

POEMS

1940



Book XVIII

Poems by

John Hewitt

October 1940 — December 1941



3  
19<sup>th</sup> October 1940

Of old when men were in husk jeopardy  
or danger swung above a life they loved  
blew scorching on the little threshing limbs  
and chill upon the white face clenched in sleep  
they barked with despair and profured vows  
a cup a mass the first born of the house  
their hearts' hugged trinkets: and the crisis passed

What shall I offer now? The modes of chance  
have lost the plink and gestures to respond.  
I spell no code or index to placate  
the ruffling terror hung above the roof.

If I survive, if those I love outlast  
imagined torments prood on half the earth,  
with all the candles of the world blown out  
the things I'd offer would seem jettison.

19-20-10-40

## The Ballad of O'Hempsey

My name is Denis O'Hempsey  
I am old and my strength is done  
I filled the world with music  
yet never saw the sun  
I heard the great winds crying  
but I saw not the rivers run  
of the loveliest voices in Erin  
I knew not the face of one  
For a hundred years and over  
I have drawn a darkman's breath  
heard songs in the courts of princes  
and the keen for the harper's death  
I have plucked my strings in the castle  
I have scorcht my skins in the hall  
but I played my bravest music  
when the wind wheepled thro' the wall

and crofter led me to crofter  
down the lanes of Donegal

I have walked this island over  
the lands that led me once  
have y' room to deep sweet menhood  
and told the tale to their sons  
who hitting a strain of my harp  
have shouldered their pikes and guns

and these have died or departed  
but ere they went from us they gave  
a word and a time I set it  
that bid their children be brave  
as they stood by the spray dromelt seawall  
on the edge of the open grave

For awhile I left this island  
and heard it over the sea  
the clash of claymores and glasses



and the toasts of Scotia free  
I have heard the voice of Charley  
but his word was not for me

I have come at the end of my playing  
at the townland where I was bred  
and the generous hand of Lord Bristol  
has smothered me a friendly bed  
has given a hearth for my warming  
and a roof for my weary head  
where the waves crash loud on the shingle  
and the gulls cry overhead

And here of a day in the autumn  
seeking the harpers' love  
depen to write my music  
a man has come to my door

and bid me play as a prettime  
the Fox and the Deer Dark Head.

7  
for the sake of the days that are coming  
when the last of the harpers is dead

and I have taken my clairsach  
and let my fingers run  
over the tunes I remember  
of the King of Ireland's Son

and the four green fields of the widow  
and the comely silk of the King  
and the sorrowful parting of friends  
and the clans that intertwine

and I have played them o'er  
as the voice cried again and again  
till the man with the rustling paper  
has marked the shape of them plain

The women stood up and departed  
with a coin and a clasp of the hand



7<sup>th</sup> November

and a kindly word to remember  
I am not alone in the land  
but still in the star of the cities  
there are some who understand

And now with my clavichord beside me  
and my patient wife by the fire  
I know in the end that my travels  
have won to my heart's desire

with a stall that never has faltered  
and a memory that never betrayed  
I heard among bishops and princes  
and men grown heavy with trade

and knew that despite the broad acres  
and the throng of beasts in the stall  
that was ragged and sightless  
I was the king of them all.

It is a strange feeling to walk about  
with a new poem hatching in your head  
an arrangement of words never heard or seen before

The conductor asks for your penny  
the usherette takes your ticket  
a passing acquaintance remarks Fine Day  
and none of these knows

A pregnant woman's secret is soon out  
but the poem may lie on paper for twenty years  
that rightly handled should modify an age  
start a fashion

thrust into school books

or tag a cabinet minister's address

It is perhaps better to keep it in your head  
and let the possibilities fool you a little longer  
for when it comes a moment comes when you're sure  
the usherette was quite right not to notice or care.



7. XI. 40

I sometimes envy those contented men  
who joke with waitresses  
or send the conductor grinning down the stairs  
or shout greetings across the ring side seats

I am only fluent and easy  
when advertised to speak  
or knocking the pipe ash into my own grate.

It is not that I lack vocabulary or ideas.

14. XI. 40

Out of this mood despair  
what gesture may be born  
like the moon's tilted horn  
that gay with borrowed light  
assumes the upper air  
and leaves us to our night?

14. XI. 40

That stooped man Mark, my father's grandfather,  
with the hooked Jewish nose that reappeared  
in my bad uncle, died so long ago  
I cannot now assess my debt to him  
My father's work I know and have declared  
yet somehow poor in passion I am heir  
to honesty and health and little more.

