Matters of the Heart and Body

A rhetorical poetry collection by Sonny-Rhoey "Gwen" Liverod-Griffin

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Kernow duw genes

Thou hadst hand'd me mine own life,

A gift from thy radiant hills.

From bluest water didst thine bathe

Me; thy sapphiric blood standing

Vigil against the emmets that swarm,

And gnat at our homeland.

Thou wouldst now welcome them,

And reject me! Thine own daughter of Celtic

Egg and seed! In golden robes was I

Flowered; more delicate than, methinks,

The heaths upon which thee did grow.

I must know: dost thine oaks

Now reach the tin from which

Mine own blood was siphoned? From my ancestors'

Decay dost thee claim glory, yet thou hast declin'd my

Birthright. Woulds't thou cast out thine children

To beyond Piran's gaze? Where shall we sleep,

For all art rightful land is stolen from us, left for thine curse-ed

Emmets to hoard and ruin!

With 247 homes, to 400,000 Cornishfolk,

Mayhaps o'great Cornwall would'st benefit

From looking at Rightmove – if thou

Wouldst not protect thine children.

I cannot see beyond your sapphiric walls,

As though Tamar herself hath

Shackled mine soul to her great Kernow;

So I must ask: Will fifty thousand Kernewek men,

Know the reason why their heirs

Shall disinherit their house, whilst

More conquerors settle and displace?

When didst I, a queer youth of

Eight and ten, venture out

Of Mother Tamar's embrace

Unto formerly unmet Bristol,

I realised how fucking backwards you are. “One and All” our coat of arms proudly declares, whilst the same country voted leave, where people of colour are looked upon with either wonder or disgust, and us queers have scant allies. The English settlers have forever changed my home, distorted it into a place forged into the granite of time, doomed to serve up meagre capitalist pretendings of change: a Starbucks there, a Greggs along one singular road into Newquay, these are nothing but hollow windows into the world north of the Tamar that even Plymouth embraces. The worst of the Anglican imperialism has marked all of Celt, yet only Cornwall remains so distinctly ancient.

So, great Cornwall, tis now time for my leave.

For until you understand that your children cannot

Feel safe in Tamar’s embrace, why we cannot lay claim

To our homeland to which fifty thousand Kernewek men

Laid life to save - Cornwall cannot be a home to

Its children. But when you realise your mistakes,

When your pride and valour fade away,

When all of varying colours, places and flags,

Are united under one great golden blackened shield;

It is with great happiness I will say:

Kernow a’gas dynergh.

The Red River

Atop a high peak, the highest ever seen, so high the gods proclaimed it home,
There flowed countless rivers; the crown of their majesty.
They were birthed from divine tears that slipped gently from the peak to
The base – the gods' blessed water gave life to nature
That drank and swam in their gift, prospering and spreading:
People lived in harmony with animals, insects, the trees, the grass, fish, birds,
And all others of their world's magnificent beauty. These gems of nature,
Free and happy, were a sanctuary the world over.

Plentiful they were – the primordial ones – their love knowing no constraints:
Woman and man married man and woman both, some married only men
Whilst some married only women; some gods willed to abandon their sex,
Whilst others freely changed theirs. Attraction and commitment were as common
And bountiful as air. The godly coven revelled in it, peacefully and lovingly
Indulging themselves, and it seemed as though this paradise would never
Fade.

Until one evening, a god had seen his husband abed
Between two others. Free love was common, but only when spoken of;
The sly god had slipped away from his lover, to indulge in fantasy -
An underhanded affair. So, the affronted god sliced his skin in dismay,
His blood dripping, and dropping, and pooling into a shimmering
Red mirror, growing ever larger. The god would never stop bleeding,
No matter how much his love repented for his dishonesty – "this paradise
Would end before his pain would stop" the god screamed.
In time, the mirror was so immense and deep that all the gods drowned,
Perishing. With no more room to grow, the mirror, in time, cracked,
And from it, a river, as though cried by a blood moon, erupted.

