



Writing | Symposium 2021

**The Burghers of Calais –
*after Vaccination in hospital Atrium I***

By Cheryl Passanisi

I forgot the Burghers haunt
the Quadrangle –

as I walk from hospital atrium
where we gathered on our marks,
in masks, move in folk dance
quiet celebration, without music
in the hospital atrium, cathedral-like
where concerts performed over decades
for patients to mend with music,
a memorable ache sneaks up –
how the ghost of music accumulates
in the corners, degraded but remanent
of vibration still grazing the skin –

now a place of vaccination –
arm out, the shot, a quick wave of nausea.
didn't eat this morning –
“Non ho fame”, but a need
to savor the moment walking
the empty campus, in epic abandonment
to remote learning,
walk the labyrinth circuit
near the engineering buildings,
concentric paths modeled on Chartres
Cathedral where pilgrims
went to walk off sins...

I come around the chapel to the quad,
and in the quiet
without words
the Burghers
haunt the Quadrangle,
behold –

their sorrows among the

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perennials in the gardens
coming up from underground,
from the deep stones of bronze,
the bones cooled from earth violence
shaved from the deeper stones of water
and the veins in the neck,
in the back of hands seek life,
and life seeks the rushing waters
and the hand, say Rodin's, freezes
them there and they hold like dinosaurs
caught in the blitz of meteors.

I walk among them.

II

I walk among them
sun-sorrow fractured landing
sharply features halo them,
the sun chisel-sharp,
forms rounded with the earth
from which they seem to have emerged
silhouette, sacrifice and polymer
eyes of their children, hunger-dread
and sunken worlds of mouths,
the ropes of their communion,
the keys, the keys sounding of bells
from their belts pulling
them down to earth like grain,
as they hand over, turn over
slipping into dust, novitiate
of siege, negotiant pulsatile
into redemption,
their hands spark with musical tensions,
their eyes inward to the contracting soul,
the slump half step poise,
the chest cavern's tremble –
winged creatures flapping competitively
to emerge from their mouths' devotion
savoring air-full prayer the keys delivered,
the ropes restrain, impel
to the forced labor of the soul –

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noble final tattered robes
Excalibur of wounds –
the wound-sap fresh stigmata
captured in cupped hands –
One looks skyward, another to ground...

Pieta.

Cheryl is a writer, poet, performer and NP. Her collection of poetry was published by Finishing Line Press in 2020. [Geraniums From the Little Sophias of Unruly Wisdom](#). In non-COVID times, she is active in community theatre and local opera. She works as an NP in hematology at the Cancer Center.

There is an audio version of this piece on our website.