

SAID THE RIVER: An Anthology



Clive Williams

Said the river:
imagine everything you can imagine,
then keep on going.

Mary Oliver

Instructions for living a life.
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.

Mary Oliver



Yet nature wise, becomes the dappled wood

Sonnet 1

by Clive Williams

stand in the quiet wood and wait for morning
when cobweb silk snares light's first waking sigh
as jewelled grass bows to the slate grey dawning
and veils of mist enchant the meadow high
fleet comes the deer so cautious in its grace
yet nature wise becomes the dappled wood
and knows the presence in this hallowed place
where all creation then before her stood
and poorer creature man who cannot see
with endless thought that drowns his fretted head
that life is there for all eternity
on leaf strewn paths where woodland creatures tread

and love will outlast each passing season
when matter matters not and joy is reason



the spider still will turn its eye to distant folding hills

On Bradnor Hill

by Clive Williams

there is a place within my mind - cathedral like in majesty
whose soaring hawk describes its height upon the morning breeze
and bracken spiders spin their lives by rabbit nibbled aisles
my breath was caught on Bradnor Hill
words lost in awe as opal wisps of woodman's smoke
and hallowed splendour stilled my heart

and when we are gone away
and time robs man of youth and beauty
the spider still will turn its eye to distant folding hills
that lay as young lovers one with another forever folded in gentle embrace
and Summer clouds drift silken sheets of gold upon their limbs
then will we softly catch our breath
and hold the beauty in a memory – if you were there with me



down to the waters edge where they drink

At anchor in the Luro Skärgård, Sweden

By Clive Williams

We are mid lake now, in a very sheltered horseshoe bay within a group of islands in the Luro Skärgård, one of the many natural harbours in Lake Vanern, which at the moment we share with two other boats some distance away, one at anchor, the other, stern out and bow tied to a tree. How can I tell you what total peace is? We relax in comfort on deck warmed by the afternoon sun with nothing to do other than absorb this extraordinary sense of “something else.” The trees are silent, the boat is hushed, not even a bird call can be heard, the water is calm and its undulations barely caress the rock 100 mtrs away. I can feel my ears strain, literally, for absolutely any sound. I look at Jane and we smile knowing we are sharing this same rare experience - suspended in a complete absence of sound for just a while - then as an evening finale, bathed in golden light, a herd of cattle emerge in slow procession from the trees, down to the waters edge where they drink and slowly raise their heavy heads to look at us strangers in their world miles from anywhere.



see in the glass the spirit's viscous tales of gipsy fires

Fado in Porto

by Clive Williams

then stagger down that steep stepped street
of marble treads worn smooth and low by winters rain and countless feet
and drink the summer warmth and amber wine
by sun scorched walls where Morning Glory clings for life
and scattered roofs and flaking shutters cascade in flights down to the quay
where Porto's vaults await the sea

take shade beyond this beaded screen
where music creeps into your mind
then see in the court a dancing child half hidden in diagonal light
her ragged dress as coloured wings
begin to sway to Fado's rhyme
and heady wine and Fado's song
sweeps you away to a world gone by

the singers voice is from the earth where vines root deep in fractured rock
and mountain crags above the groves where falcons fall and glide then stall
her passion speaks of lovers pain and broken hearts
and soars then hangs - suspending time
and in that moment steals your soul and thrills and waits
until the music wheels and falls again

so swirl a goblet brimmed with golden wine and see in the glass
the spirit's viscous tales of gipsy fires
and her voice leads you upwards
with oakwood smoke to a timeless star filled Moorish sky
and the scent of roses, tarragon and mountain thyme
of chocolate and cinnamon, caramel and cloves
and her Fado voice in minor keys bleeds your heart
and forever you are lost in memories



Lower Manhattan that September day

Nine Eleven

by Clive Williams

a guy in a button down shirt walks by
Lower Manhattan that September day
the world turns around and I wonder why
what was the point, and I try and I try

blood on his face and his clothes ashen grey
a guy in a button down shirt walks by
I search in his eyes and fear fills the sky.

