
from the large, cannot walk
between things and say,
“we are alone”.

Life in the 21st Century

I
We put on display the twisted metal remains,
the helmets, boots and instruments of fear.
Pictures repeat, dry land, sharp sun and men.
God and Allah repeat their songs from yesterday.
Sacrifice flows from the chorus
as we put on display the twisted metal remains.

II
We close then open the door on carbon,
the beginning of diamonds, the end of greed.
Dreams repeat, paved land, dull sun and old men.
Men and economies repeat old but popular tunes.
Sacrifice flows downhill to our children
as we close then open the door on carbon.

III
We ignore the perilous wind-swept world,
the endless cycles in our dominion of pride.
Reality repeats, leafless trees, washed land and bodies.
Leaders of men repeat their song in a very low voice.
Sacrifice flows from land to sea
as we ignore the perilous wind-swept world.



Nov. 11, 1980

Two minutes for our fallen brave,
who, long to dust, are in their grave
grinning at the poppies.
Our long-faced deceits cannot erase
their silent cries; our disgrace
of fertile bone-meal fields.

Two minutes for two million dead,
or is it six or eight,
the numbers stagger, I guess
I'm thirty years too late.

The long-toothed soldiers, arched erect,
scuff-scuffle and lurch along
the dry autumn street, in step
to an off-key Sally-Ann tune.

Nov. 11, 2008

Summer leaves have fallen in fire,
been bagged or buried in the compost heap.
Some left behind have dried, their urgent colour
faded to a wrinkled brown. They are gathered,
placed upon a lonely pyre and a green man
watches the stuttering flame send summer
wisps into a grey winter sky. The wind moans
as it flows through empty trees and new birds,
now on the wing, follow a warmer sun.

The green man sighs and shivers in the chill
as fire consumes the last memory.
A few desultory snowflakes float between
the bare black branches as the green man
spreads ashes across the lawn, rakes them
into the patient soil where they will wait.

Published:
- *Trees & Seasons* - chapbook

Politics As Entertainment

For our time in history

The pundits and their polls
are like weathermen whose job
does not depend on being right.
Local evidence as global doom
is a distraction clipped from
every wagging tongue and stuffed
between commercial reality.

Mendacity mingles smoothly
with medieval righteousness
and Caesar declares that peace
is an imperative, that he has time
and will save his loyal legions
for another unnamed distraction.
The pundits revel in the mud.

Johnny goes to school and shows
his ID at the door then learns
that creation has more than one story.
Meanwhile, the TV debates
are not about the latest hi-tech
fantasy war game that Johnny plays
instead of doing his homework.

Published:
- *Cobourg Poetry Reading* - chapbook

A Picture of Fire

*"War is for everyone, for children too.
I wasn't going to tell you and I mustn't.
The best way is to come uphill with me.
And have our fire and laugh and be afraid."
from "The Bonfire." by Robert Frost*

The long gray roads are full of people,
trudging people, women, children and old men
burdened with meager possessions and war.
Box-camera film records this black and white
migration from a fire, from a destruction
of long-built stone, from laughing circles
in a town, empty and waiting to be reshaped.

There are vibrant colour pictures
of a stark landscape, a jumble of tents,
of gaunt people looking at a waterless sky,
of land that is tired of the same old fire,
tired of power breaking old stones
amongst listless children who do not play,
do not discover the stars at night.

Yes, let's go uphill between trees where
the large sky falls through the leaves. Come,
see the fires on the horizon, the silent fires
where video cameras record today's distant
destruction and meagre lives as they falter
along dust-filled roads, searching for water,
searching for a place without burning trees.

We can sit around our campfire and watch
sparks mingle with discovered stars, watch
the succulent flame roast our marshmallows
and listen to stories filled with imagination.
We can laugh in our safe circle, laugh and forget
the pictures, the videos, the hilltop view, forget
what it is like to be hungry, tired and afraid.

From a Distance

I've seen the films, the TV documentaries, heard radio interviews of participants, but my father never spoke of it, never uttered a word, not even while drunk.

There are many like my father, many who never relive those times when guns and guts, fear and excessive laughter churned in a cauldron of insanity.

