



# Wolves Come Groveling

Poems by

Alan  
Morrison

SAMPLE

*I cannot help hoping and believing that before this generation has passed away, we shall have advanced a great step towards that good time, when poverty... will be as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests.*

—David Lloyd-George, 1909

*The cat, the rat, and Lovel our dog, Rule all England under an hog.*

—William Collyngburne, 1484

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Dedicated to the memories of two irreplaceable  
Anglo-Irish countercultural republican poets

Niall McDevitt

1967-2022

&

Kevin Higgins

1967-2023





## Wolves Come Grovelling

Out of the forests of towns & hovelling,  
Wolves of poverty, howl out in worship,  
Bow to your Wolf-queen, wolves come grovelling.

Away from your wolf-fare of food bank shovelling,  
For one weekend, share in wolf-fellowship,  
Out of the forests of towns & hovelling.

Her crowned head, minted on our pound sterling  
& postage stamps, shadows our hardship—  
Bow to your Wolf-queen, wolves come grovelling.

Believe or get even, there'll be no levelling  
Up, except in Uxbridge & South Ruislip—  
Out of the forests of towns & hovelling;

It's all just so much Cat-Rat-&-Lovelling  
Of Big Hog's nodding-dog dictatorship—  
Bow to your Wolf-queen, wolves come grovelling.

Come famished & homeless join the street-revelling,  
Come unemployed, lumpen, unpaid internship—  
Out of the forests of towns & hovelling,  
Bow to your Wolf-queen, wolves come grovelling.





## There is a Time for Everything Must Go

*There is a time for everything when  
Everything must go. This is the time.*

*Amen...*

A time for taking sides & sitting on the fence,  
 A time for taking stock & taking offence,  
 A time for moral panics & panic buying,  
 A time for outing & for othering,  
 A time for pulled pork, a time for gammon,  
 A time for tea & Tetragrammaton,  
 A time for witch hunts & casting stones,  
 A time for glass houses & empty homes,  
 A time for plasma screens & iPhones,  
 A time for taboos & Youtube vlogs,  
 For verbatim Tweets & verboten blogs,  
 For black dogs & blond demagogues,  
 A time for panic rooms & comfort zones,  
 For echo chambers & isolation booths,  
 Weighted blankets & anxiety bracelets,  
 A time for the woke & the wilfully blind,  
 A time for the misspoke & left behind,  
 A time for rainbows & unicorns,  
 A time for food banks & poverty porn,  
 For Facebook petitions & Twitter storms,  
 A time for snowflakes & shrinking violets,  
 For bearded hipsters, & shaven varlets,  
 A time for outdoor smokes & indoor vapes,  
 For schoolchildren eating toilet paper crepes  
 & picking apple cores out of bins,  
 A time for sinning & losing SIMs,  
 A time for calling out & cancelling,  
 A time for blacklisting & whitesplaining,  
 For hate-emboldening & virtue-signalling,





For xenophobia & victim-blaming,  
Self-isolating & social distancing,  
A time for psephology & crystal balls,  
For pop-up shops & flat-packed malls,  
A time for chiliarism & existential threats,  
A time for hedge funds & hedging bets,  
For taking the knee, & kneeling on necks,  
A time for strings of resignations,  
For naming & shaming & no-platforming,  
A time for occupancies & pop-up protests,  
A time for scapegoats & grotesques,  
A time for yellow roses & yellow vests,  
A time for blue badges & black triangles,  
For Parliament prorogues & lockdown pandemics,  
A time for stopping boats & mooring ships,  
A time for chucking milkshakes at fascists,  
A time for uprooting statues from plinths,  
For shedding light & throwing shadow,  
A time for starting your answers with 'So'...

*A time for everything when everything  
Must go...*





## Unicorn Country

*Fifty years on from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county [cricket] grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers, and—as George Orwell said—old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist.*

—John Major, speech to the Conservative Group for Europe, 22 April 1993

*Old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn mornings... these are not only fragments, but characteristic fragments, of the English scene.*

—George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* pt. 1 ‘England Your England’ (1941)