They stooped to kill like brutal birds of prey
the world turns around and I wonder why
they had my name but not my time to die

when towering dreams cruelly fell away
a guy in a button down shirt walks by
Life's hopes shattered down, crushed steel mounted high.

No more will firemen wave to those at play
the world turns around and I wonder why
a tightening throat and tears in my eye

still too heavily those memories weigh
a guy in a button down shirt walks by
the world turns around and I wonder why



but only you will feel the instant when trees cease to whisper

Above a Sussex Beach

by Clive Williams

when early morning's moonstone light seeks to wake
be still lie perfectly still
do not move your hand or folded arm from near your face
conceal your waking breath with a softer pace
then look upon my stolen hoard
for I am a thief a thief of time
and will show you the art of how it is done

here is the time a crown of gulls wheel halos in the heavens
and scribe our fate on warm river air
the arun runs fingers through clean picked ribs of long dead hulks
slips sideways over silken beds of chocolate mud
and chuckles chasing coat tails of the fast ebbing tide

but only you will feel the instant when trees cease to whisper
and the world stands still and you sense that you are falling
only then will you know that the time to steal has come
and a maiden fair with rhineland hair
brings octopus and wine

look here now
while the wind sweeps the slipper limpet foreshore
where pebbles lie like plovers eggs and scrunch up to the dunes
our footprints in the boardwalk sand live then in a breath are gone
and the sea holly rattles
when the wind surfs the seed heads on the long dune grass

and the maiden from the rhine
brings us chanterelles and mussel shells

a beaten silver sliver of a spring tide moon
watched me steal as we walked that afternoon
the seasons shall not age the moments I have stolen
though our footprints sift through the slats of time
and the lizard's tracks and the yellow horned poppies
all blow to dust all too soon

velvet is the evening when she walks in sculpted chambers
her eyes haze olive green as sacred roman glass
she brings us marjoram and tarragon
and again I sense the falling
and her hair hangs down in golden saxon plaits



That evening, I sat under the great Carob tree.

Finca el Cerrillo

by Clive Williams

Under the great Carob tree I sit, in a cushioned oasis of rough hewn local stone forming a sheltered verandah above a garden. Here and there, pots of vivid red geraniums, agapanthus blue and heavenly scented jasmine accentuate the sunlight and contrast lush fronds glistening in the shade. By the house, sun bleached animal skulls adorn a window ledge, and sculpted stone frogs entwine for eternity beside three steps rising up to dappled shade where the house dog is coiled asleep at the front door. From within, I hear the staff preparing another wonderful dinner - always a surprise - and practising their presentation of English words ready to recite their creation before serving. Somewhere, there is bird song.

Shrubs and trees in the garden tumble downwards. Large waxen leaves and exotic purple blooms provide a haven for carpenter bees toiling away in the heat of the day and small birds call and hide from the light among the rustling tree canopy. On down to the prickly pears beside the lane where birds impervious to the spiny threat, dart from one orange bloom to the next, almost too quickly to observe. Along the lane through wandering terraces and wild orchids to the dreamlike tree house - were you there? - an ancient gnarled olive tree tormented and twisted, yet home to a menagerie of mysterious creatures partly hidden in its age wracked limbs. Ascend the winding stairway to a rustic platform and stop in silence above fifty shades of shimmering silver olive trees which drop away down to a white village in the valley far below, from where the distant rhythm of a drum band punctuates the day, in rehearsal for the coming Palm Sunday procession and celebrations.

Trip with care down the zig zag path, scree skidding underfoot, down to the Roman bridge and follow the route beneath to cross the stream with a single lunging jump and land dry footed to look back and watch others become gazelles in turn. The path winds past a cluster of avocado trees, there to puzzle the plantsmen among us. It has started to rain but continue upwards on the path by thick bush and lavender iberica, wild sage, rosemary and thyme, all filling the damp air with fragrance and there, partly hidden, we stop to read a memorial plaque to one traveller whose life came to an end at this far flung spot. So many silent thoughts revolve in minds just then.

