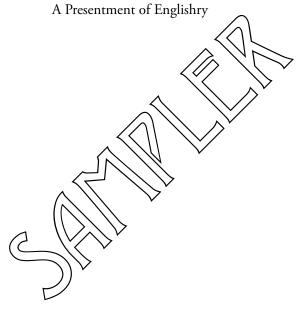
A Man of Heart



Also by Liam Guilar

Rough Spun to Close Weave I'll Howl Before You Bury Me Anhaga Lady Godiva and Me



Liam Guilar



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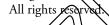
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Precisely between their God and Devil, heaven and hell, white and black, the man of heart walks through.

—Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God. Creative Mythology (p.37)



Introduction and Acknowledgements

A Man of Heart, the second part of A Presentment of Englishry, is the story of Vortigern and the end of Roman Britain. It is also a story about story-telling. It continues to follow the narrative trajectory of La3amon's late 12th century version of The Legendary History, the foundation myth of Britain. By the 12th century this had very little in common with 'History' as we understand it in the 21st. Attempts to resolve the discrepancies or reconcile La3amon's version with what we currently know about the period are futile. Nor is it possible to rationalize the chronology. There are anachronisms, contradictions and inconsistencies in my text. It is not a modern novel.

Ruins and Chapter One appeared in Long Poem Magazine. My thanks to the editors, Linda Black and Claire Crawther. Derek Yurner at The Brazen Head serialized earlier versions of most of Part One. I am grateful for his generous, ongoing interest in the project.

None of this would be possible without the scholars from Sir Fredrick Madden onwards who have edited translated and studied the texts I've used. My thanks also to Josephine Bahrer for her patient assistance with matters Classical and for putting up with my grumbling about Vortigern. Any mistakes are mine. Thanks also to all the usual suspects who read drafts at various stages, but especially to Darren Rhodes for taking the time to give me written comments on a very early draft of the first six chapters and to Cassic Forster for asking awkward questions.



Part One Sons and Daughters





Fragments. The Formation of the Kingdoms

Maxim 1

History is a record of brutality tempered by outbursts of idealism.

Memory

There was never enough light.
Even in summer, shade
and shadows contour brightness.
At night, torches and lamps
shiver the edge of sight.
The candle drew attention to itself
while life continued in the silent
darker ebb and pool beyond.

I remember her hand on the pillar, a shadow on the white stone.

Her eyes bright in a dark face.

She was worded, there were visitors, men of power and induence, come to court her daughter.

Not bad for a freed slave from the lands around Carthage.

I remember her hand on the pillar, the light shaking over the mosaic floor. She had plans. We all had plans.

Returning to the city

Its pavements cracked, the shop fronts boarded or burnt out. The places

where we played gone wild. The silence of a storm about to burst.

We lived as squatters in this shanty town, lean-tos inside the walls, until one night of panic, lit by burning homes.

Demented cacophony
of a city torn apart.
Bundling possessions,
I took a wrong turn, alone
somewhere I could not recognise,
backtracked, saw my family, called,
unheard, then saw them killed.
In my nightmares I'm still running,
till I found the gate,
found our meeting point.
Found no one.
Waited. The raiders came.
I was ten years old
when I became a slave.

The Roman saldier

...taught to think in the plural. We march, we build, we fight. Exception: *they* died, even if *they* were men we'd marched and fought beside.

They sent us on a long patrol to find the end of marching. Stood on a mountain gazing at the sea, returned, ambushed, betrayed till we saw Roadsend and gave God thanks.

The fort was empty. *They* had marched away. Glad to have a wall around us. smoke from familiar villages to orientate the landscape, snuggled into the border post waiting for orders. A trader moving on the road, challenged at the gate, said the legions had withdrawn. No pay wagon creaked towards us. So the officer said, 'Right my lads.' (Me with 19 years of service, hardly ladlike.) 'The bastards sailed without us. We, however, shall continue. Patrols will establish contact with the villages ensure taxes are still paid in kind. In turn, we offer them protection They'll need it when the raiders com

We've fought the Empire's wars.
We've marched through deserts
chasing Persians. We've built bridges
in a nightmare Slavic pass.
Not one of those sad lastards
who abandoned us
can say we haven't held our lines
and done our duty.
We've been, we've done, and now we stay.'

We stood there in the rain. Not one man cheered. Not one said, stuff it up your hole I'm going home. Because this was our home. Mist, rain, damp and those rare days when sun shone on the heather. The girl who slept with me was from the hills. I knew her language well enough to understand her father's jokes.

Our children, hardly Roman.

Better to be led than lead? Of course, my son. There's always some jumped up corporal, acting unpaid with tickets on himself, burning with an indignation you could cook your rations on.

And it is fun to listen to him strut his stuff but when it comes to slaughter, you will thank your Gods if the mouth giving orders is connected to a better brain than the one directing the lunatics out to cut your throat.

And that my son, is why we're here.

And why we hang together it the end

The Council and Vortigern

They have made it clear that while they are grateful for his service, it's service not advice that they require. His knowledge and experience are theirs to ignore. You will recruit Foederati, Germani from the coastal districts. Three boat loads will suffice.

We have no way of keeping them in line.

¹ *Foederati* were tribesmen who were recruited into the Imperial army. Their use had been standard Imperial practice for a long time before this story begins.

His objections are ignored. This is tradition: we speak and you obey.

