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Poems mainly
in Blank Verse
(1932 - 1939)

[21 poems]

Ireland

"Listener"

We Irish pride ourselves as patriots
and tell the beadroll of the valiant ones
since Clontarf's sunset saw the Norsemen broken.
Aye and before that too we had our heroes
but they were mighty fighters and victorious
The later men got nothing save defeat
Laid transatlantic sidewalks or the scaffold.

We Irish rather than tense duojer
are yet content with half a dozen turf
and cry our adoration for a bog
rejoicing in the rain that never ceases
and happy to stride over sterile acres
or stony hills that scarcely feed a sheep

But we are fools I say, are ignorant fools
to waste the spirits' warmth in this cold air
to spend our wit and love and poetry

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to waste the spirits' warmth in this cold air
to spend our art and love and poetry

on half a dozen turf and a black bog

We are not native here or anywhere

We were the keltic wave that broke over Europe

and ran up this bleak beach among these stones

but when the tide ebbs we left stranded here
in crevices or ledge protected pools

that have grown saltier with the drying up

of the great common flow that ~~we~~ kept us sweet
with fresh cold draughts from deep down in the ocean

so we are bitter and are drying out

in terrible sourness in this lonely place

and what we think is love for usual rock
or old affection for our customary ledge

is but forgotten longing for the sea

that cries for out and calls us to partake
in his great tidal movements round the earth.

The Touch of Things

I know the touch of things the play of mind
upon the smooth or ragged surfaces

have reached rich ecstasy by merely thought
sent skating over glaciers of sense

admire in a logical intellectual way

the curves a tree makes leaning across a window

But these remain outside me light and shadow
move over them and change them after thought
til I become a strange anthology

bound by no thread save of a nimble wit
and find no fabric for my spirits' house.

If life's to mean full just and ripe wisdom
these things must turn to blood, to blood and muscle
til last of eye is April rain transmuted
or left of knee the sun on antrim cliffs.

Then when I set a flock of dreams adrift
they will be pigeons wandering at will
not paper boats blown in among the reeds
or letter shelter down the spated stream
but have small eager beings of their own
to plane or circle to any possible cloud
and then with homesick hearts come back to me.

April 1933

Summer Wind

After a week of weary sun or dust
the green drains from the stiff ungainly stem
I woke this morning to a world of wind
hearing it first then sighted in the curtains
slamming a door unusual prancing in.
Without went glad cool face uplifted happy
breath cleaner deeper and new ecstasy
in clouds cartwheeling and the flowing grasses
combed, lovely all flowers lively and awake

Rough put on vigor to surprise itself
I said: This is the spring come back again
all times a lie. I am not grown so old
I can recapture joy with this manjollo
that's richer now in color with the wind
and has gone back to beauty from withering
and light-step lifted let the straight pervade
my heart's old load of trouble. Even so
the leaves have a dry rustle in this wind.

August 1937

Summer Dawn.

Walking in draughty air Jamilian street
 was desolate and grey, untried and still ;
 grey rags of paper blown against the gates.
 Past houses blind - and silent, 'till we came
 over a high ditch by a narrow plank,
 with water gleaming over little flints,
 the tangled grass bleach'd grey in the pale light,
 West on the left - a huddle of dark trees
 where the first birds began with startled chirp
 as the boughs shook with song like falling leaves.
 Behind the black firs shouldering the hill
 showed the first smoulder of the coming day
 Then up the long slope with the blackened whin
 still smoking slowly, rooked in the tang
 'till haze precipitated, the last crest
 set us against the daybreak just begun .
 A far light gleamt - and west and west and past
 from the grey island of the shrouded west .

The land lay cold and shadowed with a mist
 the water grey and calm without a ship .
 A narrow cloud on Scotland bundled thick ;
 the sky above fleckt evenly and high
 that suddenly was smudged with smoky flame .
 The cloud on Scotland split to let a shaft
 of gold thro', falling yellow on each face ,
 taking on margins like a neon sign .
 The sun was up . Already light lay long
 on the grey hill behind us, making plain
 the mound we stood on as a shadow's curve .
 The landscape, lost in night before and vague ,
 took definition from caressing hand .
 The water glittered with broad working blades .
 The southwest mountains, islanded in swirl
 of coiling grey, stood tall unlit as yet
 by toredid day . The town below us spread
 became complete now as the sunlight caught
 first the high buildings, concrete tower and dome ,
 then lower gables and long rows of roofs .

August 1939

Oasis

Sheer from the sea we scrambled over chalk
flat tilted loads of limestone starting sheep
the green between bracken and primroses
creeping down in pale yellow in the sun
Behind above to parapet the sky
now blue with tufted white flung out and scattered
a toothed edge of basalt pinnacles.
Leaning against hill's slant and shortend breath
and dazzled by the ricochet of light
we lurcht and slithered in the flowing air
til topping cone of sods and mossy stones
we stood erect between the sky and sea
and caught the sudden wonder of the light
before us swept a hollow gently scoopt
from chalk shelf curving to screen buttress cliff
fields tills for corn fields grazing lazy kine
rigged for potatoes rising to the left
where someone wearing red was laboring

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at the green margin of a narrow strip
and out beyond a man and straining horse
combed slope with harrow over rutted earth
High on the right hand sentinel by trees
slate roofs and thatches sent three trails of smoke
against the boulder littered mountainside
where shifting goats almost invisible
mood forward nibbling to no prompting cry
In one green square steep tufts and blanket by lambs
stood patient and fulfills. Then down ears
with rocky jolt and stirring bony eyes
a low red cart creckt slowly in between
two winding walls of blackthorn contained stone.
Breath held and heightened at the circumstance
we turned - and smiling to each other gave
a mute salute of dream near realiss
and on the brink of utterance. Slowly then
we slid - and stumbled down the cone of sods
leaving a little world we dare not break
and could not enter to its gentleness

April 1938

Daybreak at Loughgall

I shall indeed remember such a dawn
the torn clouds glowing in three separate wounds
the grey light slowly smoking over the dew
birds just awing awake surprised began
their melody increasing with the light
till ear stuf left it was too loud to hear:
the new wind woken also in the reeds
stirring for passage taking sudden flight
and shaking trees against the bitter sky
till life resumed and sun and song involved
the secret spider and the field of corn.

