

The Dancing Of The Earth-Sprung



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Non-Fiction

Free Speech Upon The Rock Above The City:
a re-wording of John Milton's *Areopagitica* (2018)

Novellas

The Floating Harbour (2019)

Floating On The Avon By The Floodplains Of The Nile (2021)

Longer Poetry

The Ballad Of Stokes Croft (2019)

Nafereti-Iti: Book One (2021); Book Two (2022)

Isis, Su-Tekh, & The Falcon-Child (2023-24)

Song Of Palestine (2023-24)

Poetry Collections

Written Somewhere Sunny In The South-West (2023)

Fleeting Songs, Eternal (2023)

Seven Years Of Poetry (2024)

This story was first published on my personal WordPress, along with all my writing:
<https://williamaltoft.blog/>



Hear them dance
'pon the land
that they rose from,
born on
th'ground that they beat
with their earth-sprung feet –
fast fireflame firm
raw-rhythm to the sky
chant spirit to the sunshroud night!

Like the wolf 'bout the white-tailed deer,
the morning gathers...

October 7th 1654

The land – it rolls, lushscapely climbing; fall t'crash-tumblegatherrise in long, unlevelled hillplains, forested with coastly plumage, ocean-worn. Greenful, garish scatterings of vibrant grassland latticing the wooded-groves that densely decorate in great 'n gathered foresting of branching bronchi.

On the shell of the spirit's dream, dark-water dances with the ancient earth; bright-water, lapping at the beaches, inundates the submerged rushes of the marshy creeks. Weedwort-rattlegrass clasps the passing wind on its way to transpose the calling of the warblers, curlew-chorused, with the marsh wren watching where the nuthatch hurries.

Welikia the Witchgrass echoes
to the Redback,
salamandering along.

My Good Home 'laborates
the Painted Turtle,
talking to the Terrapin.

The Black Duck 'n the Tree-Frog
tremble as the Osprey
hawks its rapt intent.

The pecking 'pon the Pine
now punctuates
the landscape's changing...

Streamed freshwater fights to find the ocean, carrying the perch 'n trout, as it rivers from the limits of the m'yand'ring roots of the hazel, huckleb'ry, 'n sycamore. Muskrat, rattlesnake, 'n mouse, vole, cottontail, 'n chipmunk, milk snake, snapping turtle – myriad the mammals, reptiles; roaming foxes parse the grouse-filled fern.

And as the Owl oversees
where the Brown Bat roosts,
the Eagle roams
the sun-flecked sky.

The Otter 'n the Bobcat
marvel
at the Mountain Lion
as it maps its trails...

The island of The Place For The Gathering Of Bows, hill-canopied Manaháhtaan, makes harbour at the eastern reaches of a continent.

In a midden-heap, bone-chalky oyster shells stack, contents eaten. Left beside the great freshwater pond, they shimmer as a sunlit landmark left behind by Lenape fisherfolk, their lakely pond no longer theirs. To the river; to the ocean – flowing, feeding streams outventure, over salt-marsh, encouraged by the contoured layerland's earthsoil guide.

Autumn filters sunlight 'cross the water.

The day disembarks, having travelled o'er the ocean.

From the south, where the risen palisade writes *Settlement!* across the sky, have come pond-pilgrims – for the scenery; for the fishing; for the frontier's gaze. In their north-Germanic notes, they navigate the soundsea waves.

Only innocent, the young, Dutch dreamer-child drinks lifelove from her mother's breast; a brother – innocent 'n dreaming – drags a babeless hand ahead. There are men of young/old/middle age who forage, fish, 'n watch – for the bear on its black-furred wand'rings; for the wolf 'n the indigenous.

Canoes that move in silence;
footsteps falling as if ghostly made –
fear of those *River Indians*
unsettled by New Amsterdam.

Hazards of empire a-falling 'pon the ones caughtcarried by its waves, unknowing of the compass of direction steering steadily by powers proud 'n cognizant... Thus the people gather 'bout the pond's south-shore as the arrow-shaft sticks shuddering, shattering a young man's cheekbone with its fury.

.....