Mountains stand at the horizon, some wearing a cloak of snow at the peak. The soil is iron red at the base where almond trees in formation stand in delicate pink bursts of joy and a pack mule from the fields below, brays it's pitiful plight with every ounce of strength in its laboured brown body. Driving upwards, the trail becomes stonier and wilder. Steep plantations of conifers appear until we stop in a clearing where vast slopes of grey rock and scree stand above the tree line. Here, there is a feeling of being in the sky - to look down and down to the tiny world below where a faint distant tinkle of goat bells leads the eye to a lonely goatherd leaning on his staff as his goats tumble and scramble around him through thick parched scrub in search of something to eat - a scene unchanged for centuries. Here we drink hot chocolate and taste homemade biscuits while we stand around the tailgate with the dog weaving excitedly between our legs and sticks. It is a special time, a special place.

This is nature in the raw. Poisonous caterpillars hang from nests of web and drop to the ground where they march aimlessly, head to tail in toxic hairy necklaces and beneath the trees there were signs of wild boar which had been rooting for food. Later in the day through the jumbled rocky slopes, a small black snake lay sunning itself on a rugged slab, like an exquisite jewelled brooch, quite still and beautifully camouflaged. I cannot find words which adequately describe the final pinnacle of the walk - we sat in a rough ring, perched on what seemed like the top of the world with the country spread out in all directions around us. There was a sense of being, and wonderment and thankfulness which was somehow out of this world.

That evening, I sat under the great Carob tree. The light was failing fast. Cast up from the pool in the garden, an iridescent blue green glow slowly undulated in the trees and the slightest breeze - just enough to feel - wafted warm perfumed air across the verandah.



and heavy eyes like deep dark pools

On Upper Meadow

by Clive Williams

It was a moment on upper meadow
late sun dipping the crest
and me against a rusty gate
a stunted apple twisted and wild
and trodden cider in the air

shadows slid across
flint kicked chalk strewn warrens
padded hard by feet of the night
where thrushes feed on straw gold snails
and rabbit roads wind nettled and white

on the meadow crest
up where they found a Saxon hand
clutching a silver coin
up where a thousand years before others saw as I
four horses graze the chill field shade

and snort warm air
and swish a tail
and twitch a flank
and mark the moment with a hind hoof stamp
and heavy eyes like deep dark pools

we did not see how they came
but a startled blackbird burst from blackthorn
all heads came up on full alert
the air charged with animal uncertainty
a group of deer were on their meadow

and in that moment I joined their world
knew their thoughts and tasted the sky
heard trees whisper as the breeze brushed by
warm scent of earth and unseen life
where poppy seeds sleep and wait their turn

Then began their game of chance
each one reading the others stance
and my heart was with theirs and my senses sang
go gently good souls live softly today
then others may learn to follow your way

and a thousand years on
I shall watch from the crest
four horses graze then meet their test
as a herd of deer emerge from the wood
love life love gentle be seen to be good



and a silence lays thick with the snow

Imagine

by Clive Williams

some time every winter
those first whirling snowflakes
float down from a lead coloured sky

and in spite of the downside
which I know only too well
I hope it will settle or lay - however you say

then come the large flakes
great chunky beefy bunches
which like to dress the branches

and in the morning sun
the garden is another world
of frozen stillness and white powdered light

and the glittering birch tree
droops her twigs of filigree lace
and a silence lays thick with the snow

however hard you try to imagine
something with only half of this wonder
the world will always give you more



Stralsund, Germany
from the harbor.
28 May 2014

just look at the magnificent buildings

In Harbour at Stralsund, Germany

by Clive Williams

The old Hanseatic League city of Stralsund benefited for centuries from a monopoly on the Baltic trade – just look at the magnificent buildings and sea front where the harbour provided a good place to sit out a full on Easterly gale and give time to sketch.

Like so many towns in the former East Germany, the fabric of the town became decayed and even derelict but in spite of all the odds, there are treasures still here which made me gasp – at St Mary's Church the silver organ pipes tower above the most perfect baroque ornamentation of angels and intricate craftsmanship of what is one of the finest organs still in working existence having been built around 1658, a quarter century before JS Bach was born.