Unlike its sapphiric siblings, this garnet river didn't pace itself,
Rocketing down the mountain, painting the luscious emerald
Hills in deep burgundy, the gods' bodies falling and rolling across the ruddy ground
As the current ploughed, ravaged, and wasted all it touched.
The red ran for miles, the divine haem impregnating the earth: drowning the bovine,

And rodents, and avians, and felines, and canines, and all people powerless
To stand sentinel against the bloody tide.

Though it ran for many years, the river in time, ceased its conquest,
And with it, the old gods were forgotten – their paradise of ecstasy faded.
But from their putrefied bodies, their spawn emerged. In likeness,
They were the gods reborn anew. In soul, they resembled the sickly pool of rot
That they were birthed from, the hedonism of their former selves an enigma to be trampled
And forgotten. A score and five they were in number, and so this quarter cent began a
Dreadful march. They dreamt of a black canvas with swathes of red, and so
Sought to expand the river. Oversea, and under land, their relentless strides would not be
Quelled, every step deepening and widening the river. The first rivers could not
Hold against the tide of dominance, and so the many splendid sapphires became one gamey garnet.
The gods' once bountiful nature, ladened with beauty and splendour,
Was crumpled and crushed under the foot of their descendants.
The survivors of the river's first rush were made slaves if they did not
Join the conquest, butchered if they attacked, and hunted if they ran –
Only those who gladly sold their hearts to empire were allowed to live.

The quarter cent, now a much larger host, had marched for many years,
But the first generation were old, weary, unable to sustain themselves
On the dying planet. So they, in their number, reproduced.
Man and woman and man and woman. Their sex, pleasureless and dutiful,
Doubled their number. The march had stalled for twenty-five years, but as
The children matured, the doomed walk began again. There remained much land
Undisturbed by their warpath, but with the coming of the spawn,
These lands were fruits to be plucked. As the children aged, they, as their parents before, grew weary.
So, naturally, they too had children, and their children had children, until, after millennia,
The earth was brown with the sodden colour of the river and the world ruined.

The once contained river, now expanding into an ocean with no assistance,
Was able to cover the world with itself, as though it were a child's blanket –
And, with the worldly dominance done, soon the conquerors
Began to squabble. Land, and people, and livestock, and vegetation,
The resources they had thoughtlessly doomed, were now

All they had to live by, and most of all, they wanted the ocean.

The ocean, a memorial to the united conquest, became a weapon turning

Sister against brother and husband against wife.

The squabbles evolved into wars, much like how the river

Evolved into the ocean. The river, and the people it had birthed,

Had swallowed the world – a hollow sphere of death and loss.

A sister killed her brother, and the river grew; a father killed his son,

And the river drank; a mother killed her lover, and the ocean laughed.

The gods have been forgotten, so too had the simple world they made,

The red lording over all in creation,

And still it remains today.