West-shore waters, Never Still Two Ways, that wash upon the soapstone sitting to be carved in serpentine deposit – here the tidal turnings crashcaress Against The Pipe-Making Place. Cloth, kettles, wampum, blankets, beer, 'n guns... but for this? Gunpowder 'n disease a-given as the goods for the sale of a stretch of soul.

The creek encroached where the cultivated land lay tensely in a pact with nature; now a Noortwyck, bloodied by the intermittent warfare waged by th'white ambition...

Northward pushed.

Northward pushed.

The Bobwhite 'n the Terrapin
were hunted here;
th'Perch plucked as the Bittern watched.

Now the paths
no longer lead
t'where the Oyster waits,
but to acres of plantation.

The day becomes the present with the dawn's embarking.

They, like the padding of the noiseless paws of the naked hunt of nature, move south through the groves 'n the grass 'n the trees with a vengeance in their radicalised minds. Buck-skinned; beaver-pelted; feathers 'gainst their proving breasts – boys to be made into men by the hunt; by the harrying; the catch; the kill.

The tattoo on their skin
'n the tattoo of the drum
beat t'gether
'n the lock
of the hair
on the scalp
of their head
stands, headdress-crested,
calling out its red-tipped blackness!

Holding bows of hickory; wrought-iron, smoothbore muskets – they approach, with range ‘n power, the north-west of the pond.

The gathering is settuhling. In jacket-coats of coloured cotton ‘n in gartered-stockings ‘n with hatted-heads do they spread – a dozen children, some in arms, ‘bout the boots of the men ‘n women. Barely guarded; bearing a few guns, some fishing hooks.

From the wind-whipped rushes, now the archers fire.

.....

“The savages are savaging, sir.”

“Told you the intel was accurate.”

“No-one doubted it, sir. They’ve killed two... Another...”

“Hostages?”

“Grabbing a woman, baby, & child as we speak.”

“Give it a minute more.”

“Are we supposed to pursue them?”

“No.”

“Just kill, watch them flee, report back?”

“Yep. Right... Come on then.”

.....

Dense orbs of lead swerve swiftly through the morning, passing by each other on their ways to ‘n from the opponents, oppositely placed, uneven in the number of their armed combatants.

The assault of the indigenous – a fierce warband.

The response of the settlers – a flustered scrap.

As a girl of teenage years stands frozen in a panic at the scene she is broken by the blast of a gun at her back as the militants arrive, ostensibly to save the day. Killed by the Dutch latecomers as they shoot with carelessness at the people up ahead, she falls – now her pale skin skids against the earth of the land she was brought unto.

The soldiers of New Netherland bayonet ‘n shoot ‘n shout; the warriors of The Homelands bludgeon ‘n shoot ‘n spear. At the end of it all, as the warband wisp away like the smoke by the campfire raised, taking as they go north th’woman ‘n the child ‘n the babe as their hostages, the troops tread upon the gory marsh that’s littered with the killed ‘n the dying, burying their boots in the blood of the subjugated.

.....

Many hills to be man-flattened, gridded over by the looming of a stretch of rows of towers tearing at the fabric of the sky with their unkempt hubris ‘n their vast ambition. Myriad trails ‘n tracks – unrigid in their panarchial playing with the whims of nature ‘n the plans of sapients, they foreshadow the shackled domination of the wonder ‘n the wreckage of the city. Though it spills beyond the wall that streets its bord’ring way from east to west, the colony lies limited to the harbour at the edges of the ocean. Here, where the Dutch do engineer their control o’er the waters, the sails of Orange spread their mastly spans to grasp the wind – great ships share port with the pilot boats, the trawlers, ‘n the drifters all.

Trade mercantilically unfolding at the far frontiers of theft.

Past the stone-front
slat-front
dwellings, barrel-piled
out fence-front
overhanging woodsigns,
separated out
by the shops 'n the land
hand-worked in strips,
straying swine
switch gossip with the cattle
'n the sheep
in the street bump-cobbled –
here they run
with their yelling
of the news of murder!