I would make gestures keys to rhetoric  
bow to applause and flash affection back  
like a steel mirror but I am constrained  
by a chill mind that's frosted by a breath  
blown from a barren place far back in time  
at last must end unable to ignite  
the hearts about me with a warming fire  
that might have loosed my limbs and freed my thoughts  
that had the cell frustrated, into joy,  
sun's joy, that to my careful happiness  
is moon's bright ardor to the steady moon.

15. XI. 40

13

Now at this moment when the world breaks up  
with only islands left and shuttered rafts  
to trace and pace familiar motions on  
and daily these grow narrow plank by plank  
none but the smallest gestures possible  
mere twitchings and collisions on a slide.  
The sick dove moulted and has no heart to count  
her wing beats twist the ark and Ararat.

Should the flood tunnel from the brown droun earth  
who dare foretell how long til life take root?  
a dew spring loiter by the sagging tide  
eager to arch her leaves across the streams?



16.XI.

Sonnet 31

Learn life from truck with matchbox or from game  
That needs thrust finger's mine to demonstrate:  
Heer whores in alley bargain; playing late  
find startled girl in corner straddling stream;  
mouth words to win the taller lads' esteem;  
write them and run a spittle down the slate:  
till stick with symbol you may pass the gate  
where couples tumble in concerted dream,

before sleep mocks you with the endless fall  
the throbbing taxi and your mother dead  
and you wake crying in the dawn grey light  
to greet vague friendly pictures on the wall  
adding the room up with uncertain sight  
leaving the new watch tick beside your head.

Sonnet 31 + 2.

20.XI.48 15

Sonnet from Bandellane

When on an eve autumnal with drowsed eyes  
I breathe the fragrance of your friendly breast  
before my gaze unfolding to the west  
spread happy shores where sunlight never dies  
a lazy isle where nature's boon supplies  
fantastic trees with luscious fruitage drest  
and men whose vigor their little limbs attest  
and frank eyed women whose proud looks surprise.

led by this perfume to delightful climes  
I reach a harbor crammed with spar and sail  
at leisure from the broad sea's trafficking  
where scented taraminds and odorous limes  
coil thro' the air in gusts that never fail,  
nostalgic as the song the sailors sing.



24.XI

### Ulster in Wartime.

Poised upon a dipping branch tip  
where the fungus has not rotted  
and the green scum of disaster has not spread  
you have felt the great tree rocking  
but its creaking woke no terror  
for the planets keep their courses overhead.

24.XI

17

### Comment on Verse.

These are the surface shapes upon my mind  
straws floating mid reflections of the sky  
darting or cruising indolently blind  
that leave no lasting angles in the eye.

The stones beneath, dark basalt, flint or lime,  
scoured by the passing waters smooth and round  
that wear the patient signature of time  
in their slow sculptured strength my peace is found



29. XI. 40

Tonight november ending by the fire  
I suddenly remember another time  
a gap of twenty years, an interval  
too full of gestures and words and moving shapes  
to swim at ease in leisurely with grace  
better to leap outright to the sunny bank.  
I find no adequate reason to remember  
the sunburnt cliff tops tilting to the sea  
thick bared with limestone ledges where the fields  
are stacked in early summer and the beans  
cluttered with wagging pods and the sky blue  
a month of drought with barrels slopping over  
as the cart jolted from the three mile well  
and the men moved to jet the bluestone spray  
over the green potatoes. Every day  
just after one o'clock I ran from the house  
to lean on a gate and watch the steamer pass  
with yellow funnel leaning back to the smoke  
that tumbled dragged and hung in the scorching air

19  
always was early to perceive its bow  
cutting great scarves of white round spray filled cliff  
watching the tense length shoot full into view  
as it hard the rocky edge and disappeared  
vague breath of smoke among the other trails  
on the sea's limit passing north and south.  
Why should I remember that ship nor give a care  
for the cargoes she carries now if still afloat  
sold to the hordes, or battered into scrap  
to some gaunt hungry town of white faced men.  
Why should I remember this for twenty years?  
No symbols offered. She does not represent  
a quiet regular world of holidays  
I have other motifs for that 'treeshape or hills'  
voices in lanes and seeds upon the grass  
I do not need that hull with the folding smoke  
to remind me I grow old in a crazy world.



It was no Eden. It was far from perfect:  
 Here with things to fret the sense and vex the mind  
 but there was comfort in its ease and grace  
 and we are now shut out. A flaming sword  
 not only burns as warding sentinel  
 but threatens our very heads with scorching swipe  
 forbidding our return and even making  
 our forward progress grim and tentative.