She leads me down, pushes me, caresses me, guides me to her lips, sweet smelling and fiery and addictively dangerous; gripping my hair pulling my head to and fro as though I were a pendulum, she giggles and delights in my squirms and whimpers and depraved carnal need for her – oh I need her so badly, to feel her around me, squeezing me, her wetness, I need it now – in a mocking tongue she dribbles and drools from her mouth to mine and it is so delicious, so nectary that Dionysus would soil himself just for a meagre droplet of her fluids; giving her the worship she deserves, I nip suck lick nip suck lick at her thighs, a thin trail of my own dedication forming between her meat and my tongue – oh her eyes she looks so cruel and mean and beautiful – with no time to think, not that I'd want any thoughts with her beautiful mahogany eyes tormenting me like that, she forces my mouth to hers and her taste is life and life is so sweet and rich and pure and I need it all immediately – oh she's pushing my face further in let me taste all of you please please please – my tongue now an earthworm trying to surface within her and I can't help but grinding myself against the floor the friction is like a spirit, it burns so good that I might explode and I twitch and twitch and twitch as she grabs my hair, her back arching, her legs squeezing my head as though it were a melon and I taste her release, and it is ambrosia, an orgasm from her mouth to mine – she looks at me and pouts, her gasps and giggles like ephemeral ecstasy and her smile like Buddha's – she strokes my cheek and slaps it hard and my brain doesn't know what speaking is, I only know the stinging redness on my cheek is a promise of want and need, and the gentle touch before a sign of care and love and – please fuck me oh my god I can't take it – because she's so smart – another yank of my hair, I swear she's reading my mind – pulls me up, onto the bed, pushes me down, using my tits as handles and – I can't bare it, I'm aching and throbbing and thrusting against her lips and I'm already dripping, and I shut my eyes drowning in her control – and – OH GOD SHE CALLED ME A GOOD GIRL – then she drops onto me and we both surrender ourselves as her wetness is coating my hardness and dripping down me and into me and I have to be further within her and my hips relent, bucking inside and we both convulse and scratch each other, me on her thighs, her on my chest making my nipples hard and before I can breathe her hands are wrapped around my throat squeezing the life out from one head and towards another – I see only her face contort as she brings her head to mine and her lips to my neck and I feel air filter down me again – she bites deep into my neck as a predator would its prey, so I flinch and cower and pull away but she won't let me, I'm hers forever, please never let me move my love please ruin me, and she laughs as my thoughts become words and she mocks me and kisses me, and I feel her squeezing me tighter and tighter, entwining us further, so her grinding and my thrusting becomes a dance until we can't hold it any longer – twitch squeeze twitch squeeze twitch squeeze –

Come.

I would, and shall, see you

I would see you again, my love.

I think not.

I will, as it is promised.

But, do you promise-

Yes, by all there is.

That, when once again our eyes do meet, yours shall never look upon me?

Why would I not wish to see your face?

There are some things better left unseen, my love.

Your face is a blessing, our children miss it.

Believe what you say, my love, and yourself will be betrayed.

Where will I find you?

Through dark, the dead, the damned and doomed, down you must travel to find me.

Then, where you suggest is-

Indeed, what I speak of is-

Death.

You understand now?

You truly mean that you are-

Dead? Yes, my love. The hill has claimed me.

I would still see you.

And I, still, shall see you – when your time is bid.

I cannot bear to be without you.

You must bear it, for the world cannot.

And if I were the world?

Then the world must change.

The world did change; when you left.

Then you must wait, my love.

But we know-

But we know-

That's impossible.

I shall leave our children-

You must never – they would detest what I am now.

They all still love you.

All 5000 of them?

Yes.

Believe what you can then.

My love, why do you scorn me like this?

Love is blinding you.

It is enlightening.

If you cannot be swayed then-

I cannot.

Then I will show you-

I need to know-

Where you are / Where I am.

How long will you travel for?

Until your comb burns no longer.

You have lighted it?

In your name, my love.

You would not see me like this.

We will be in each other's arms again.

There is a price to be paid.

I'll pay it tenfold.

Then, my love, I pray you turn back.

I have travelled down these many steps, my love; tis too late for that.

I can hear your rainfall steps upon the earth.

Am I close yet, my love?

You are. Soon.

Soon we shall rejoin.

And soon you shall understand why you would never look to me again.

Never. I shall see you, always and now.

Then come to me, my love, and I shall say-

I will see you, my love, and I'll tell you-

I love you / I told you.

At last I find you, the children will-

The children shall never see me.

But, I promised that-

You would not see me.

I cannot bear it my love, I must-

My love, do not betray me-

I relight your comb for you-

Why do you not listen to my warnings-

Because the children need their mother-

Or you would need a wife! What of my needs?

You're my only need, my love.

Then you seek to possess me?

I would never-

You already have-

Abandon you / abandoned me.

There; now your comb shows my rot, my decay.

I will look no longer. My love-

You would not believe me.

I shall turn away-

You keep a promise after breaking it?

I am so sorry, my love.

You must pay the price, "my love".

I will climb the steps, and pay it.

Ascends those steps, away from me; abandon me.

What is your price, love.