The Lane

11

The house was curtained neat the hedges clift
the byres and barns bright white against the sun
commended in our passing down the lane
Good careful folk live there wise thrifty folk
but not the niggard thrift of the slow peasant

Then down the lane settles on either side
the long docks near them poison and remedy
the tufted knapweed in the boggy grass
cool lane that holds a narrow spine of snow
when the hills bare open and the wet trees black
The lane grows glauzy squelches to a stream
with little clouds of mud in the deeper parts
we rouse in passing. Not one stepping stone
The water running out of the tangled grass
into the tangled grass with the smudge of oil
blue at its roots uncertain of direction
Lafy following the path half counter to it

running at nuts and lying shallow pools
in trampled places: for the lane goes down
to ford the brook above the waterfall;
brown foaming stream against ice-polished rocks
bleft the cleft frogs make in, to knight
the kiss and uproar of the waterfall

I like the lane because I remember the snow
remember the frogs and a dog that splattered across
I'd like it enough to love it if it were dry
but the care of stepping its attentive eye
first on the feet distracts the free mind's joy
from richer matters of woundwort and scabious
so I walk in silence next til sage or stone
I scrape the worst mud off and turn back
why didn't they do something about the lane.

Sext. 1937

Down Emprise

I stood upon a little hill in Down
with august poised upon its mellow prime:
the passing shower had left me in the sun,
but thrown cool scarves of shade on other hills
from Castlewellan with its brace of spires
along the sharp edge to the crest of Croob.
The cotton clouds were billow sails and bales
with blues whole range & island them in light.
The landscape spelt its colors pattern out:
the grazing pocket with moving cattle black
and brown; the rich potato rigs of green;
the lighter corn with squares of charlock gold;
the grey stone ditches; lines of darker trees;
the gash of quarry with its clay red wounds;
and, caught between green slopes, the littleough
Altanadra, blue as the top of the sky,
with one white horse against a narrow field;
the new stacks totted but hardly weathered yet

and gulls that rose and settled with slow cry
on the low marsh places to the right,
and one rook cruising in the middle air.

I lost the ache of self, my heart gone out
into the shapes among the dykes of stone
as gull's wing pecking at the horse's feet.

I was in all and yet included all;
that are and far off earth was but projected
from the stored images within my mind,
like god on chaos dreaming forth a world.

It had not been before me and would end
when my will wrist. I could control its end
Then as I stood a cry from one behind,
emerging from the souterrain's cool gloom,
jolted sudden frenzy to my falling sense.
Here to this hill, well walled from ranging feet,
one hurried gasping with the terrible word
of Patric landed with his murdered god
brought here by the green mouth of the Quayle.
Why must another god kick on my dream?

August 1937

Flight of swans

The three swans broke the water with a splash
dragging black feet and stretching urgent necks
beating great shining wings and flapping clear
to gleam and flash their silver in the sky
march tawled grey and blowing near to rain.

I paused to marvel hearing in the wind
the whistle of their flight. They headed straight
across the curve and hollow of my path
for the lead level of the upper lake

that slaps forever on its flat wet stones
when they were past I jumbled with my thought

They are not lovely. Scatter balancit skill
is beautiful to see but this mere instinct
this natural motions and forms a lesser thing

I do not praise the stone for being stone.

I think them no remembering a poem
and the clear phrase that left beyond the brush
of whirling wing into a timeless sky

beyond life's screaming hands and drumming fear.

They prey on darting fish they hatch and die

fly so about the business of their hunger
no cumulance of wisdom handed on.

They are lovely only in the dream slakt mind
So ran my thought the scorching arguments
clipping into the context and my mind
broad in its disillusion broad and poor.

But snadden beat of pinions again:

I raised my solemn face. Again the three
came whistling down the long slant of the land
bright in the troubled air and shadowless
and I rejoice in the wide angled form
my heart plucked from its pity set afame
with something out of time and out of space.

April 1938

Ghosts

I have no ghosts. My dead are safely dead:
my grandfather reading the paper, my grandmother
jumbling in cupboards, John with his bag of clubs
standing idly, his left hand lict by the dog,
or walking rapidly talking of Mark Twain

These are flat images flickering in the mind
with focus narrowing, widening, nearly lost.
They are not repeating these acts in another place;
and when they did them they were not shadows of things
but suffering creatures moving with joy and pain.
They survive now only in the brittle thoughts
of a dwindling group of people. If I could
gather the scattered colors and shapes and words
and make a mannikin of them and name it John
there wouldn't be much of him there who used to take
a more emphatic figure than any other.

The winter evening reading and asking questions
while my grandfather straightened his tasseled cap
and dealt with the matter, had surely spun a cable
of contact on no merely physical level.

I knew his mind and mocked him and loved him well,
he knew my rash opinions and jeered at them.
Yet he is dead - and has not spoken to me,
or even shifted a glass of water on a table.
I even forgot the particular sounds of his voice.

Died first to the senses active, dying again
to the senses in memory, touch and hearing are gone:
only a listless eye remembers his face.

The Famine

19
And then they grubbed roots by the roadside there
or lay face down in shoughs. My grandfather
was six years old. His mother caught the fever
over the halfdoor of her little house,
from a poor starveling begging a pinch of tea.
His grandfather, who'd eaten of the roasted ox
on Lough Neagh near Ram's Island, took him home,
chaff little frost blue jipers before the fire,
and gave him a face to remember for kindness
and a story still told in seventy years.

There was food in the country. They shipped grain
and cattle by the boatload from the ports.

There was no lack save in the economy
that men must profit the small children die,
must profit tho' the clachan be destroyed
and cows crush nettles on the broken hearts.

There is some legend in the history books
of kindly Britain coming to our aid,
repealing cornlaws, listening to Bright
for the sake of hungry Ireland. This is the fact;
They feed the corn blower the price of bread
for the thousands toiling in their new gaunt mills
so that they'd never need to raise their wages.

There was no thought of us. Both grain and cattle
were shipped from a starving land to foreign places.
Remember this and add it to the tally.