Yet there were Eden days had we but known  
 prone on the sand dunes gazing at the sky  
 letting chill water from the mountain streams  
 refresh our ankles and our beaded wrists  
 talking at leisure planning circumstance  
 that would unleash the happy qualities  
 we have no room for on our smouldering sod  
 more precious now because improbable.

Could we have known at birth by prophecy  
 the script our lives must follow - and the shape  
 our actions throw a foolish shadow on  
 would we have turned from life in mute despair?

These frantic decades lean with violence  
 great hurtling mad convulsions in their tides  
 uprooting stable things and smothering  
 all gentle feeling in their general woe  
 murdering the thronging peoples in the streets  
 mocking the lonely crofter's board with want  
 choking the coolie in his paddy field  
 making the long term scholarship absurd  
 and art an aimless scribble in the dirt.



When darkness narrowed on our anxious days  
 and none dare hope beyond the midnight stroke  
 we came together from our threatened ways  
 two score of odd and ordinary folk  
 eager to seize what comfort lay in art  
 for the vexations of the troubled heart-

We watched the subtle elements unfold  
 the elegance of balance and design  
 the warm romantic arabesque the cold  
 precision of the thoughtful classic line  
 the skill unerring and the steady eye  
 that snatches beauty from mortality

The gentle monks of Florence innocent  
 the frantic dutchmen setting all on fire  
 the banker's son, aloof and diligent  
 who sought the cone the cube the cylinder

Claude Monet making even shadow bright  
 and Rembrandt peering thro' the jaundice light

the courtly painter to the Spanish King  
 who drew his master and his master's fool  
 { the peoples painter combat arguing  
 } Mary Hals the lively open swapper  
 and cynic Degas at the dancing school  
 these these and many more whose patient gaze  
 made permanent the paper of their days

Now having argued and debated long  
 we've from a noisy company of friends  
 no what agreed on what is right or wrong  
 but somehow sorry that the session ends  
 where with opinions privilege we were free  
 with the last gestures of democracy

So when the future opens above feet  
 let us go bravely on our careful ways  
 secure above the terror of defeat



and the loud tumult of triumphant days  
wise & emotion qualified by art  
to the high purpose of the human heart.

8-XII-40

My exile insulation is complete:  
two layers of life between me and the street;  
life alien to mine - and all concerned  
with certain habits I have never learned  
The street itself so far from typical  
oasis bounded by an ivied wall  
with tree on pavement - and a wedge of grass  
too narrow for the tides of life to pass  
with sandstone pillars and mute folded gates  
and ponderous information on brass plates.  
Here from my window I can still survey  
the glimmering changes of a winter day  
dawn on the rooftops, feeble sun at noon  
a wind scoured sunset and a crescent moon  
a gust of starlings a stray single gull  
heading for sea unhurried beautiful  
and when the discipline of early night  
withdraws the smoky chimneys from the sight  
the world outside persists in looting train  
and sudden footsteps running thro' the rain.



13. XII. 40

I cannot make a song tonight  
The words are numb my wits are dull  
I write and cancel what I write  
and yet my days are no less full  
of thought affection and delight  
than when of old my singing heart  
achieved the ecstasy of art

and if I make another song  
with rhythm to staunch the flow of time  
reverberant as a beaten gong  
and rich as unforgetten wine  
to whom then should the grace belong  
save unto her whose gestures give  
mull evidence whereby men live?

13. XII. 40

29

I use no myths: have wrought none of my own  
no longer schoolboy glib with the old gods  
nor coughing schoolmaster adeptly faul  
Blake's monsters do not flounder thro' my dreams  
with michelangelo muscles and huge arms  
the pasteboard persons Gray apostrophised  
are but curled cards of rhetoric. I live  
with daily journals for my nourishment  
and certain volumes careful and precise  
to label the great shapes that lift me up  
with legible titles that I shall not miss  
the screaming motives underneath the masks.  
yet these drab labels blanket the quick pulse  
the bitten lips, the deftly fluttered ash,  
the nibbled nail that signifies our state  
til ~~time~~ life's a pyramid of packing cases  
tipped on to barrow, Trundled out of sight  
or judd anew against another wall



new destinations pasted on their flanks.

I want life's tang and flavor, so that I  
may find live words to match their qualities  
not the flat stencils that cannot inform  
a stricken heart that other hearts are sound.