Today, police, firemen and citizens with flags endure cold hours on the Highway of Heroes, salute their honour and pride in silence, silence that meets the silence of an ending.

I've never been there, never been insane, never wrapped my fear in coverings of laughter. It's an intellectual exercise to imagine fire, fire that burns the grass from beneath your feet.

Today, movies and news of real events pleads with my inexperienced soul, plays with my rational mind, making it easy to say, war is bad. But next day, the images repeat.

I wonder about our children who play computer war games, those practices without fear where death and destruction earns points and immunity from reality.

I don't know anyone whose son died in war, whose life was suspended in disbelief, whose anger transformed into hatred for that social military imperative.

Old-time religious rubble seems to fuel the fire, or is it power or oily dollars or fear that others will bury our good life under their stone-tablet rules.

I can imagine fervent talk around a fire when small tribes urged themselves, sharpened their spears, beat their chest and spoke loudly to their powerful gods.

I can imagine power and politics gathered around an oak table, speaking in measured tones, calculating economics, their gods hidden in the background.

The Highway of Heroes is a long way from the burning sand and dusty streets where we insert ourselves between tribes competing with bombs and bullets.

I cannot imagine the tents and caves where calculation and tribal gods convene, cannot feel the frustration or fear that sends silence along that long road.

As I wander in a succulent park, the trees whisper calmly and sunshine flows through green leaves. I am far away and laughing children do not know.

Diversity

It doesn't matter how you paint your skin
or drape sackcloth across your bones
to celebrate an ancestral theme.

It doesn't matter if you foreswear labour
to celebrate ancient script or burn
a scented stick to stimulate the mind.

It doesn't matter if you heed the bells
that call you to communal sacrifice
or if you sleep and dream away a day.

It does matter if your strident horn
to urge the car ahead to go on green
is always at your fingertips.

It does matter if your children don't know
how to search the wild universe
to find the colour of their cloth.

It does matter if the children
can't put words right together
and feel clearly explain they how.

It does matter, it does matter
if the lion is the only predator.
He can't eat everything.

Published:
- *Cobourg Poetry reading June 19, 2008*

Sweet Soil

There is a sweetness in the soil
and much discussion about why
the grass is green, snow is pure white
and birdsong is always pleasant.

There is hot sand on this earth
and much discussion about why
the grass is always brown and snow
never reaches the ground.

The sweet soil is gently ploughed
and cool in the bright summer sun.
The hot sand, churned by tanks,
burns the soles of thinly-clad feet.

There is much discussion
while the earth turns. Perhaps
the ambrosial soil should grow more
sugar to sweeten the hot harsh sand.

Published:
- *Executive Sweet*, TOPS Anthology, 2007

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Homeland

We wept there,
endured mad brothers,
dead grass and flowerbeds.

A weathered house,
old-time colour.

The Path to Sweet

I - Bitter...

When the taste of salt is lost
in tales of spent adventure,
the sour soil remains unploughed.
Succulent summer peaches
shrivel in the rasping wind
of a moonless winter night.

In this time, there is failure
as war's sharp edge of sorrow
stings the unready land.
Harsh men and their gods leave
an acrid taste so profound
it grinds cold rock into sand.

And the sand blows, clouds the eye,
fills the mouth with angry words
that have forgotten the taste
of adventure, of soil ready
for fertile ploughs. Peaches
are fruitless pits, old and bitter.

The Path to Sweet

II - Sour...

When war's acerbic taste fades,
salty sea winds are only
witty stories on the tongues
of old summer men whose fruit
withers like unpleasant grapes
abandoned on a shrivelled vine.

In this time, failure continues
as weary forests smoulder
and the earth accommodates
the cooling ashes. For a time,
young men brandish sharpened sticks
to probe the warm pungent soil.

The harsh dust hangs in the air,
obscures the sun and settles
in the nostrils of those who wish
the wind would bring the smell
of salty adventures. New seeds
struggle with dead sour soil.

The Path to Sweet

III - Salt...

When war becomes a salty tale
told by gray soldiers who march
slowly between nubile trees,
off-key tunes disturb the dust.
Only old eyes understand
brackish water on the cheek.