I walkt thro' the ragged park of a shipping lord;
The parsley run to seed, degenerate roses,
The hedges all grass and dock, the lodge lands crackt,
The unfertil margin nibbled by ribbon builders
Planting their red brick where he shewd the view.
A name and fortune? I forgot his name.
His fortune's burning the guts of a foolish son:
Death wills and handed on. No picture or poem,
no shape of stone, no test tube held to the light,

or coil shock tingling to the tips of sense,
not even a fair name in a peasant's ballad,
or the memory at a show of a comely beast

They shipped both grain and cattle from a land
where men ran hungry and children cried and died.

May 1936

The Servant Man

I said at breakfast "We could do wi' help
 I must find out if everyone's bespoke
 down in the village." "You're over late for that"
 Jean grumbled on. "You shoud ha thought before."

When I came in from the byre a man was there
 standing by the stove in a creasy coat
 James Galt his name. He'd workt across the Glen
 for seven years. He'd fallen out with them
 or been kickt out, and begged a chance to start.
 I knew him sober and a steady worker.
 It was no concern of mine why he had left.
 The corn was ripe now - and a deal to do,
 and help was hard scarce enough. I started him.

The forenoon of that day we cleared a field,
 then after dinner went across the loanin'
 to give my neighbor Andrew Scott a hand.

We did right well and got his long field out
 by six o'clock. I halted the machine
 close by the ledge, and turned to look for Galt.
 He was not there. I called to Andrew Scott.
 He shorted that he'd seen James working near
 awhile ago but hadn't seen him since.
 I curst the loafer. That was why he left.
 So he'd a fancy now to treat us stricter
 than he was used with. Stopping sharp at six
 as if he wrought in some big factory.

At home I askt my wife if she had seen him.
 She had not since the time he left with me.
 We blamed each other for engaging him.
 We took him in when he had been thrown out
 by unseemly people. Now this was our thanks
 He'd never left another place for me.
 I never had a name for driving men,
 but now this made it hard to keep that name.
 There was the horse and reaper to put in.

That was his work. He had no right to go.
I put the horse in, spread the waterproof
over the reaper in a sheltered corner,
and took a turn to look at the corn we'd cut.

It was a cold night after a warm day,
a little wind was rising in the trees,
and all the rooks were nested safe at home
when I came to the gate and opened it.

I started sudden. In the fading light
I saw long rows of stocks where there were none
when we left off for dinner. I went in.
At first I could see no one in that light,
then I came on him stooping steadily
down in the narrow corner by the burn.

I shouted to him. James Galt. Do ya hear
it's nearly dark and time that you were done.

Then when I came to him he straightened up

and smiled a bit and said "I don't ye mist me?
from Andrew Scott's log field?"

"By God I did."

I thought ye'd left at six to learn me how
to treat a servant man with decency
and I was angry at your insolence.

But now James Galt I do not ask for this.
I work no man or beast as long as this.
I never had a name for driving folks."

He smiled again looked at the heavy sky
"It's going to rain the night or the morn for sure
Are ye game to see the stockin' til its end?
Come on."

We did as just before we'd done
the first big drops fell on my hands and neck.

February 1938

"Northmen"

The Fired Dad's Farewell.

The farmboy only older than myself
by two tanned years sight like a grandfather
shifted his body on the stack
and plucked a longer straw. With chin on knee
I sat not looking at him gazing out
beyond the lime-washed pillar at the yard
where a late hen that'd strayed all afternoon
ran clucking back and scraping round the door
From the open byre came swish of leggy tails
and noisy breathing till a bucket fell.

Rooks gathered in the dark elms near the gate
The sun's last crested torch set earth afame
til stack and meadow smouldered in a haze
Tomorrow I'll be going home again
For nine weeks now Sandy and I had been
close friends and comrades in this sun-tangy life
I had learnt much from him. More than I will

ever learn in so short a time. Today
I walk more wisely for the knowledge he gave
knows more of cow and horse of crop and root
that burns my heart up when a screaming train
tears thro green acres from town to smoky town
He'd learnt from me a scrap or two of verse
the names of foreign places and fierce kings
and something of three men who have given life
a richer texture by their simple words
and how to hold a bat or toss a lob
that gave more trouble than my overarm
we both were charged thro meeting with each other
we could not ever be just quite the same.

Now life became the thing I'd heard men curse
had used us each for each then split us off.
In three month's time the lad would go to sea
an older cousin promised that last year
for all his people always went to sea
tho lived in a country place of corn and flax

and early familiar with the ways of cattle
 For their small holdings stumbled to the sea's edge
 and broke in cliff and single to the waves
 and here was on the bay the creatures munched
 giving the milk a flavor. They spread brown kelp
 over the plowed fields at the proper time
 and got good crops as good as any dung
 while blackhead gulls screamed in the plowman's wake
 He would go to sea for thirty or forty years
 then settle down a lighthouse keeper or pilot
 at some lost crumbling cliff foot round the coast
 but never again go back to work on the land
 no more to the end than windowbox of hills.
 It seems a foolish thing to lose his wisdom
 hard calloused still his spent his boyhood getting
 only to turn his hand to rope and shovel
 and eat tinned pork and biscuits who knew how
 to slit hog's throat or stock the heavy sheaves
 Tomorrow then I'd sit in the farmer's trap

on labeled box and wave a nervous hand
 while Sandy's stand peering over the trampled hedge
 just where the hedge broke tho yesterday
 And I'd not even see him anymore
 unless maybe an Indian typhoon
 flung me into a bar in Singapore
 or at some quayside walking to the train
 I'd catch a glimpse of him thru an open port
 But here we were on the stack tops lying quiet
 Oed Brennan's black bull roared. The mooley cow
 that was Jane's pet lowed gently back to him
 The shadows of the stacks and trees spread out
 what sun was left shone on the tips of stubble
 a curlew or some other wandering bird
 cries from the bough. Far off an engine hooted.