On that day someone was playing Bach, adding another dimension to the experience. The altar screen is a riot of medieval art and colour and gold yet bravely to one side was an exhibition of photographs and text telling the story of the city from 1930 to 1945. I stood in a black emotional silence with others trying to come to terms with the depth of man's cruelty – my eyes filled with tears and I silently withdrew finding difficulty in coping with the images of people who had given up all hope and events which took place in this very city on these very streets. Where was humanity, where was civilisation, where was love for fellow man?



how can this be that all of this is here for me

The Osprey

by Clive Williams

I see an Osprey above the saltings, loose lazy wings calling itself home
I hear curlews along the mud, slurring their bill curved call rippling with the river
and swallows skim brown water where mullet skulk in silent pools
and I take the offered gifts of joy and life and hope and beauty
and wonder how can this be that all of this is here for me

Who would not breathe all that a rose has to offer in its brief life
or see the tilt of clinging foam touch your lips to leave its cappuccino kiss
or taste the crunch of sweet amaretti beneath the tongue's root
and this is the wonder of small things, as amber teardrops preserve their prey
these gifts live on for ever and a day

I see the moonless night reveal Andromeda
a smudge of dust between the stars
and I dissolve within and am lost in its infinity
as when you move your hair and there I glimpse the starlight by your ear
and watch your smile dazzle the night like sunlight on the sea
I crash and burn again in awe at love and life and all its mystery

Therefore would I wish no more than this
that these ephemeral sparks of joy unknowingly given
be with me when I walk that dark valley or stand at its brink
that within me my heart should miss another beat for love
and we fragments of creation be blown by the winds
in beauty and light until we like the Osprey are called home



The young couple making their solemn pledges to each other

Szczecin, Poland

by Clive Williams

Poland has suffered more than its fair share of wars over the centuries. In the Polish city of Szczecin the Cathedral Basilica of St James was built for the first time in the 12th C but war damaged many times and yet again rebuilt after WWII.

Its brick exterior is strident and functional with little elegance but leaving the heat of the day outside it conceals a wonderful interior of soaring columns flooded with light pouring through the most spectacular modern stained glass windows I think I have ever seen – to me they were reminiscent of the jewel like art which Russia was once so good at with astonishing use of colour and flowing line, like silks moved by a breeze.

In that wonderful setting a marriage ceremony was taking place. The young couple making their solemn pledges to each other in timid whispers which floated over the hushed congregation and breathed upon the stone fabric in every corner of the cathedral. A tightness came to my throat - I was near captivated by the ceremony, beauty and light when a lone voice began to sing, so fine and pure, then accompanied by strings and finally the organ – the music filling the vast space, enhancing every spiritual aspect of the experience – I was absolutely knocked out and have more to say about it than I am able to say just now.



where the water widens and slows

Stones

by Clive Williams

Still that small stone lies in my pocket
and my fingers roll and turn it without thinking
like the brook that tumbled and polished its
face to a smooth butterscotch hue

It had stopped for a while on a sandy ledge
where the water widens and slows
and gleamed like a jewel at my feet
as if it was pleased to meet me

anyway, I picked it up and it made me smile
you don't have to have a reason to smile
but there was something - something else
as I turned it over in my hand

it seemed to say, Hi there fellow traveller
you seem OK, what's your story?
well I know what you're thinking
but we both had a story of sorts

and we are both come from the cosmos
and all that stellar stuff
then life comes along and this time
I am me and my friend is a pebble

well there's a thought enough to make you smile
as if it wasn't enough to have a pebble for a friend
but when we are all gone down to dust again
what journey will we go on then?

what stories we could tell
when that life force rolls us around again
and we meet another fellow traveller somehow
and we smile and feel good

and say, Hi there fellow traveller,
you seem OK, What's your story?