Loose-lipped fire – all they know is their own are mangled; murdered; taken. Like rats from off the gangways of a new-moored ship, the flames of fear 'n racism run their unchecked, fanned, encouraged ruin 'cross the fragile nature of the human mind.

"They are aware?"

"They are aware."

"But not that we knew?"

"No – not that we knew."

"That we knew, they are not aware?"

"That we knew of the intent of the warband in advance, these people – they are not aware."

"Good."

"Good."

"And they do not suspect? Theorise?"

"Of the fact that, not only did we know in advance that the warband of the savages was seeking violent vengeance for our incessant thieving of their land by corrupt false-trade 'n vicious murder on an unknowing assortment of our civilians, but that, not only did we consciously allow that violent vengeance to fall upon those unknowing assorted civilians of ours with our full awareness 'n pre-knowledge, we actively did not intervene for a protracted period of time as the violent vengeance unfolded before us so that we might allow as much violent vengeance as possible to unfold in order to superficially excuse 'n justify the fact that we are looking to eradicate the dirty lot of them on whatever barren pretence we can muster – you mean this?"

"Yes, that."

"No, they do not suspect or theorise that. This."

"Good."

"Good."

.....

By the beachly edges of the island, sandful stretches straitside stradduhling the blue amphibious, down they take their hostages, held captured by a captivating force. In a trance of fear; of foggy terrorwisps about their minds, they, strangleclouded into silence, stripped of their freedom, sit within the towed canoe.

Upriver, row homeward!
Row t' beyond the saltmarsh wetlands
where the valleys drain
'n the upland forest
covers 'cept the meadowplains!

Eelgrass meadows
swim in shallows;
sway in shadows...

The matrilocated Lenni Lenape lay in scattered clans, their vast, unbroken possibility of movement, settlement, 'n movement-on now fractured, cracked, truncated – sold for some household goods; violence; pestilence...

Cultivate the Three Sisters
of maize 'n beans 'n squash!
Gather hunt –
gain flesh 'n hide 'n shell
t'consume, create, 'n trade!
Break soil in the clearing fields!
Bring deer unto the river!
Bear beaver-pelt 'n buckskin;
deer hair; porcupine quills!

Now the chestnut-tree canoes arrive; are hauled; are placed; are left. White mother; white child; white babe-in-arms – made to move; moved along.

Woven cornstalks matted muddy; clay-bound elm shaped shelteric – the homes in their semi-permanence make village of the gathered band. Weaving waiting watching feeding talking laughing greeting gawking walking wand'ring wond'ring resting lazing looking drinking eating gath'ring bringing living.

Of The Woods (*silva... silvaticus...*), wildsavagely indigenaic!

From the water to the water through the land between, Welikia-begotten spirits! More ancient than archaic time their entry o'er the land, far-cradle born.

Indu...

Indigena...

Earth-Sprung.

Huddling together, the ship-borne mother 'n her here-born children cower.

.....

Red cedar-wood in palisade; walls of rubblestone 'n hard-packed earth – amidst the windmills, worked-land, scattered streets, 'n busy docks, Fort Amsterdam – proud – figureheads the city.

Near thirty years in use, its few, big buildings stand encased. With the jutting corners arrow-headly heralding their cannons, it flies its flag of orange, white, 'n blue, letters within.

Built by the displaced, employed into earning back some homeland.

Built by the chain-dragged, enslaved a dark-ocean away.

By the gate, the Dutch-Manhattanites a-gather.

"Vengeance!"

"What happened?"

"Vengeance!"

"But what happened?"

"Terrorism!"
"Unprovoked!"
"Evil!"
"Unannounced!"
"They killed our people!"
"Terrorists!"
"We are in grief!"
"Terrorists!"
"They savaged from their godless shadows!"
"Vengeance!"
"Unannounced!"
"They murdered those who did no wrong!"
"Evil!"
"Unprovoked!"
"In hostage-hell they hold our kin!"
"They hold our kin in hellish chains!"
"Terrorism!"
"Terrorists!"
"Vengeance!"
"Evil!"
"Vengeance!"