Tomorrow I was going home for good
 and even if I came again next year
 he would be gone. I thought of friendly things
 of our antics on the hay float or picking up

hard little windfalls bitter in the mouth
 or scrambling in the rafters after a nest
 or crawling on our bellies after beans
 or whipping at the pony or whacking pigs
 til their red buttocks quivered as they ran
 But it was useless. I was going home
 and Sandy here was going away to sea

He never was at best a clever talker
 even with the family round the kitchen table
 At least his eyes were full of comradeship
 and pity at the parting. I had been
 the first boy to run with him as a friend
 for he'd no brothers or sisters was an orphan
 and always was a sort of hired lad
 out working for his keep to sell to people

Now he was going away a hired lad
 indentured to the sea til time should end

And I was going home to a city of brick
 to bind myself to a desk or a shelf of books . . .

The sun set steep behind the Antim ridge
 and there was one star over Maldensley Hill.

I shall not be more sad at any death.

August 1932

The Return

The gulls began at daybreak in the mist
 gliding a smooth adagio astern
 Intent on it they slowly dropt aside
 Then in a hurry flapp'd back into place
 The scarts the cormorants upon each buoy
 sat still aloof avert'g their long heads
 repeated stencil of black silhouette
 I'd taken a bet with myself to find them there.
 Day brightening and the mist being thin and torn
 a flock of rooks from the woods at Clandeboye
 passed safe and high above our bobbing track
 Over the sunne and welter of the wake
 I flung my scraps of bread and the screaming started
 the rival hunger and the pedantic still
 disdaining jostle for swoop of dignity
 always life hoist upon the edge of pain
 The quiet that had come upon my spirit
 since at the flat Meare field is found my place

was cut to flicker . Superimposing shots
 set me at angles with a marvellous sky
 Rattlin the Westlight and the tall black stacks
 the hurtling puffins and the guillemots
 rocketing past our faces into the surge :
 Dunansrooey mounded fort of swordgit rings
 and cresting the small hill a heron surprised
 trailing off in it offended arrogance
 The oystercatcher's eggs you found on a ledge
 when the frightened parents cried in a narrowing circle
 and down by Ushet drough a sparrowhawk
 striking the gull's breast in a flurried fury .

On each return to Ulster I am renewed
 I had made resolution to be ready

a year more racket and rustard than any before
 just daily use of living out my love
 existence that before was spent in snatches
 with cold and lonely intervals of self

learning a mind judging a spirit's tension
 sail shortening for the weaker of the mood
 trusting one side of an arch to hold love's keystone
 That span is steady. Lay the trowel by.

A land year vibrant with cross-trumpet calls
 rally to arm a land a voice for beauty
 a bitter tongue for what I took as grand
 verse jogging close at elbow to be uttered
 but burst aside bawling into dreams
 As keen a student error or lift a banner
 of mercy and justice in a smoky room
 war imminent and its black wing unnoticed
 by careless japers at a slowy neon.
 but threat so dread for those who watch the skyline
 that you and I dare not delay to give
 what little craft we had to rouse and warn them
 skirmish with those false prophets bleating gently
 the crazy circle of daft circumstance
 and the oversimple chart of easy rescue

an electric day with that high volted rebel
 who has battered the walls of folly with his head
 for longer than he cried upon this planet;
 your fevered weeks alone of rash endeavor
 to raise a beacon for the night boulders
 who rather love this darkness than your light.

Name me the faces rocking in the shadow
 the white tired face of the exile German woman
 behind her gentle words the whip and pistol
 working relentless murder to her hopes
 the grim good humor face of the dramatist
 whose jancies trip aiptoe tho' his cripple
 encounters in the rain of an Irish June
 yet bright with a ripe wisdom and gay courage
 the rough cut face the strong mouth eloquent
 of the one major prophet of the north
 betrays a little into vanity
 flatters to silence on his stormy dream,
 the bruised face of the boy taken at midnight

The ivory sculpture of the ageless woman
who rallied her sex to freedom and saw it lost
and turned to rally a class that is not hers;
the hooded features murmur over the peat
of Neil the paper and the grangachi's cry.

Not one of these but gave us strength and wisdom
wisdom thro pity strength thro reverence
And when the world's walls trembled to engulf us
we had the strength to face the hoard disaster
and cry salute to the clean stars beyond.

Yet far our nurture and our start with success
we hurried from island Rathlin knowing
hoop by steel cliffs and ocean insulated
islands are wellheads of the world's salvation
There men at peace in fields or driving cattle
women at doors and children brown and shy
sleep on the hills the more with the stumbling foal
the sick calf in the corn the stacks of sods

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The white road with each bough a bright surprise
Craignacaggan Mull, roger Ally, Ualet
the charlock yellow barley, the warm sweet beans
and the perpetual crying of the birds
brought back clear joy and merry sanity.
Not once a social conscience troubled us
Leaning on rocks or perch'd precarious
on the stone walls between bare field and field
we let the free heart flutter til it found
up near the sun a happy stay of light

So we decided what our days must mean
sustenance of sense and steady growth & ripeness
Lands eyes and works bound slaves to poetry
the briefest pain to be the oyster's grit.
This then decided fresh in a salty squall
we tacked for home and ract small ragged clouds

But in the city of our dreadful night
men fought with men because of a slobbers rag.

or history remembered blindly. In the streets
 crowds shrank the stale shibboleths of hate
 drove from their midst the strangers of a creed
 and set the little flame licking up the curtain
 So we were thrust back out of the lair of light
 into the flickering gloom. The wounded arts
 played on the broken bottles of despair
 struck the timcans of helpless misery
 and poetry was smothered by the drums.

Brief, for a moment we grasped the hem of Peace
 along the minor river by the trees
 the tanager's golden buttons and the shells
 of a new mollusc fitted the bounding heart
 back to the track of promist permanence
 There too a field of corn in heavy sheaf
 brown gold against blue shadow of green tree
 steadied the shifting pattern of belief
 But the old battles still were left unwon

men driven from their homes to beg for shelter
 or seize it. Bragg's authority impotent
 save insolent tongue or tilt of bulging socket
 What hope we thought then for the foolish people
 what hope for our desire to bring them life
 abundant life; just for the body's need
 then for the hearts? The broader fields of time
 brought harsh concern for me - the leagues delay
 the bullfrog leader and the bearded kip
 widening to a net to mesh the world
 narrowing to a personal decision
 that must be made to keep a core of self
 nor flailing off at wheelwhirl of event.