We will negotiate a rainbow backstop,  
 Our own trade deals, a customs unicorn,  
 We will above all else protect the Union,  
 Keep the unicorn in hoc to the lion  
 For THOU SHALT NOT HAVE A SECOND REFERENDUM  
 Is carved in Scone: applies both sides  
 Of the rainbow border where are bounding  
 Frictionless unicorns; no worries about  
 A hard or soft border on the island of Ireland,  
 Nor hard- or -soft-boiled rainbows, those  
 Are rumours of unicorns—but not the kind  
 Of unicorn that we intend to chase  
 & catch in the coming weeks & months,  
 Which is another unicorn entirely,  
 The unicorn of Conservative conception,  
 The unicorn of conspicuous consumption  
 Amidst mass shop depletion, empty shelves,  
 The unicorn of phantom speculation,  
 The unicorn of coupon rationing,  
 The Eurosceptic unicorn, the unicorn  
 Of obscure opportunity cropped to purpose





Of microscopic prosperity for the top  
1% per cent—Let us be clear: opportunity  
To trip back in time down the primrose path  
To halcyon *Shropshire Lad* days of hazy  
Summers & Scrumpy & warm beers  
& cricket whites & rainbows beaming  
In glorious Technicolour *Richard Of York  
Gave Battle In Vain* because he was doomed  
To lose to gloomy Tudor, so much for  
*Caparison my horse*, it bolted at the pitched  
Battle's brutal moment—so much for Bosworth;  
O with Henry the Eighth powers she'll make  
England grate again, gaunt Greensleeves—  
Now it's *caparison my unicorn* & come  
Cantering into Camelot, no place for Woke  
Or Snowflakes, only snow lions, white witches,  
Ice queens, this sceptred isle, this demi-monde,  
No props apropos as we trip back to  
A mythical past, fantasy island, a theme park  
For solipsists, misanthropes & xenophobes,  
Pomp & diminished circumstance,  
Lucky dips, riddling idylls, Morris Dancers  
Waving white handkerchief flags & little strips  
Of paper—cryptic receipts, or scrolled price tags  
Strung on inscrutable antiques; a tinpot  
Utopia, raffle-ticket Uchronia where,  
According to folklore, once were unicorns,  
Only, contra to accounts, none had actual horns.



## England in 2019

*After Shelley's 'England in 1819'*

A nonagenarian white-gloved Queen  
Grimaces assent to her sixth cousin twice  
Removed, now prime minister number fifteen  
Of her longest reign resigned (but no  
Signs of resigning) & only the second  
To whom she's related: a recently seen  
Trend entrenching, another silver-spooned  
Sprout of nepotism in our ermined  
Democracy undermined, spliced together  
In unlikely embrace, a pattern's setting in:  
Eton > Oxford > Westminster--unspoken  
Hereditary principle whispers in our  
Wood-panelled parliamentary politics--  
The Remembrancer marks the shaking mace;  
Of course, we're reminded Her Majesty  
Is constitutionally bound to take advice  
Since her royal prerogative is purely symbolic;  
But who'd have thought in the bicentennial  
Year of Peterloo's protest for suffrage,  
Parliamentarians would feel compelled  
To crowd protectively round the Speaker's  
Chair in protest against the clamping  
Of their representative voices by  
A government gone rogue to prorogue on  
The flimsiest of pretexts, shut the portcullis  
At a point when it's most required to speak,  
Be outspoken as spikes (MPs are more  
Than just delegates); just as in 1629  
King Charles the First claimed Divine Right,  
And, in turn, gleaned regicide...





(Or is this all a strange phantasmagoria  
Projected by nostalgic Jacob Rees-Mogg  
Reclining on green benches *à la chaise longue*,  
Purring upper-class cat of the Commons  
In human form, hands clasped across  
The broad lapels of his 1940s-style  
Bespoke suit jacket, his pudding-crop propped  
Up on the carved wooden edge, feigning  
Forty winks of contempt for the House  
Of which he is Leader & Dreamhead...?)...

Now another entitled Etonian,  
An oratorical Nero bloated on hubris,  
Braggadocio, rodomontade (vocabulary  
Bercow), has his premiership imposed on us  
By 90,000 blue-rinsed Tory subscribers,  
Little Englanders, *Daily Mail*- & *Express*-  
Thumping xenophobes, a prime minister-  
Cum-tin pot despot specially licensed  
To clamp our democracy, have it silenced,  
Because sovereignty is not something  
To take lightly—it's a double-edged thing.





## Beak Doctors

We're wandering about by day  
Keeping each other at bay  
Some of us wearing face masks  
Carrying out our daily tasks  
Of getting some shopping in  
Without touching anything  
Like revenants who think we're still living—

Wiping down the supermarket baskets  
With disinfectant  
Like over-scrupulous neurotics  
Or priests polishing communion cups

(One wonders if those orange tops  
Will ever be back in the shops)

Meanwhile pinstripes in Whitehall  
Are beginning to doubt all  
Their weird science, Sage guidance,  
“Herd immunity”, nudge units—

150,000 souls departed and counting—  
It's a strange kind of social engineering  
Wearing down the generations' engines—

Is it the underequipped nurses & carers  
Or the newly departed we're  
Supposed to be clapping?

