

# “Vulnerability”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

Vulnerability is not a weakness, a passing indisposition, or something we can arrange to do without, vulnerability is not a choice, vulnerability is the underlying, ever present and abiding undercurrent of our natural state. To run from vulnerability is to run from the essence of our nature, the attempt to be invulnerable is the vain attempt to become something we are not and most especially, to close off our understanding of the grief of others. More seriously, in refusing our vulnerability we refuse the help needed at every turn of our existence and immobilize the essential, tidal and conversational foundations of our identity.

To have a temporary, isolated sense of power over all events and circumstances, is a lovely illusionary privilege and perhaps the prime and most beautifully constructed conceit of being human and especially of being youthfully human, but it is a privilege that must be surrendered with that same youth, with ill health, with accident, with the loss of loved ones who do not share our untouchable powers; powers eventually and most emphatically given up, as we approach our last breath.

The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with disappearance, our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully, or conversely, as misers and complainers, reluctant and fearful, always at the gates of existence, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door.

# “Sweet Darkness”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone,  
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure  
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your home  
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon  
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness  
to learn

anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

# “Finisterre”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

The road in the end taking the path the sun had taken,  
into the western sea, and the moon rising behind you  
as you stood where ground turned to ocean: no way  
to your future now but the way your shadow could take,  
walking before you across water, going where shadows go,  
no way to make sense of a world that wouldn't let you pass  
except to call an end to the way you had come,  
to take out each frayed letter you had brought  
and light their illumined corners; and to read  
them as they drifted on the western light;  
to empty your bags; to sort this and to leave that;  
to promise what you needed to promise all along,  
and to abandon the shoes that had brought you here  
right at the water's edge, not because you had given up  
but because now, you would find a different way to tread,  
and because, through it all, part of you would still walk on,  
no matter how, over the waves

# “Stone” (Thobar Phádraig)

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

The face in the stone is a mirror looking into you.  
You have gazed into the moving waters,  
you have seen the slow light, in the sky  
above Lough Inagh, beneath you, streams have flowed,  
and rivers of earth have moved beneath your feet,  
but you have never looked into the immovability  
of stone like this, the way it holds you, gives you  
not a way forward but a doorway in, staunches  
your need to leave, becomes faithful by going nowhere,  
something that wants you to stay here and look back,  
be weathered by what comes to you, like the way you too  
have travelled from so far away to be here, once reluctant  
and now as solid and as here and as willing  
to be touched as everything you have found.

# “No One Told Me”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

No one told me  
it would lead to this.  
No one said  
there would be secrets  
I would not want to know.

No one told me about seeing,  
seeing brought me  
loss and a darkness I could not hold.

No one told me about writing  
or speaking.  
Speaking and writing poetry  
I unsheathed the sharp edge  
of experience that led me here.

No one told me  
it could not be put away.  
I was told once, only,  
in a whisper,  
“The blade is so sharp—  
It cuts things together  
—not apart.”

This is no comfort.  
My future is full of blood,  
from being blindfold,  
hands outstretched,  
feeling a way along its firm edge.

# “Working Together”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

We shape our self  
to fit this world

and by the world  
are shaped again.

The visible  
and the invisible

working together  
in common cause,

to produce  
the miraculous.

I am thinking of the way  
the intangible air

traveled at speed  
round a shaped wing

easily  
holds our weight.

So may we, in this life  
trust

to those elements  
we have yet to see

or imagine,  
and look for the true

shape of our own self,  
by forming it well

to the great  
intangibles about us.

# “Everything Is Waiting for You”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

*After Derek Mahon*

Your great mistake is to act the drama  
as if you were alone. As if life  
were a progressive and cunning crime  
with no witness to the tiny hidden  
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny  
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,  
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;  
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding  
out your solo voice. You must note  
the way the soap dish enables you,  
or the window latch grants you freedom.  
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.  
The stairs are your mentor of things  
to come, the doors have always been there  
to frighten you and invite you,  
and the tiny speaker in the phone  
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the  
conversation. The kettle is singing  
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots  
have left their arrogant aloofness and  
seen the good in you at last. All the birds  
and creatures of the world are unutterably  
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

# “The House of Belonging”

BY [DAVID WHYTE](#)

I awoke  
this morning  
in the gold light  
turning this way  
and that

thinking for  
a moment  
it was one  
day  
like any other.

But  
the veil had gone  
from my  
darkened heart  
and  
I thought

it must have been the quiet  
candlelight  
that filled my room,

it must have been  
the first  
easy rhythm  
with which I breathed  
myself to sleep,

it must have been  
the prayer I said  
speaking to the otherness  
of the night.

And  
I thought  
this is the good day  
you could  
meet your love,

this is the gray day  
someone close  
to you could die.

This is the day  
you realize  
how easily the thread  
is broken  
between this world  
and the next

and I found myself  
sitting up  
in the quiet pathway  
of light,

the tawny  
close grained cedar  
burning round  
me like fire  
and all the angels of this  
housely  
heaven ascending  
through the first  
roof of light  
the sun has made.

This is the bright home  
in which I live,  
this is where  
I ask  
my friends  
to come,  
this is where I want  
to love all the things  
it has taken me so long  
to learn to love.

This is the temple  
of my adult aloneness  
and I belong  
to that aloneness  
as I belong to my life.

There is no house  
like the house of belonging.