I remember one who went to die in France
 Lating tower and wishing only to paint
 but dreading more the pointed finger and gibe
 and what his son might think when he had grown.
 remembers too that day lens with the brush
 glad to slop jilt and human excrement

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rather than crack his flees in a frontline trench
or have his sensitive arts script bare with suspense.

Then when to Bristol town of Chatterton

I went alone intent upon my trade
camp follower of the wayward feet of men
Loander of trifles scattered by the roads
of things well made and broken or halfmade
strainer of cinders winnower of dust
preserves of the shards keeper of names
lackey of time astler of the apocalypse
suddenly there descended over me

sense of the instant's morgence into time
my flight no more or less on the rims of space
than the busy gestures of Cabot's father and son

lading the little vessel for adventure

Burke's rhetoric on the dreams of western heaven
blueprinted by Bob Sonsteg and his friends
I walked the streets aware of older streets

before the black glass and the chromium
Corn Street Wine Street Red Lodge Christmas Steps
Paragon Terrace built with the price of slaves
and the famous Gothic of St. Mary Redcliff.

And when chance sent me jolted to the south
over the Mendip hills by Cheddar Gorge
Westover Westhay crossing the river Brue
the thing was plainer. life was eternal life
the windfalls littered in the tufted grass
the bigger apples netted in a heap
men milking in the meadows twisty roads
red roofs of tiles streaked with yellow straw
life was eternal involving every instant
Clarence crew or state; apples of Somerset
make cider to be drunk by living men.

At Meare in a windwhipt field as flat as bog
(My Antrim eye had noted. So it proved)
there had been dug a magic hole thro time

revealing a crisscross raft of oak and alder
 and silver birch with the bark not rotted yet
 where man had wrought - and swat before Christ's birth
 the nail scord hot bonecold smooth ring of jet
 the blade now shelters and the amber beads
 the baked clay heart and the bars of hammer iron

Man has gone on enduring the incidence
 of Rome and Norman hobs from the end
 of wood and crucifixion Thor and Zeus
 if not men individual with these faces
 jaws set so broad this angle eyes this color
 man has gone on essential man the maker
 the double man destroyer in his blood
 charring the wood and heaping hills of slag
 smearing a valley with shuns and fusing the whin
 yet out of his nature making something lovely
 a bronze blade meant to kill but less precise
 Always the touch of Immortality
 upon the things of death the mark of life

on things with else no secondary meaning
 For it is not the wars that make us human
 but the chisels face to broach the silver bangle
 the temple and the sonnet : these are man.

And knowing this I thought of the things I care for
 I knew my choice was the choice of life and good
 tho' men still choose the way of death and evil
 life in them works denial of their waste
 thro' the expert economy of art
 cleaves thro' their chaos with a feathers joy
 A faith men murdered thousands for may leave
 a symbol life's the richer for a gesture
 recovers that may add another sense.

I saw how the two engines of my thought
 and being spite the clogging grease of self
 beat in the right direction .

First positive action gearing the destroyer
 crushing the rocks for basis, digging clear

40

the level path for justice the paved way
for mercy: tentative effort following
of sheer creation out of my sensed scope
leaving the things I love no poorer for
my loving them and adding where I can
my touch of life of life articulate
thrust me a particular focus of memories.

but move at bidding of this uncount compass
like no more than a needle stuck in a straw
and floating in a shaking bowl of water

So at the ship's stern as I fed the gulls
appraising each swift arabesque of hunger
I grew aware of the conflict of my being
the interplay of memory and thought
and having the dialectic in my sinews
was eager for the resolving synthesis

I wrote these words out awhile recognising
the shifting lights I mist in definition
yet sure the jumbling letter was not worthless
that I or you in dark days coming after
might not despair because of the uncharted

September 1935.

Traveller : a mosaic

I

Speak now if ever O my wandering man
 walking the deck or strolling down the train
 waiting the gong impatient to begin
 I might put formal queries to provoke
 set formal speeches that ignore the clock
 and let the match drop on the pipe unsmoked
 but better let you speak in your own way
 half overheard asides that slip away
 a corner of the damp cloth from the clay.
 Speak now if ever O my wandering man.

II

Not you the albatross on foamy wing
 with only mileage for your journeys,
 nor you the merlin circling over stones
 littered with splintered bones and bloody feathers,
 or even starling flying from the cold
 harsh swedish winter to a warmer place
 like tide of air, like tide predictable,

time to the shape of twig your line foretools
 like track of steps across the frosted grass.
 Speak now if ever; I shall listen well.

III

But keep the shells and pebbles in your pocket.
 I shall not remark the knife you whittle with.
 Say boss war ya ever on de Pacific?
 Say didja didja ever see de Hawaiian ships?
 My god boss der's botes for ya. Not like dis.
 Bands playin on every deck
 from mornin til nearly mornin.
 Ya just go in an dance de way ya are
 when ya feel dat way
 in yer pajamas or dress up in a tut.
 Hot-ells dat's what dey are. Hot-ells:
 am' de Soivis? Boy

When I was in Rangoon a year ago
 a man came up an said is yer name Thomson?
 I ask ya? Was my name Thomson? Christ!

O albatross I did not cry by you
with only spume of seas on your tedious span.
Speak now if ever, O my wandering man.

IV

I've just been to Aberdeen to bury an uncle
now I come over to Ireland for a niece's wedding.
She said it wouldn't be right with me not there.
My family are born travellers by nature:
my wife too. Her father has his ticket.
For me I like the trip to Ramsey and back,
on a fine day, in June for preference.
I have a brother in the naval reserve.
He was called up in October.

O starling, waddle away to another part.

My father's came from a little village in Poland:
most of my dear are left by the Elbe or the Rhine.
I should like to get to Jerusalem before I die
but it don't seem likely now,
to the son of my mother's cousin.

has an orange grove out there.
We go each year to dig the Scotch potatoes
and sleep in huts. There was a fire one year.
America used to be good. They send no money now.
My elder brother came home with a Yankee wife:
my father and mother moved to the end of the house.
I was a joiner's help in Winnipeg
before the slump. Six months on the job
and I was the old hand.

I went to Barrow once to find a job
but that was before the war.