where the stream longs to linger

By The River

By Clive Williams

rain drops meld on windows
tracking a random downwind path
gravity viscosity shape a route
by chance back to this river
bringing memories

in the water there
in the clear small shallow by the bank
where the stream longs to linger
around the swaying cabbage leaves

those few oscillating leaves caught
on stem patterns as cloud chamber particles
and the other rainbow of coloured sludge
where the sticklebacks hunt for lunch

two boys cut blowpipes from
magenta balsam along the bank
penknives mimic machetes
transported to filmland Congo

exotic foam swirls down with
strange scented air from snuff mills
a lethal kingfisher blue flash
slashed dipped turned and back

panther like advance through nettles
silence stealth hunting their quarry
water rat out from the far bank
coming coming nosing its bow wave

a move, it dived, it's gone
propagating rings and rings
a target for stones which fly and splash
and skim again again and again

sudden fear of two swans
that break arms with single blows
and hiss aggression in their direction
or so they are told now not so bold

and Trevor drowning and thrashing
before their eyes as they stand
and watch
not knowing what to do



a trace of flint a smear of chalk and fragile twigs

Killing of the Deer

by Clive Williams

a pathway runs through Home Farm wood
beneath the holly oak and ash
where trailing brambles claw and snag
and ferns conceal its twists and turns
and drifts of leaves disguise its pass

from Upper Meadow down to the road
by hoof brushed beech leaves gilded bronze
then down the bank where scattered grains of dark damp earth
a trace of flint a smear of chalk and leafless fragile twigs
meet polished road stone fateful hard and cold

in the lengthening dusk that comes with early Spring
a dying hind with broken legs beside the cruel road
elan and grace discarded now in such abandoned form
with gaping mouth and dark doe eyes alight with fear
of man who shattered nature's beauteous balance on this day

uncomprehending almond eyes beyond a blackthorn hedge
its mate would flee yet in confusion knew why she should stay
knelt on the road my eyes held hers both searching the unknown
caught out in no man's land where death lay waiting
then sensing loss she looked once more and slowly turned away

tenderly my hands caressed the deer's tormented beauty
compassion spoke and willed her pain subside
tense sinews eased fear dispersed she knew I meant no harm
In calm and peace we were as one below the silent farm
surrendering then she touched my soul and silently she died

much time has blown through Home Farm wood
and some would claim what's gone has gone
yet something there she gave to me but how I cannot say
the rarest lasting gift of love though little had I done
her spirit reached into my heart and still she lives this day



the brick above the lintel has a paw print in its clay

The Derelict Forge

by Clive Williams

Dangerous building or so the faded sign says, that it should come to this
a slumped wooden door leans askance held fast by nettles
windows cracked and lit with a cobweb cataract haze
and on the floor only nameless forgotten pieces of yesteryear
yet on the day my father was born this place was already grown and fired
with adventure and iron and flying yellow sparks from the anvils blow

sleeping now in woodland the forge returns to earth
relentless travel of shadows weigh upon the sagging roof
its iron sheets rust down to stain the river stones
and in the velvet sheltered blackness long eared bats
hear thievish wasps take timbers for their paper nests
and almost without measure the brick stack's back begins to stoop

it feels impolite to look upon this shell these time washed bones of former glory
Its wooden frame worn silver grey with age and coarse like old men's hair
and it occurs to me that we meet now at the same crossroad of our own respective times
but the brick above the lintel has a paw print in its clay
and you could say there's a sense of justice that
our spirit and the marks we leave will last a thousand years

Clive Williams was born in 1942 at Bristol, England. He studied engineering which gave him the opportunity to continue his interests in music and the arts while working in Electrical Power Engineering. In the 1990's he started a company using his knowledge of Mapping and Utilities to provide expertise in Geographical Information Systems for the computing industry.

He studied painting and drawing at Reading in the early 1970's under Ian Humphreys and his early work was sold by Gerrans Gallery in Cornwall. He now works mainly in oil on portraiture and abstract work but often sketches in watercolour. His studio is near Henley on Thames in the beautiful Chilterns where the surroundings provide frequent inspiration. He is a yachtsman and his knowledge and love of the sea is clearly seen in much of his work.

His writing and poetry closely follows a romantic and spiritual path very much in harmony with his art and love of music.

Besides the UK, his work has been sold in the following countries, USA, Germany, China, Sweden, Netherlands, Portugal, France and Australia.