I summon your children to me. 1000 every day, I take from you, "my love".

Then, what you speak of is-

Indeed, what I invoke is-

Death.

Then, my love, I shall create 1500 for you every day.

I pray they do not answer my summons.

I shall love you as you are.

And I would remember your betrayal.

I will always pay your price, my love.

Save our children from your cost, my love.

How long for?

For-

For-

-ever.

Critical Commentary

Written from an autoethnographic viewpoint, ***Kernow duw genes***, is Kernewek (Cornish) for ***Good-bye Cornwall*** and focuses on my complicated relationship I, as a young Cornish woman, have with the place I was born and raised in. The poem makes use of archaic language (e.g. "thee, woulds't" etc.) as well inverted syntax and relying on heavy imagery. What I wished to convey with these techniques, is that Cornwall's many problems are often overlooked – just as the meaning behind the imagery would be – as people would prefer Cornwall remain their 'idyllic' seaside getaway; as stated in the poem, Cornwall claims glory from its history and objective beauty, not the people who call it home. To show this, I looked at Greg Garrad's ecocritical mode of rhetoric[1] – breaking what are considered monolithic concepts of 'the environment or nature' into metaphors and structures to understand the environment's historical / political discourse – I chose to include some images to create the idyllic Cornish image and then speak truth to it. "Sapphiric walls" and "Mother Tamar", look at Cornwall's revered seasides and juxtapose it with the shackling of the speaker's soul to Cornwall, painting Tamar as an overbearing, cruel parent. It is only in the latter half of the poem, in which the speaker's anger has peaked, I greatly increase the parrhesia by suddenly breaking free of the archaic language, leaving the poetry behind entirely in place of prose. I've used rhetorical techniques throughout the poem, but it's only in this paragraph that I use plain style – Foucault said that those who speak danger, who are against the majority, are parrhesiastes[2], and I feel that I am in doing just that in this poem. I wanted to leave the poem on a hopeful note though: "***Kernow a'gas dynergh***" translates to "***Welcome to Cornwall***", and despite my issues with home, it always brought me comfort to see that phrase on the A30 when driving home.

The Red River is a fantasy tale and, accordingly, it reflects how its author views the world around them, so for that reason I tried to base this poem on Aristotle's epideictic genre of rhetoric[3], with my intention for this to be a spoken word poem. The red river, as the poem states, is made of blood. Anthropologically, blood is one of humanity's most profound symbols[4] and one revered in many religions and cultures globally: it embodies both life and death, destruction and creation; the act of bleeding itself shows this. The paradoxical nature of life and death that blood represents, was the primary driving force behind the poem's themes; the conquerors are birthed from the old gods' blood, and it is through their "divine haem" that they ruin the world by expanding their own number; the descendants' imperialism is only possible by creating life, which then begets further death, which then necessitates the need for more life. This loveless, evil version of life is shown in the poem through the anaphora of "red" and "blood", their gradual increase in severity, as well as the likening to the river as a garnet, a rather plain and uniform gemstone, aims to show the unquenchable need for fascists to dominate all they can, which contrasts greatly with the gods' Eden-esque utopia at the start of the poem. Fascism, and its resurgent ideologies, have been growing ever harder to ignore in the 2020s – from the re-election of Donald Trump and his immediate mass deportation of foreign migrants[5] and staunch rejection of "transgender ideology"[6], to the Zionist entity known as Israel's attempted genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. I felt the need to write ***The Red River*** as an analogous poem to our current world, as one that expresses my own personal feelings of betrayal and loss for the oppressed peoples of this world, that cannot defend themselves from these loveless ideologies, so intent on division and purification.