Is this virus really a leveller  
Or simply a revealer?





Our enemy is invisible,  
But then it always is, as is evil,  
As is the longest serving visitation  
That ever descended on this nation:  
The Conservative virus—  
For which there's never been a vaccination  
Only a slow-acting inoculation

Ironic socialism  
Of Keynesian economics  
Tories can only countenance  
If they don't have to see the consequence

*We are all anchorites now*

We must keep apart to keep together

(Apart from the unemployed  
Who are encouraged to be fruit pickers)

& in this strange transparent plague  
The shape of our salvation's vague  
But a shadow proctor  
The grotesque shape of a beak doctor  
Pecking at the buttercups  
Pecking at the buttercups

The buttercups in meadows





## Applaud the Thunder

You already kept your distance  
before the pandemic

Because you couldn't accommodate  
my colour in your scheme of things

(Or you came too close  
to ask me where I was from

& when I was leaving

Or I kept my distance  
sensing your hostility)

But now you seem to be  
busy remembering—  
while bored alone in lock down—

The once-bustling streets  
the hubbub of everybody  
about their business

You find now you're missing  
human proximity  
vibes given off from minds & bodies--

*Even me...?*

We thought there was no 'us'  
until this virus...

In cities the cars have fallen silent,  
we hear the birds sing





in the eerie spring silence,  
& laudatory thunders  
of applause in the distance

& soon it will be raining

& we'll all be under  
transparent visors  
watching droplets  
splatter on plastic  
as we did as children  
through those see-  
through umbrellas

& what do we do  
when there's no more applause  
only thunderclaps...

Applaud the thunder...?





## Borrowed Rainbows

*i.m. Niall McDevitt, poet and republican*  
22/02/1967—29/09/2022

The day Elizabeth Windsor passed  
A double rainbow was visible  
Arcing over Buckingham Palace—  
Supposedly a benevolent omen  
Of transformation, fresh beginnings,  
Good things—Royal mourners  
Gasped at such celestial symbolism  
For the late Queen's heavenly ascent  
To flights of angels singing her to her rest,  
& down here, a smooth succession  
Of a new King & a third Carolean  
Age—but it all depends on points  
Of view, personal hopes & opinions,  
As to how the double rainbow  
Could be symbolic: to a growing  
Number it symbolised more the budding  
Promise of monarchy's enduring end  
& the sleepy hope of a ripe republic...  
But now is not the time to speak  
Of republics—to do so is tantamount  
To traitorousness, sedition, & other  
Unspeakable transgressions; one  
Republican protestor is one too  
Many—a placard reading ABOLISH  
THE MONARCHY elicits arrest;  
Another protestor cornered & warned  
By bobbies not to write anything on  
His blank placard, hardly a placard,  
Just one square empty space of card





But in propinquity to Buckingham  
Palace, enough proof of treason in  
The book of Babian of the Yard,  
Sufficient grounds for a bruising,  
Swift prosecution & sentencing—so  
*Christopher Robin's sent down with Alice...*

A double rainbow bruising over  
Buckingham Palace minutes before  
Elizabeth Windsor passed  
Was miraculously symbolic  
& enough to mint a new taboo...

*May flights of angels sing her to...*

Rainbow O Rainborowe O borrowed  
Rainbows O borrowed tomorrows O

Now is not the time to be a republican,  
Now is not the time to speak of a republic,  
Now is only time to join the queue...





## Tobacco Wrappers

Sceptre  
spectre  
& spectacle  
tradition's anointed mystique  
none can fight its  
spiritual fists  
divine right's  
unquestioning monarchists

could we replace it  
with whispered republics  
conspiracies  
in tobacco wrappers

pot-&-pan-  
handed clappers  
cap-doffing  
forelock-tugging  
bowing & scraping  
endlessly queueing  
to bow & curtsy  
& cross themselves  
at the catafalque  
as if at a holy  
reliquary  
or paying respects  
to a departed saint  
divine being

not citizens  
but subjects  
subservient  
deferential



so we defer  
& defer  
& defer  
the future  
put the past first  
history on catch up  
perpetual repeat

time is ripe  
for pipes & plots  
conspiracies  
& micro-republics  
discreetly sealed  
in tobacco wrappers