In this time, failure weakens,
rain is clear and new trees reach
toward the sun. Old men warn,
boldly grandstand charred remains
and foolish gods ride the wind
of random chatter from the past.

The sharp tang of faded tales
is still a taste in vibrant air.
Fresh trees slowly grow and reach
to cleanse the blazing sky.
Summer turns, crisp leaves fall;
flames that feed the salty soil.

The Path to Sweet

IV - Sweet...

When war is just a single tear,
clear and soft across the cheek,
it stains those yellow pages full
of bitter men with sad tales
of sour gods in hurricanes.
Last year's leaves soothe the soil.

In this time, failure is dead,
old marching men are alone,
forgotten in fire-filled earth
that nourishes spring blossoms
where honey bees can harvest
this ripe fruit of fragrant soil.

The rustle of tall summer trees
is a melody in the ears
of men who plough the land and find
old bones in the ambrosial earth,
bones that will help them remember
the long hard path to sweet.

The American Gun

Look in any ladies purse or glove compartment
and there it is! A declaration of independence,
constitutionally correct, ready to save the day.

How good it must feel to be safe, to be ready
for any imagined television show scenario
in a dark parking lot or bright shiny street.

It is an easy path to defend, to be prepared
for that uncontrolled dis-ease that lingers
in powerless disconnected shadows.

Daily death by lead is no longer news
unless parents and children are involved
and the living are suitably full of grief.

Actors all and so surprised when the play
leaps from the TV show and the bodies
fail to show up in the next episode.

The forest is overgrown. Shouts for help
to carve a fresh path for the next episode
are obscured by the struggling undergrowth.

Published:
- *12 Poems Read at 66 King E.* - chapbook

The Taliban are back

It's always on the news,
the anguish of picking sides,
sending young lives
into centuries of religious rubble
where players stumble amongst
the righteous warriors and struggle
to make some logical sense
of the sand devil's proclamations.

Power is an actor in uniform, a fool
in his motleys, an affectation
of life, a repeating performance
that consumes the audience.

The adjudicator puts his life at risk,
has decided what is good, resolved
that his own stone tablets define
the rules of engagement.

And so the play is repeated
again and again until the audience
falls asleep or leaves the theatre
to watch history unfold elsewhere.

Published:
- *12 Poems Read at 66 King E.* - chapbook

Wave the Flags Goodbye

Trumpets blare from all the towers
as quiet children stop and stand
in the correct bright light of politics
that creates deep and secret shadows.

Wave the flag goodbye along with God,
wave the meeting place goodbye as well.
Stop the disturbing wind so it cannot tell
the fresh green leaves where it has been.

The unseen wind whispers secrets
as it slides between the cold towers.
Its chill fusses along the empty street
looking for an open door.

Shirtsleeves in the towers shout, wave
their hands to quell the doubt and save
us all from all the dusty bits that fly about
the cold and calculated city streets.

And all those trees whose neighbour's
are the same with green and brown
that follow seasons root to crown
can move only by their seed.

Seeds cast are caught by careless winds
and fall outside the insidious shade
of tower flags that wave them goodbye,
wave them goodbye and cry, oh God!

It's much too late, the sky is everywhere,
the earth grumbles, winds blow
and we must wave the flags goodbye, wave
goodbye and smell the fertile upturned soil.

Published:
- *Islands in the Shadow* - collection

The Greening

Undoubtedly, the green revolution
is leading us astray. Streets littered
with nothing but red-tinged leaves
from cloistered trees proclaim
a dedication to the art of work.

The green house, a western contrivance,
is built into new corporate images
and the shiny surface of our lives
dissimulates the uneasy news
that flickers in high definition.

Then there are the poets for people
who worry about themselves
and conjugate the universe
with single letter words that define
their struggles in the sun.

There is garbage everywhere
but it's inconvenient
so it is painted as background.

The Land is Comfortable

We are so certain that the sky is blue
and confident that soil is black and rich,
that burning leaves will fall then rise anew
and rain will nourish flowers in the ditch.