Come is a poem written in prose, in a singular sentence, and in reverse – i.e. the title comes after the poem itself. This is done because the act of coming during sex, is often the 'climax'; it is the 'title' of sex, as it were. Similarly, it is written in a singular prose sentence to represent the unscripted, feral, and primal nature of sex,

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[1] Ecocriticism, pg14. Garrard, Greg (2004)
[2] Fearless Speech, pg15. Foucalt, Michel (2001)
[3] Rhetoric. Aristotle. Accessed 26/01/25 via https://www.americanrhetoric.com/aristotleonrhetoric.htm
[4] Introduction: Blood Will Out. The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, pp S1-23. Carsten, Janet (2013). Accessed 28/01/25 via http://www.jstor.org/stable/42001726
[5] Mass arrests in nationwide US immigration crackdown. Faguy, Ana (27/01/25) accessed 29/01/25 via https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd6434dq7p1o
[6] Trump signs executive orders for military, focusing on transgender service members, COVID, diversity. Cook, Sara; Watson, Eleanor; Watson, Kathryn (28/01/25). Accessed 29/01/25 via https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-executive-orders-military/

and how for many queer people, sex is not a sanctimonious act, but one of need, desire, and mutual lust, as well as a powerful political act. The speaker's thoughts alternate between a 1st person description of what she is experiencing and her inner thoughts where her desires and lust manifest as worship. This alternation is heavily affected by pathos, as the speaker concentrates heavily on her partner's pleasure and how that is presented to us – the fixation on her breathing, her eyes, her taste, her laugh – with the speaker even comparing her lover's smile to Buddha's. These highly visceral descriptions are designed to contrast with the very utilitarian mentions of sex in ***The Red River***; the conquerors in that poem, see sex as a duty, a necessity for the sake of their expansion, whereas the couple in ***Come*** clearly enjoy having sex together. These comparisons are a very big focal point in George Orwell's ***1984***, wherein *The Party* is both explicitly anti-sex (sex for pleasure is expressly prohibited) as well as being a fascist entity, so Winston's relationship with Julia is one of rebellion[7]. Where fascists seek to eliminate sex from the public consciousness, I wanted to convey within ***Come***, that sex for pleasure is, itself, an antifa position, as well as love and intimacy being a protected and natural part of the human experience, that we should cherish and fight to protect.

Lastly, ***I would, and shall, see you*** is a retelling of the Japanese Shintoism creation myth of Izanagi travelling to Yomi (the underworld) to save his wife, Izanami. In this poem, I wanted to explore how love can change between people due to circumstance – in this case, how does death affect love? As Plato put forth in Phaedrus[8], the function of rhetoric is to persuade; so, I wanted to explore what different motivations love can invoke within a couple, and how this affects their rhetoric. Izanagi, the speaker on the left, frequently dismisses the wishes of his wife, Izanami, the speaker on the right – by breaking his promise to not look upon her, Izanagi scorns and hurts his wife in his need to prove himself worthy of her, whilst Izanami tries desperately to make him stop "when [his] time is bid". For both characters, they act out of love – one selfishly, and one selflessly – until eventually their shared speech begins to break down as Izanagi, in his desire to reclaim his wife, pushes her away and hurts her. The conflicting notions of love are, tragically and ironically, what invokes the death of their shared love; Jonathon Swift in his essay A Modest Proposal[9], uses heavy amount of irony to mock the Irish ruling class's attitude towards the poor, and whilst my irony is more subtle than blatant, I feel it works better for the poetic mode of rhetoric – Aristotle spoke of finding the best method to convey a message, and looking at how the love shared between the two characters breaks down as they both strive to protect their partner, is something I enjoyed.

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[7] Revolutionary from the waist down – the politics of sex in George Orwell's 1984. Storrie, S; Martin, D. A. In E. di Nucci, & S. Storrie (Eds.), 1984 and Philosophy: Is Resistance Futile? Open Court (2018). Accessed 30/01/25 via https://pure.tue.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/168478646/Storrie_Martin_Revolutionary_from_the_waist_down_Sex_and_power.pdf

[8] Phaedrus. Plato (Last updated and translated 15/01/13). Accessed 30/01/25 via https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1636/1636-h/1636-h.htm

[9] A Modest Proposal (1729). Swift, Dr Jonathon. Accessed 31/01/25 via https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1636/1636-h/1636-h.htm

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