Old men in togas, fretting in the dark, they move with all the formal confidence of self-important men who know their worth. 'A skirmish, nothing more.' 'He'll want a triumph soon.' They are the ones their friends appointed because they know what is appropriate, because of who their fathers were. Blandly competent, they glide across predestined tracks rehearsing phrases emptied by centuries of repetition. Insisting on the dignity of office, the privileges of tank.

He saw a group of dancers who had learnt their steps until they could pirouette without a thought. But the dance required a polished floor, marble, music, painted walls, and Empire to validate the meaning of each move.

Now the lamps were out, the music silent, they stumbled on a windy hillside in the dark where time had rendered them ridiculous and irrelevant.

'We'll name the three ships:
Ariovistus, Alaric, Arminius.²
Impatient gestures send him on his way.
'Call them what you like.'
He leaves them to their ignorance.
They know nothing of tradition,
or the history that underwrites their titles.

² The three names were mercenaries hired by the Romans who turned on them.

On the Beach

A grey sky and a torpid sea. Red cloaks on the littered sand. Move closer you can listen in.

'Why are we meeting on the beach?'

'They fear our magic in a confined space.'

Their chiefs come down the dunes. He cannot feel the Empire at his back. The tide has washed him here on the ocean's edge, where the flat land drifts towards the sky, and the armed men standing in a ragged line, are rubbish on a rising wave.

If you cross the Rubicon better have the 13th at your back, battle hardened veterans, disciplined and layal.

Not the grey sea and beyond a land of ghosts and shadows where 3rd rate actors strutted on a broken, darkened stage.

Maxim 2

A father will trade his daughter for a Kingdom A daughter will trade her body for a crown.

Imperial soldier #2

There were stories of a girl. Someone he'd met on RandR. A dream of home and who was I to laugh? Next time I saw him pinned to a tree, split all ends up, I had to double take to recognise the mess, so when we moved into that pigsty of a village, saw the child playing with a helmet-his? who knows. We forgot about 'respecting tribal culture' and 'negotiating ethnic differences'. We heaped the corpses in the middle and torched the lot. A habit forming reflex action, becoming easier with practice.

The Tyrant³

When did Inotice the world was coming to an end? That summer, there were far more people on the road, whole families with their bundles, or their carts, some heading somewhere, to a distant relative some just trying to get away. And who'd have thought a store front by the road could do such trade? We upped the prices but they kept on paying. Give me your coins, no coins, what's in the cart then trade your wife and daughter for an hour. Occasionally someone remembered dignity and drew a sword but I was hiring swords by then, ex-soldiers who'd been left behind or slipped away

³ A non-derogatory term meaning ruler, but in the context of 5th century Britain a ruler of a small kingdom.

and the straggling line never coalesced behind a common purpose. Coins, jewels, or women. You want to eat. You pay.

When the winter came the silence between travellers grew longer till no one moved along the road. I was clinking rich, so many coins. So many jewelled pieces. But I soon learnt you can't eat coins and the local farmers wouldn't sell a starved cow for the Grail. So I took the things I wanted. If they complained they died. We moved the operation to this hill, where we could see our natural resources and the road.

These are the Good Old Days #1

There must have been sunshine. Good days when a man unbent from his and smiled to see the healthy children play. When women turned drudgery into a Long evenings by a fire, the conform of old acquaintances, good kriends, state jokes older stories. A shy glahes across the flames. The promise of a willing bod Shared satisfaction in a jok well done, a problem shared, the beauty of things, well made and functional. The crops abundant, the cattle healthy promise of babies, wisdom of age. Lovers by the river bank paused by the moon, stars flung back to clutter a clear sky. Of course, there was bitterness, frustration resentment, jealousy, the savage tongue, the casual cruelties, the stink of desire turning sour.

Some died as children, other accident took off, but some reached old age, dying in their sleep. A hard life, a tough life, a short life. Daily victories that never made the chronicles. The beauty of the passing days in this little portion of the world they labelled home, made life worth living.

The young man

Mouth don't eat if hands don't make. I looked out on perfection, knew each day was beautiful. I heard the poetry in other voices, saw with muddied clarity the world beneath the surface. Had I been nurtured, trained, I would have been a poet or a priest because I understood the divine that radiates from everything, from rock and tree and river, the awe inspiring is that is But not my village, nor my dad Mouth don't eat if hands don't make What use is poetry or house when hard work must be done against the winter? Stories are (for priests and old men. Neither feed thems So I learnt to be someone else.

Vortigern

Your words won't work.
Call him Caesar, Imperator, Rex,
Comes, Dux bellorum,
Arglywd, Brenhin, Tyrannus.
His palace is a wooden barn
encircled by a makeshift fence,

his kingdom scattered settlements whose people dread the sound of hooves. Its boundary is that tiny stream and that slight rise on the horizon they dignify by calling it 'The Ridge'. His army, twenty thugs with swords who squabble at his table, will follow him until his luck runs out.

He has no policy, no pension plan, retirement scheme. He fears his sons will knife him when he sleeps before his enemies carve him on the battle field or nail him to his burning hall.

He wears a gown of raven feathers, or a bear skin with the head as hood. Strong men don't look him in the eye they say he measures them for burial He lives for shadows, trusting no on a dead friend is better than a live enem and women can easily be replaced. Addicted to the raid, to stealing cattle, selling slaves, exuberant, but cunning, watchful, bribing the young men with rings, gold, promises of better days ahead. Scheming to improve the limits of his power before death dumps him out of history, or into genealogy, if he's worth the space. Call him Hlaford, Cyning, Tigernos, Superbus Tyrannus, Vortigern.4

⁴ Caesar, Imperator, Rex... all words roughly meaning 'Man in charge'.