

New Poems

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These poems are for the late Rose Reynoldson. Her careful and kind critiques raised many poets from nothing. She grew up outside Florence Acres in the Depression. That's uphill from Woods Creek in the forest beyond Monroe, Washington, where the state prison broods over the town. Her family made its way by brewing hooch and holding weekend dances. Somehow, she finished graduate school and became a professor. Her book, *I know There's Something More*, tells about rough love and strong religion.

I dedicate this book also to Martha, my love of 50 years, who was taken by the Covid virus. Her poems are to come.

These are new poems because there are a couple of dozen old ones in print here and there. All I claim is that these are worth reading twice because I attend to meaning, meter and music.

My name is an obstacle. It means 'reed' in Polish, and it's pronounced something like Chinna. It's onomatopoetic. Think of a sea of dry reed stalks clicking against each other in a wind, or the sea of reeds Moses may have parted with his refugees. There's a river like that between Poland and Czechia.

The poems are divided into two groups: Lands and People, and Abstractions and Ideas.

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Proem: Threnody in Time of Plague

British Museum, London, March 10, 2020

“Timor mortis conturbat me.”

—*Lament for the Makaris,*

William Dunbar, 16th century

The news was never false, though lately
Speculation filled the pages. Now, fatally,
There’s no news at all, just silence
That throws us back on self-reliance.

Pax mortis consolat me.

The answer is, we do not know.
Antarctic ice speeds its flow.
The virus harvests a large percent
Of folks who quailed and quickly went.

Pax mortis consolat me.

The quarantined complain of loneliness
Though Netflix fills the air no less.
Somehow virtual companions pale
When living at home resembles jail.

Pax mortis consolat me.

Membership, begin with that.
So goes Pascal’s fine dictat.
The bell that tolls, tolls for you.
You must assume that burden too.

Pax mortis consolat me.