

# Hey, look at this!

**Neil Richardson** writes 12 articles about his own poetic work and what people, ideas and influences led him to write some of his poems. The series will last for the twelve months of 2010.

## **The Prelude and a petrified P in Carnac**

(To W.W. with apologies)

Perhaps it was the megaliths which had  
A strange effect on me? This, coupled with  
the Supermarché wine, of course, which worked  
It's way from mouth to head, then down to parts  
Less mentionable. I mean poetically.  
But, William, stars and sky were just the same  
For me, as when for you, on Ullswater  
In frosty air, "all shod with steel", you had  
Your strange experience. Or, just like that time,  
That summer evening when you did your "act  
Of stealth and troubled pleasure" with that boat,  
Remember? Well, I do. I sat in school  
And read your glowing lines with growing awe.  
I don't know why. They just rang true, and then  
In Carnac, then, I knew just what you meant.  
By then, I was a father, not a boy,  
And, in a summer holidaying mood,  
I'd drunk too much and needed to crawl out  
Of sleeping bag and seek the toilet-block.  
As I unzipped the tent, the toilets seemed  
Too far away. Perhaps a spot nearby?  
No-one would see or mind or take offence.  
As I stood up and looked around, it seemed  
To me as if the countless stars in heaven  
came rushing down to meet me as I stood,  
Disturbing night, invading starry pride,  
Accusing me of frivolous entry to  
Their Realm.

Undignified I must have been!

But Nature, as you knew too well, provides  
It's certain disciplines. I recognised  
"A grandeur in the beatings of the heart"  
And, by the way, I ran like hell, and hid  
Within the breeze-blocks soothing solidness,  
And, when relieved, with hand held high against  
A sudden avalanche of stars, I fled  
back to my tent, the hairs still prickling on  
My neck, and dived for safety and warm flesh  
Within the welcoming familial tent.

And now, I feel I never can go out  
In Nature's realm quite worthily again.  
A sense of guilt clouds o'er the hill and vale.  
Joy beckons, but disperses. I await  
the Summons. The "Presences of Nature"  
Leave me expectant of some ghastly thrill,  
Attendants, Visitants, lest I forget  
Their reprimand that night on Carnac plage.



This was my first attempt to imitate deliberately the work of a famous poet, on this occasion, William Wordsworth. (1770-1850) The idea came directly from the experience which I describe in the poem and which immediately reminded me of passages in his long poem **The Prelude** which I first read at school. I wrote about **The Prelude** in *Magna* for January, 2009.



He described his experience as of a sudden but prolonged feeling of thrill or a sense of presences in Nature following activities like stealing a boat and rowing out on to Lake Ullswater, or skating on a frozen lake. That night, camping on the beach at Carnac, I had a similar experience and I was immediately put in mind of Wordsworth's words.

My lines are a little tongue-in-cheek, of course, with a dose of self-mockery, and I would never compare my work to a master like Wordsworth. I just borrowed from him, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery! I enjoyed the iambic pentameters and the blank verse, of *The Prelude* and I found it congenial to imitate these aspects of his verse and I was pleased at how the quotations from his poem described my own sensations and in borrowing his words, I acknowledge the impact they had on me since I first studied them more than a decade earlier at school in Manchester.



Les Alignement are vaguely similar to Stonehenge in some ways and still shrouded in theories rather than fact with many considering them to reflect astronomical interests in the pre-historic world of Brittany. They are actually wonderful to look at and spread out over a large area, rather than gathered in a henge pattern as

we see at Stonehenge.

Wordsworth's sensitivity to Nature provided him with several experiences which were thrilling or even frightening and that was certainly what happened to me on that camping holiday on the Quiberon Peninsular, back in the 1970s when my sons were still very small boys. We played on the beach, got sun-burned, visited Mont St. Michel and generally explored the area as much as you can with two small children. We especially enjoyed visiting Vannes, a very fine historic city. Living on the beach for a lot of the holiday was wonderful. We enjoyed watching the locals farming their oyster beds and enjoyed the taste in the local restaurants. I don't see myself as particularly in tune with the natural world. It brings back to me sad childhood anxieties and at my home, we had only a back yard of stones and a coal shed, just past the outside toilet, no garden at all, in fact.

Going shopping on holiday is always an adventure, compared to the chore it is at home. Everything seems so different and interesting and even paying the money is an interesting experience, rather than the pain we have at home. After an evening of drinking the local Supermarché wine, I went to sleep and then woke up in need of a "comfort break" as our American cousins politely call it. As I clambered out of the tent and contemplated the walk to the toilet block I considered if the journey was really necessary. I looked up and down the beach and then up at the sky. It felt as though the whole heavenly constellation was about to fall on me. I could see them gathering and moving towards me, aggressively contradicting my instinct to avoid the walk. I felt very scared indeed. The experience brought me close to my primitive self, to my ancestors who found the supernatural in such things as stars and hills and trees. I felt the hair on my neck bristling and tingling and I ran as fast as I could. Nothing would have enticed me out of that tent again that night!

Such moments are worth cherishing and reflecting upon, and I was grateful that William Wordsworth had prepared me for the experience, providing a language and a model for my own feelings.