My brother too. He stays. His sons talk English.
Not these my wanderers, sheeting, never these,
blown like a feather, floating like a stick,
compelled and driven, ebbing flowing going,
part of a graph's curve in economy,
ciphers and digits swelling not changing the total.

V

Sometimes Ulysses running on the porch
will shade his gaze for unfamiliar sail

with seaman's eye assess her cut and rig,
heards her port and cargo, then at length
review in his rich lethargy of thought
the islands past, the many colored seas,
the trees and hills, the witch's grunting spells,
recall the dead land and his own soft cairn,
and growing perturbed, demand the boy,
repeatedly in his high quavering tones,
bring staff and lead him straitway to the steps
to talk with the old men among the nets.

VI

Today we call that country the Northwest
its name is changed about three times a year.

The Border Region or the Soviets.

Sensi Kansu Ninghsia There is our hope.
a new man is emerging. a new hard type

The troops began to march on horse before the day.
I followed mounted on a hairy pony,
-and caught 'em up and passed 'em and rode on

51

to camp at nightfall by a little lake
between tall sides of loess, the yellow earth.
Before I was right asleep the troops arrived
weary a bit but singing. It was 50 miles,
with mostly bundles of rags and straw for shoes.
They find a village eating maize - well say,
they must eat millet, must be so better off
a change stat from the old provincial armies
cutting across the country like a scythe
over a field and leaving only stubble
or like the dreaded locusts black in the sky
and gone from a desert,
the frightened people before 'em like hares in the corn

a new man is emerging, a better man,
hard in his mind and body, hard and kind.

Small boys from all over China

come thousands of difficult miles
to join the devils' brigades and grow to be men,
new men.

I went to go back thro Mongolia.

The chief town there was only huts and tents
but now its steel and concrete.

A man I met in Moscow had been there.

He says they're the best fliers in the east,
can keep formation and their aim's superb.

O Phoenix here is your nest. The flames begin -
Han Sung Manchu Republic, twig by twig,
smoke up in bitter incense

or Polo paunchy, stick curved grill in pot,
thrust ledger from him with brown clever hands
feel belt and wallet and take up once more
the tale of Kublai to th' obsequious clerk.

VII

The long just in front got well across
then disappears in spinning cloud of sand.
He harkt and waited til the dust died down.
Before the air was clear a man came out

holding his face with bloody hands and swaying.

The all was over save infrequent shells
dropping, some duds, on both sides of the road.

The captain said "You try to bring it in".

Say sixty yards or more with little cover;
so I went walking on the softer ground,
slowly and ready to flop at the warning whine.

When I got there the windscreen was blown in
with splinters on the seat. The tyres were sound.
So I stepped in and tried the clutch.

O men with the darting mind and sharp keen face,
is this my Phoenix' fire? O wandering man.

VIII

Earth narrows suddenly.

The stage our jatis plays out on is the world:

not narrow world of accent, world entire.

Rain falls in India and a wench is wed
in Ramsey. Rain falls not. She is not wed,
but has a bastard by the lack of rain.

The Kuomintang marched in and burnt us out
 we scattered to the woods and headed north
 hoping our guns impress the villagers
 for we were rotten shots. Among the trees
 I practised random shooting. My sight is poor,
 but the printed page has somehow come alive.

I crossed the Ebro in a two-ton truck
 when I was in Rangoon a year ago
 on a fine day in June for preference
 Now Spion Kop and the Mense to a piping boy
 The mountain road in Persia: a half-mile drop
 on the right hand, a cliff along the left.
 I went to Banow once before the war.

I have gone as far as this in a picture book.
 I have stood on a rock to see the river below
 a road beside it curving as it curved
 a toy car running round a meccano bend.
 I climb back slowly to the charabanc

and hear last village orchard and battlement
 two teachers at the back talk books and art.

O man on the over bed in the yellow eave
 O man with the three-day's beard at the parapet
 O man in the rented room translating trash
 What is the peace ye know? or is it peace?

I plunge and plunge to find the heart of things,
 pursue forever the flickering light that leads.
 One day it's Gandhi squatting at his salt,
 another a cripple in the Capitol.
 Let Plato spend eternity on his arse,
 my hands for Hermes of the winged heel.

Have you no more to say o wandering men?
 Say master were ya were ya ever in the Pacific.
 But that was in Rangoon a year last June
 I will go back before Hankow has fallen
 I lost my papers in Prague with the address

XI
Some say from Egypt, some from farther east
our fathers came with polished axe and pot.

The journeys in our bones, we must go back,
Lead home forever east or farther east.

No hill is friendly. The earth holds our sweat,
my father's father's flesh is turned to clay.
but his bones lie unbroken, will not perish,
the distance in them giving them their strength,
will fall to dust in none but native soil
and let the old ache die

XII 3

Speak now instead, my solitary man.

Why shift position? life is an endless flux
and growth is change: and even death continues
in merry meagotry life's business

XIII

Last spring I made a study of the rook.
The year before I ^{did some work on migration} went into the theory of flight,
Yes that's last Sunday's best. The negative

of course requires a little touching up.
I had to prop it open with a twig.

Keyrie found a new glebe roll in the library.
I hope it throws some light on Thomson's theory.

XIV
My theory is
the river people used these clubs of slate
for knocking the stranded salmon:
but Barrow does not agree in his last report.

XV

I set art's mask against the shifting face
and catch at moments flash of passing light
behind the open lids a moving smile
break on the painted lips: they pass and pass
the mask remains unchanged in my stiffening fist:
only the mask is real: only the mask.

O bearded loct complaining of your aches
rejecting only on the painted mask

denouncing the intrusive telephone,
 dramatist
 or you in the little villa facing the sea
 with ordered cushions in the best of taste
 and pictures painted by friends on your bookcases,
 Leave you a Phoenix for me now is art long?

I scan the level sentence, the hidden rime,
 the deft proficient dialog, the small
 carved Buddha squatting on the polished desk.

Lonely and ragged eagles too sick to fly,
 I do not believe you have ever looked into the sun.

At Malvern I said to Shaw to Homer to Jane Austen,
 and old Tom Hardy's nest was grey with songs,
 and J. M. M. threw his arm round my shoulders
 a trick you remember Huxley ascribes to Burlap.