## Lacklevel Boulevard

Let's take a walk down Lacklevel Boulevard,  
A cakewalk, if you like—we'll go toward  
The foodbank on the corner where the corner shop  
Used to crouch, past the warm haven sanctuary  
Of the local Salvation Army Hall  
Where sometimes they distribute vegetables  
To the hungry, the needy, the down-at-heel,  
The unemployed, lumpen & working poor—  
All those types of 'problem people' governments  
Persecute, stigmatise, or simply ignore,  
Which is a kind of attitudinal murder;  
So many cake-slice terraces of various shades  
& stucco-icings like Mr Benn's Festive Road  
Festooned with street children playing happily  
Outside in Seventies reverie (so sad  
The squatters of Freston Road, the self-styled  
Free Independent Republic of Frestonia,  
Lost sovereignty in the streamlining Eighties,  
In spite of best efforts at diplomacy  
Of its foreign minister Mr Rappaport-Bramley  
Some time before he opted out altogether  
In a fit of depression)—so many lives divided  
& individualised, everyone pitted in private  
Purgatories of iphone solipsism,  
Doom-scrolling in loos—toilet-seat memories  
Of kitchen towels & newspapers clogging up  
The drains during the toilet roll shortage  
Courtesy of the Covid hoarders,  
When the sewers stank out the empty pavements  
In summer miasma of that strange Plague Year  
That dragged us back in time centuries  
With its eerie silence sliced only by the singing  
Of more liberated birds, when the air was so





Much cleaner—it was the same place but as if  
At a different time—we all clapped hands &  
Banged pots and pans each Thursday evening  
Like some viral chivari—but now no more  
Birdsong or applause, just the dull thudding  
Of ubiquitous car doors; now energy is rising,  
Bills doubling, food banks emptying,  
Even warm havens warning of rationing  
Their warmth—best bet are warm hubs of public  
Libraries where books provide insulation  
From the cold & black mould; the government  
Unravelling in lies & not levelling with us,  
Never levelling anything, not even hedge-betting,  
No levelling only bedevilling from blue devils,  
Inveighing against the progressive cognoscenti,  
Boneless liberals, woolly sandal-wearing  
Wobblies, snowflakey wokerati  
Who bellyache about health & wellbeing,  
Taking the knee to all & sundry,  
Who'd fill empty bellies of the undeserving poor  
With more than mere crumbs of benefit-bones,  
Better have them banished to Bleeding Heart Yard  
Then swiftly turn the bend—we're never  
Going back to reverse the Seventies' end,  
We've made our neoliberal bed on  
Uneven pavements of Lacklevel Boulevard.



## Grasp the Nettle

### I

Democracy or monarchy?  
Citizenship or Subjecthood?  
Our history's more than kings & queens,  
It's also Roundheads & Robin Hood.

We have a whole shadow history  
Rarely acknowledged: once we were  
A Republic—black & sea green,  
Colours of the English Leveller

Who petitioned to level evenly  
All lives that survived a Civil War—  
Europe's first socialist; & Winstanley  
Its pilot communist: English Digger.

Parliament once ruled the land  
Policed by soldiers in lobster-tailed  
Pot helmets, jonquil tunics &  
Broad orange sashes, excess curtailed.

O yay, our English Revolution  
Was the first in Christendom—1649—  
A Commonwealth until the Restoration;  
France followed suit in 1789—

& the rest of Europe seized the momentum  
Two hundred years after (never too late):  
The seismic Springtime of the Nations  
Rocked the Continent in 1848.





## II

Charles Stuart invoked Divine Right of Kings,  
Shut down Parliament, & lost his kingdom—  
Charles Windsor summons this shadow doctrine  
Of anointment by God, thorny symbolism:

Poured from ampulla into Coronation spoon,  
Chrism oil made from olives pressed in  
Jerusalem spiced with rose, orange blossom,  
Jasmine, neroli, amber & benzoin.

## III

A New Model England emerged from the grim  
Penumbra of regicide—blue blood stained  
The white linen collars of God's Englishman,  
But sovereignty of Parliament was regained.

Those Cavaliering Victorians ensured  
Oliver Cromwell was demonised  
By Royalist historians who censured  
The Commonwealth: sermonised

That it was a wretched time when the whelm  
Of sword & Bible was an English chagrin,  
& steeple-crowned Puritans oppressed the realm  
With religious gloom & Goosey Gandering.