The new moon rising also lights dry sand
piled high in frozen waves that burn men's feet
and only shadows flow across that strand
where change is slow and seasons are discreet.

If we could smell that sand-burnt flesh each day
instead of rich and sun-fired rotting leaves,
would we still make our statues out of clay
let them wash away in rain and not grieve.

The forest holds us firmly and it keeps
us certain even while the cold land sleeps.

Published:

- *Trees & Seasons* - chapbook

- *Islands in the Shadow* - collection

So the moon is magical

This is the stuff of poetry, repeated
in every angst-filled verse, painted
on the canvas of our understanding.

Inherited from our ancestors, this icon
sails slowly across the star-sparkle sky,
casts its yellow light into our wonder,
tangles our terror in the branches
of an empty spring-time tree.

I imagine a campfire, launching sparks
into a night-time void, bright signals
dying in a blackness that flows
and buries the last red light, leaving
that small warm space where stories
explain the gods and lunar madness
becomes a reflection of our fear.

Our eyelids flutter as we sleep
and the fire becomes a bed of coals.
Cautious eyes creep closer,
the bright moon presses shadows
beneath the trees and we dream
our stories will cast the demons
into a black pit where they howl
at the protective moon.

This magical lamp covers our sleep
and we believe it will carry our songs
and the stories to appease those gods
who can call back the day.

The Broken Telephone

You'll get what you give they say
and this explains taxes and war.
I want to carve stone tablets for a living
so someone will carve one for me
and leave it in a nicely manicured lawn
that has no burning bushes.

My telephone no longer works
because it still has wires
and won't fit in my shirt pocket.
But that's OK, I have nothing to say
to the tax man or the warrior and
stoned-carved stories are fading fast.

If you give what you get then carved
stones and telephones are irrelevant.
You can bet on taxes and war
because failure to communicate
only means that your telephone
isn't connected to the internet.

Full Moon in the Park

The full moon caught in the summer leaves
slides slowly into full view. It is ineffable
as darkness presses against my skin.

I feel a primitive fear of unseen creatures
who stalk their prey at night and this lamp
captures my reason and I long for a fire
and a cave where I can hunker in awe.

My partner intrudes saying,
"Look at that, it's beautiful."

The groomed park returns and creatures
become ordinary people meandering
in their safe lives but I cannot release
the shadows or the urge to strike a match.

Published:

- *Islands in the Shadow* – collection

- *12 Poems Read at 66 King E.* – chapbook

The Blowing Sand

The zenith of late summer is lush
with the completion of rebirth.
A faint odour of decline seeps
from the rich soil, meanders
through the innocent leaves,
warns them of impending change.

The sea gathers itself in swirls
and rain floods the land.
Winds bend compliant trees
and scatters our stiff ignorance.
The rich earth cycles through us
like odours through the leaves.

We know these things and bend
like those compliant trees,
feel free as leaves that know
next summer's certainty, know
the soil will give its sun-rich life
as seasons come and seasons go.

Grains of sand are dry and sharp.
They gather in an arid wind, ride
the thermal currents of discontent
along barren landscapes,
fall where there are no seasons,
no promise of renewal.

The sand and sea-born rain are far
apart, imprisoned in their seasons.
A sudden storm, blown from the sea,
can press the sand so it cannot rise,
but the dry wind of discontent will
blow against our stiff ignorance.



Mark Clement is retired and lives with his wife Margaret in the quiet town of Cobourg Ontario. Mark went to highschool in Cornwall Ontario and in 1958 had his first poem published in the St. Lawrence highschool yearbook. Following highschool, Mark attended what is now called a 'community college' and became a technocrat in the field of electronics. Work and family life overtook poetry and Mark didn't begin writing again until the mid '70s. Since that time, he has become increasingly active in the world of poetry and following retirement, poetry has changed from an avocation to an almost full-time job.

Today, Mark has non-paying jobs as webmaster and doing the layout of chapbooks and anthologies for The Ontario Poetry Society. In between, he manages to write a poem or two and participate in the local Cobourg Poetry Workshop. *Islands in the Shadow*, Mark's first full collection of poetry, was released in November 2008.