XIV

I have talked to a wrecking camp who has given me more

and pocketed a tanner for it well content.

Keats caught his heart out for a silly girl.
 Blake was mad and happy, Milton blind,
 he looked like Delius with a touch more curl.
 Dawson and Johnson were praised by the last of their kind

The smaller thousands I meet in the street at noon
 can't die of immortal verse or worse for love
 or draw their angels in the falter light:
 they'll never achieve more than a quainter column
 by sending a bloody ear thro' the parcel post:
 they have never heard of Chate or the Eighth Route army,
 and could not follow them if they wanted to.

My Phoenix is nested here in the winter moon,
 the chimney stay jello last week, the shun condemned.

my dilemma shifts another, a harder plane,
 So you need not beckon me now o wandering man.

November 1938

Brief Sanctuary

I

Before war mocks my memoryed liberty
 I'd dedicate one day to poetry,
 from involuted circumstance and will
 abstract indulgent passage free and whole,
 snatching an instant island out of time
 while yet I wear an individual name.

Awake with tongue untroubled by the taste
 of midnight friends' reiterated toast,
 let me go out in sun while yet the trees
 show scarce a leaf and on the restless eyes
 light flashes from each grass blade, and the road
 less eaded ^{dust} ripples in rain dark ripples laid,
 secure in pocket to be drawn and count
 the severescou sonnets from the nester's hand,
 a quatraine red repeats memoryed
 for least rockt moment now forever phras.

Pass school with playground empty and the hum
 thro open window of a morning hymn.
 Salute a man and cart with weather guess
 and know his answer has the strength to bless
 from its slow wisdom coeternal with
 that line of stream ground mountains to the south.
 Think then of Chancer greeting travelers
 and limning each full face in missal verse:
 say half aloud a stanza of his thought
 in beldam patois not as Chancer wrote,
 and striking so companion, muse in love
 of bawdy miller and vindictive reeve.
 Stop only for a man who begs a match,
 a man and dog, a man without a watch,
 and just at noon, with man and horse at plow
 who falters at the furrow's end to know
 am I but passing or a neighbor now.

Walk a short shadow turning with the sun
 observing toward chestnut, gold fleckt whin,

equipt with neat quotation for each glance,
 each twixt twixt switch of mood remark'd at once,
 and stated deftly in remembered line,
 for hole in treebole, thrush upon a stone,
 or frog with frog where hillboun water makes
 a hoobround pause before it leaps the rakes,
 or well run rats cut deeply thro' the mud
 to ground and fix a starned stretch of road:
 find each of these as integral and fresh
 as Canterbury or the brading ash,
 and by their being prove my Shakesperie's plan
 cartographer's and sessions-clerk's in one

II

For lunch returning, spend a happy hour
 deciding what bread and in what chair,
 whether in room with shelves distracting still
 or room with better pictures on the wall,
 take this, replace, and jiper this and this,
 make nice assortment by analysis;

giant Dorothy's tangled epic's volumes four,
 the fall of Sigurd, or the high austere
 friend burthen verse of Yeats, and scarcely known
 the tinsel sonets of John Ferguson,
 with shining apple yearning for a tooth,
 a smoldering heatblotched pipe held loose in mouth.

Rich passage read, book laid on knee for thought,
 vest pocket pencil jumbled for a note.
 The verse resounds where margin remonstrates
 indebtedness to Spenser or John Keats.
 Imagination lit aglow to share
 the artistry with someone busy near,
 summoned by short visit and hear open
 the inevitable eloquence of pain,
 while cake is baking or while kettle boils
 til stir to action by fire's need of coals

Alone with the high affiance, standing back
 while wrath of Sigurd takes a swinging shock

fall into dreams till the room gives way
to slipping veils before a wandering eye.

Then for that cooling hour of lapsing light
when print grows faint and yet the sky is too bright
to drag the curtain, touch the snapping switch,
trust book aside to give crost legs a stretch,
down thro' th' allotments where men working still
look up from labor answering my call,
familiar men known for assiduous care
that brought clean daffodils to shake in a shower
out of a barren and a boggy ground,
those distant greet with friendly lift of hand
and by the ditch where, just the other day
the nested law-storm had been cut away
per keen for darting rat, too early yet
for water-boatmen or vibrating gnats:
remember Thomas as he searching gape
that turns the dust or rubble with the noise
that names the tree the light wind sets astir

and after Thomas innocent John Clare

Turn down fast lances with the chimneys plumb
for tees warm promise stay now abashed
with brilliant stars apart from glow of sun
now pale behind the mountain from the town
a slow fog rising like brown cloud of dust
that smothered better cities wisely lost.
Observe and store for later use when ripe
the clattering schoolboys in a hundred groups
with dirty knuckle knee and wrinkled sock
playing at marbles in a cul-de-sac
till mothers warn them to lesson book
or undiverted as intent on task
the pregnant women walking out at dusk
as tho the prudent logic of the seed
demanded darkness for its patient deed
the busk up trusting isolates trees'
black challenge to sterility of skies
the ready odor of the new cut grass

where on the stormy tree starlings lurch across

The short road ended come more slowly home
 where blinds are drawn in bed and sitting room
 as down the sounding street the lamplighter
 leaves twinkling points of reminiscent fire
 a moving board of sober memories
 of verses written when with weary eyes
 men greeted sunset and on coming night
 with sad reflection and dejected thought
 at the slow culmination of despair
 for holes profound and beneath a steady star
 yet satisfied in dignity to come
 with sailor and with harter safely home.

IV

When darkness complete them closer to the fire
 draw table laid with Lendor Massinger
 and Dante's now warming Paradise
 til some friend call find sanctuary in these

the full day creating was perfect prime
 beyond restricted resonance of nine
 in gesturing style of measured tragedy
 or fireborn streaks of gold philosophy
 Til some friend call as turn bearest talk
 of press clamps verse experimental work
 always entailing mystery remote
 Does not word alien to a newer thought
 if it seize shape of music take a line
 melodic from some rhythm the heart has known.
 But in these forms obscure abrupt intrudes
 a landscapes ruptured with arterial roads
 -and pylons Babel like from shire to shire
 That shrill their desolation to the air
 As while one's speaking inattentive hand
 will stretch and grasp in eagerness to find
 some sheer and steady bastion delight
 like Pope or Dryden to round off the night.