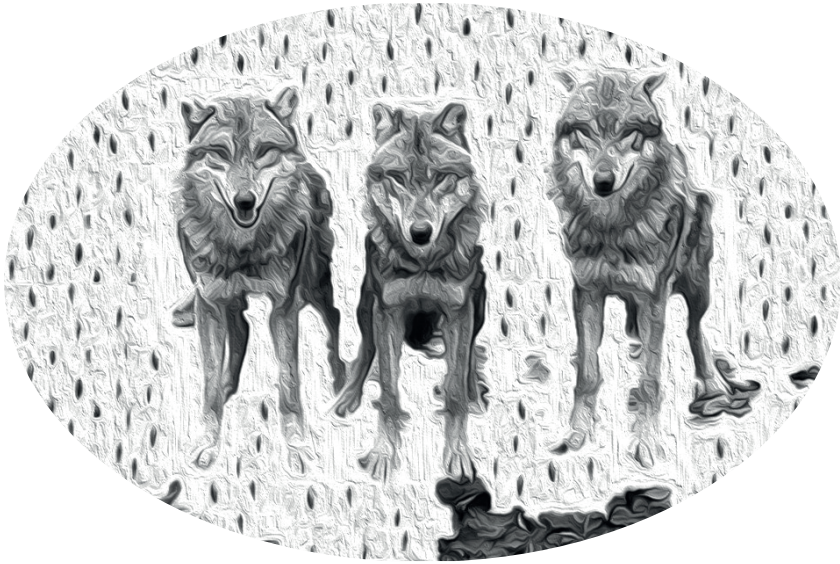
But by 1897 one Hamo Thornycroft  
Was commissioned to design a statue  
Of Cromwell, crownless Lord Protector of  
Our Republic eclipsed to cultural residue;





It was fashioned in bronze & black wax &  
Placed on a plinth outside the Palace  
Of Westminster where it still stands  
& points: embrowned unfinished business.

Whispers of a Republic might ripen  
In time to full-throated cries—for we  
Cannot stay both Subjects & Citizens  
But must grasp the nettle of monarchy.





## **Wolves Come Grovelling (Again)**

Out of the forests of towns & hovelling,  
Wolves of poverty, howl out in worship,  
Bow to your Wolf-king, wolves come grovelling.

Forget soaring bills & the cost of living  
For one weekend, spaff on wolf-fellowship,  
Out of the forests of towns & hovelling.

His crowned head, minted on our pound sterling  
& postage stamps, shadows our hardship—  
Bow to your Wolf-king, wolves come grovelling.

Grab the bank holiday, string out the bunting,  
You're Subjects of strung-along citizenship—  
Out of the forests of towns & hovelling;

It's all just so much Cat-Rat-&-Lovelling  
Of Saxe-Coburg & Gotha & kingship—  
Bow to your Wolf-king, wolves come grovelling.

Or mark the Coronation by protesting,  
Yellow placards packed up in creeping censorship—  
Out of the forests of towns & hovelling,  
Bow to your Wolf-king, wolves come grovelling.





## Notes on the author



**Alan Morrison** is author of ten critically acclaimed poetry collections including *The Mansion Gardens* (Paula Brown, 2006), *A Tapestry of Absent Sitters* (Waterloo Press, 2009), *Keir Hardie Street* (Smokestack Books, 2010), *Captive Dragons/ The Shadow Thorns* (Waterloo, 2011), *Blaze a Vanishing/ The Tall Skies* (Waterloo, 2013), *Shadows Waltz Haltingly* (Lapwing, 2015), *Tan Raptures* (Smokestack, 2017), *Shabbigentile* (Culture Matters, 2019), *Gum Arabic* (Cyberwit, 2020), *Anxious Corporals* (Smokestack, 2021), and *Green Hauntings—New & Selected Poems Vol 1 2006-2016* (Caparison, 2022).

His poetry has been awarded grants from Arts Council England, the Royal Literary Fund, the Society of Authors, and the Oppenheim-John Downes Memorial Trust. He was a winner of the Bread & Roses Poetry Award 2018, and highly commended in the Shelley Memorial Poetry Prize 2022. Poems and monographs in scores of journals such as *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Journal*, *The London Magazine*, *Long Poem Magazine*, the *Morning Star*, *South, Stand, Vsesvit (Universe)—Ukrainian Journal of Foreign Literature*, *World Literature Today* (University of Oklahoma, US). Since 2007 he has edited international webzine *The Recusant*. Some of his poems have been translated into Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swedish and Ukrainian. [www.alanmorrison.co.uk](http://www.alanmorrison.co.uk)