A man named Levy climbs atop a pile of barrels. New to the place, by the Pear Tree passaged from the Old World he had been, sailing with two other Ashkenazim on across the ocean. Only shortly after, now that the Portuguese had stolen what the Dutch had thieved, twenty-three Sephardim came from South America. Thus bolstered, this community began its troubled time of fighting to be at least tolerated.

"Repugnant jew, get down!"
"I will speak!"
"Infect, you mean!"
"Deceitful race!"
"I will speak on regardless! So, they have killed our innocent? Have taken our innocent?"
"Yes!"
"Terrorists!"
"Vengeance!"
"This is inexcusable – how shall our response unfold?"
"En masse!"
"Indiscriminately!"
"Rid this island of them!"
"Should we not kill or capture their savage warband only?"
"More!"
"They all delight savagely in these acts!"
"They murdered those who did no wrong?"
"Yes!"
"Vengeance!"
"So we should murder those who did no wrong?"
"Yes!"
"Vengeance!"
"Do we not occupy their home?"

"It's our home now!"
"We'll take the rest!"
"May they not, then, defend the rest?"
"Terrorists!"
"Evil!"
"Vengeance!"

The sun sees the west 'n walks toward it, rapt by the horizon. Where the morning falls, the afternoon lays tribute. The militia marshals genocide in its fucking racist heart. For the hostages, not a thought – they are but excuses for slaughter.

.....

The beat
of the roots
that the earth
embraces,
carrying
the call
of the wild,
drums native
knowledge
to the stamp
'n the step
of the soles
of the spirits
who perform
the dance!

Can you see the encampment in your mind's eye? Will you follow as the people move about, their existence not naïve-idyll but real 'n raw 'n human? Do you see, amidst the hair that's the colour of the bear 'n the skin that's the colour of the bark, the mother 'n the child 'n the babe so close together, fire-beside?

His fair hair with mother's fingers through it; his hand holding his sister's foot – sat atop the hides spread upon the ground, the boy hears the hues of language. The younger slumbers; the older stares, shock-stricken. The middle listens.

Listens...

Listen.

The afternoon has deepened. It is deepening still.

By a woman 'n a girl they are given fish 'n corn; some sour milk. Timidly, the boy-child hunger-lusts, looking to his mother for permission. Not given; not withheld – exhaustion holds her gaze. So he takes just a little; then a lot – now he gorges, battuhling the acid of his stomach. Even as he shovels with a hand, his other takes aside for his sister 'n his mother. Side-eyes of crazed temptation notwithstanding, safe he keeps their portion. Burping as he licks his hands, two voices shock him.

Ground-deep, guttural tongue outspoken – passing men make comment.

Breechcloths; borne colour 'pon their painted skin; greased hair; laughter in their chests.

"They called you *Bear Cub*."

Another shock – one voice; this time comprehensible.

"And other things."

The boy looks at an ancient man.

"Sleeping Bear Mother." Ancient Man makes Young Boy contemplate his lifegiver. "The men also called you *Corn Boy*. Also *White Bear Cub*. *Fishing Bear*. Also *Moon-Pale Yellow-Cub Corn-Demon*."

The boy stares still, taking in the Dutch he's hearing.

"We like to name things."

Burls 'n hollows under haggard leaves o'erhanging knotted oakflesh. Branches batter-broken limbstrong healed in gnarful scars joint-jagged. Adorned with the quills of the porcupine 'n deer-hair dyed deep scarlet, this man, slumped-sat 'gainst a canvassed pole, smokes from his soapstone pipe.

"Do you know our words? No – too young. Won't ever, most likely. I know yours. I am glad to know your words. Words are magic. So I know your magic – but you do not know mine. A hard magic! Such strange sounds... When we first heard you speak, we thought white men had been possessed by duck spirits! I wonder what spirits you think red men are possessed by? Even before I knew your words to know your thoughts, I could see – you think we are possessed by something. Do you want to know what it is, White Bear Cub? Do you want to know what we are possessed by?"

Entranced, the boy nods, near imperceptibly.

"The land, Yellow Fur! The earth! We are Earth-Sprung! Somewhere else, on some different land – perhaps there you are Earth-Sprung, too. But not here – no. Not here."