V

This is my dream . A day to spend like this

69

mind sooths and succord by high symphonies
born out of days more easily mappt than these
with a crude Boreas for uncharted ice
May alternate some choice of books or then
with unspoilt paper and a well charged pen
send time for skinning lost til I have found
some plan of words for image in the mind

VI

This cannot be. If not an urgent note
from someone thankful for the words I wrote
against oppression or a brief demand
that summons me to break a date I planned
with rest and leisure to endure again
the unresponsive attitudes of men
from platform pulpit while I scold and scream
and understand and overstress my theme
then daily paper dropping in the hall
black with defeat and loss's incessant fall
or noncommittal voice across the air
of danger marching in from everywhere

No way escape. The occasion of my birth
foredoomed me to a sick and fevered earth.
But I shall hug this hope: there'll be a day
& spend unmocht at pleasure this slow way,
when all that's wrong is right, adjusted soon
between two sonnets to the harvest moon.

March-April 1939

Chapel Dusk

Waiting in town between infrequent trains
 mid January cold and falling dusk
 the cafes shut til nine the bank blinds drawn
 only a grocer's open with a girl
 stacking tins in a window and a man
 trundling a barrel off a buckled dray
 and two men talking small across the square
 I turn from broad street down a villa row
 past yellow curtains and tall pots of bulbs
 til high steps and a statue marks a church

I climb the granite noting Patric's stance
 saw cross in stone before his ring with grease
 and stoup in corner with oil cooling water
 swung door on stall of booklets and went in
 between two rows of pews where candles burn
 to left oak pulpit stations of the cross
 gaudily painted face along the wall

grass glittered on mosaic borders cloth
 long chill and motionless with metal threads
 marking some letters of the alphabet
 two children tiptoed in and pray'd awhile
 a wrinkled woman in a greasy shawl
 leapt quickly to the rail and crumpled down
 crossing her face and bosom muttering
 I stood and gazed beyond the recesses
 to the cold window flasht by fading light
 Christ and his mother Christ at miracles
 Christ crowned in centre with a blessing hand
 and sceptre slanted. Seven candles burned
 a box of matches of familiar brand
 lay on a tray. I felt a certain urge
 to say my penny and set up a light
 not is this color'd Christ or the unknown god
 but single flame to sway with the other flames
 against th' encroaching gloom upon our time
 suppress the fancy smile in mockery
 turns clicking heel on marble and went out

I went there to admire the colored glass
I'd heard good word of from a man who'd seen
and less some moments til my train was due
cold and unknown in a forsaken place

A Certain Gain

The year began with snow that blew to sleet
gusty at first then falling wet and thick
when we went to the door to hear the bells
the rain fell on our faces listening
-and all the gutters choked with sudden thaw
New Year upon a twitching world of fear
-given over to the coward and hypocrite
The next day was a gale that shook the house
with squalls of hail upon the rattled panes
we shut ourselves against the universe

Then on the first bright morning I went out
into an earth now wakened innocent
but Europe lowered so about my thoughts
I fact mechanical - and unalert
til down the hill I heard wing whips of air
and stood to gaze at unfamiliar flyers
with blunt open trusting dark against the light

February 1939

white on the belly grey on neck and wing
flying alone before a threatened storm

I had no hint of random blow and lost
That bent goose passing said a bitter day
with sharp delight of vision and memory
unreconciled to symbol of my tangled hopes

So when on day that followed I went out
my heart was open to the naked world
The hills were cast in snow along the slopes
dawn's gentle touch of red spread faintly
the sky between hills green as daffodil
breaking to yellow of the windflast flower
while a round cloud of brown drew steadily
back from the peaks the bare sky overhead
was blue of midmost June and crystalline.
The sun a song of gold rose in a mist
out clouds before it parted brown and grey
had golden edges glittering as it glane
Whatever comes this year is not all grief

Tanners 1989

Jug of Punch

I remember a wee pub
on the borders of Tyrone
where the country turns suddenly untamable
with roads over swift hills
and bogs round corners

I remember the walk over the bog
the black ooze warm between the toes
and the purple stains on the mouth
the mottles that rose hosting
when we jumbled for berries with slippery fingers.

I remember the wee pub
and the inquisitive girl behind the bar
and the strong Irish whisky over the smoking turf
and the bawdy talk
and the rain on the road outside

Well that Jan lies drowsy
 nodding over a glass
 now so in a bombshelter
 and that deaf hand stretcht for a pint
 twitch and stiffen in a tangle of wire

They were not bad people
 and do not deserve such an end.

Last Enemy

Having survived
 the pulpit angers of frustrated men
 hell's threat no mercy save the broken will
 flouted to gods sweet tenor in a shirt
 and the precarious courtesies of kings
 starchamber matter billeting of wrong
 the insolent lord
 the small squires crop and meadow
 the jested shout
 we slant headlong now
 down the long arterial naked to
 the interim report the experts lie
 and the ambiguous coverage

Tiphead: a summary

As I came thro the desert on my right
dry bones of poets bleaching to the moon
and moss-dark hieroglyphs on rain grey stone
where lizards crawled and bats squeak at the light.
as I came thro the desert on my left
tubercular curate hung on chromium cross
as I came thro the desert thus it was
thorn-coronet and epigram bereft

here we come gathering nuts in may

nuts in may

nuts in may

here we come gathering nuts in may
on a cold and frosty morning

This is stet jidil which for eighteen pence
I bought and plays when young without much sense
the only time that it can play

war who will you have to take her away
over the hills and janaway
on a cold and frosty morning

a mudguard like a lonely roman arch
rests on a rusted pile of hoops and springs
a poster preaching mrs robin's starch
shaker ragged corners judah's whether rings
left on the hulk or hanging by the hair
adours munders that the sprung be far
booril bottles stare

brown rocketed great eyes the jew has not
yet seen the profit in this stinking heap
warm wind from sloklandz raves the vacant lot
the thin cat shaker of him and goes to sleep

yet with these shardz I must brick up my life
lant wall of care and carve bone hilted knife

Sept 1932