As Ancient One looks off, creating clouds to drape the sky, Young One watches him; watches others.

The afternoon paints over the horizon with its passing, as evening comes to pave the way for darkness. A woman kneels before some gathered children by a fire, gesturing 'n speaking – making magic.

"Yellow Fur."

At the old man's voice, the boy looks over.

"Not your eyes, child. Give her your eyes. Give me your ears."

The boy looks back toward the woman.

"Do you know what she is doing?"

"No... Telling stories?"

"Ah – a bear with white man's speech! No, not telling stories. More than telling stories. She is Other-Speaking. Telling stories that tell stories."

And so the evening ushers in the darkness.

.....

"Are we ready then?"

"We are ready."

"And... anyone that moves?"

"Anything that breathes."

"Okay, good."

"Good."

"And... if it becomes clear that the members of the warband are not actually here in this camp?"

"They probably aren't."

"Okay."

"Good."

"And... the hostages probably are here in this camp?"

"Yes."

"Anything that breathes."

"Everything – breathing or not."

"Okay, good."

"Okay."

So the men cut the throats of the watchers, wheeling forth their hellfire metal mounted up upon the frames of contorted wood, bearing up the monstrous mouths. Hook-guns, with their lead projectiles, pointing blindly through the vegetation, line the gaps 'tween the righteous cannon ready for to spit 'n belch 'n vomit death.

.....

"Bear Cub."

The boy looks toward the man.

"Close your eyes. Close your ears."

"Why?"

"Sleep. Like Mother Bear. Like little fellow cub. Do not stay awake."

The boy leans upon his family, falling into sleep so swiftly.

"I am glad to have known your words, Yellow Fur. If only to have kept you from this terror."

.....

The militia of the men of Europe, bowed down before a cloudly spectre, are listening 'fore they launch their grand finale. The dense 'n flame-laced cloud, column-standing, speaks its word, its dreadful voice reverberating violence.

"I am the terror that precedes you; the hornet-angel that shall go before you, off unto the lands of others, where I shall wipe them out. All who dwell in land you want – I shall drive them out before you. They must not live on land that you call yours. As I stretch my hand above them, your artillery shall fire. Tear down their altars; smash their sacred stones."

Infernal fire...

This dark material; this God Of Greed; Of Genocide – it makes a wild abyss of another native home.

And beyond the screams of engines?

Empty night.

.....

Moon-watched middle night.

Splintered wood through canvas torn by shattered poles in fractured silhouette stoop bloody, broken, flesh-dressed rubble fallen 'pon the cratered road convulsed by concrete carrion of livestock decimated, lying on the life-soaked soil with the man 'n the boy 'n the woman 'n the girl 'n the newborn 'n the old 'n the weeping of the moonlight over Palestine is corrupted by the warplane's screech that mocks the murdered with its murd'rous malice, riding high above the drooping hand left hanging in its debris shroud as the gray fox sniffs at the mollusk shells it holds, waiting to be strung into beady bracelets bearing purple-marbled white phosphorous burns about the Gazan air with poison-flame still flickering where wigwams, set alight, came crashing to the earth atop those sheltering inside the bags he holds, the parts of his children – rendered formless; lifeless; mutilated – sag in bloody grief all while she weeps embroidered tears over her mother 'n her father 'n her best friend 'n her school mates 'n the school itself, now nothing but a heap of bodies blazing bright in painted-patterns, th'colour crying 'cross their native skin amongst the Chestnut 'n the great Red Oak

who rail 'n rage unto the silent sky as the world stays deaf to the sounds of murder; blind-eyed to the crimes of war.

The wolf howls where the olive tree lies broken.

The seeds
of the spirit –
they are indestructible
'n so they rise
from the land
that they bleed on
born from
roots form
vast regermination
never killed
never stopped
never undone
running
is the drumming
of the beat
of the feet
on the soil
that's their own
of their home
where they stamp
with the fury
of the power
of the burning
of the fire
of the beauty
of the dancing
of the Earth-Sprung!