## Goodnight Children

At unaccustomed hour I listened in  
release from labor by the jangling light  
but heard no crooning lilt or jiggling din  
that weaves the background for my studious night  
instead came quiet voice across the air  
with gentle "Goodnight children everywhere"

And as I sat there in the flickering gloom  
too early with my books to settle down  
it was not I sat in a certain room  
in winter twilight in a certain town  
but from dead epoch ghostly leaves dropper  
who heard this "Goodnight children everywhere"

Death threatens the world of memory and joy:  
if life survives it will not be the same.  
The baysart youth, the shy precocious boy,  
are put away as some outmoded game.



Henceforth for those who live an age of care  
years spent for justice, trying to be fair

And somehow there was pity in that voice  
by chance heard in an eve of rain bleak and cold.  
There was a time we seemed to have a choice  
to let the self mature in growing old:  
that self surrenders now in slow despair;  
the heart's indulgence proved an idiot's snare.

Over a crumbling world the night comes down  
and in that dark zone knows what may befall;  
before we sleep before we wake this town  
may find its peace in common burial.  
So tell men shape a world for you to share  
we bid you "goodnight children everywhere".

Inside the porch there hung a bunch of wick  
with just of salt upon it, and the man  
who lived within came out and looked at it  
each morning for what weather was to be.  
Then he went in and blew the ashen turf  
and swung the kettle over the new glow  
and called to the sick woman in the bed.

He was a bearded man with puckered face  
above his sailor's jersey; but his age  
was far beyond a small boy's aimless guess  
and scarce worth question with so many things  
he had to tell a boy of ships and ports.

He'd sit outside, a dish between his feet  
and drop the cleaned potatoes into it,  
peeling the turnips on another dish.  
Talking of Singapore and Trinidad



and men he'd sail with. Then he'd cross the road  
and fling the parings over the seawall  
among the tins and splintered lobsterpots  
for gulls to scatter. Then he would go in  
to make his dinner, and I'd walk away  
kicking a ball among the drying nets.

I saw the woman once. My mother'd sent me  
to fill a bucket at the gushing pipe  
and I was coming back not spilling it  
I looked in at the seaweed in the porch  
when suddenly the half door snapped its latch  
a little figure in a faded shawl  
bowed on a stick, with little skinny legs  
came shuffling out. I saw her crazy face  
yellow and dirty with large fleshy eyes  
like all the witches in my picture books.

I stopped in fright. She opened her crested mouth  
and mumbled something that I couldn't hear

and didn't want to.

When I found my strength  
I dropped the bucket and ran straight for home.

Next day the sailor would not speak to me.



Handle bindings turn the pages  
 scribble comment on the margin  
 sighing deeply as you move them row by row  
 Peel and Fletcher Crabbe and Cowper  
 Blake and Scott. They are dead row  
 You & row older. None will care for what you know.

You have left no well rubbed volume  
 proving thesis for a scholar.  
 all the words you found for fancy or for thought  
 fitted deftly when mood granted  
 bolted together when it faltered  
 yellow paper now with fading lines enwrought

or are scattered thro the columns  
 of dead journals, weekly papers  
 twisted into wads for firing, never bound.  
 You may even find a bundle

on a bookstall tied together  
 print in coppers with the edges curled and browned.

Yet perhaps the consolations  
 of the falling leaves of autumn  
 may bring peace to dreary moments of despair  
 who shall guess the breadth and bounty  
 of the tall trees coming after?  
 Tho but humus for their nurture you'll be there.



I have been spendthrift of my easy thought  
 and lavish with my ready eloquence  
 expounding what the subtle masters taught  
 of sculptural form and color's excellence  
 to those who epein for a lazy rule  
 for joy's assessment came to hear me speak  
 hoping the name the place the date the school  
 provide the signs their baffled senses seek  
 They looked to me, and in some measure fed  
 go on their ways: and I am left at last  
 with all the wealth of autumn's gold and red  
 and frost's first night morning overpast  
 and lost to time until the troubled year  
 hits in its labor writ and again  
 repeat the seasons show I still be here  
 and in find in beauty purging for my learn  
 and virtue in my old philosophy.  
 Will then the autumns that I have not lost  
 shall keep the tally safe and armor me  
 with leaf's surrender to the early frost.

The man in the bus leaned over  
 and said Sidi Banani  
 and set back nervily blinking  
 in the blue light.

My wife said Is it true?  
 The man replied Listen for it at twelve o'clock  
 Then he continued "Mussolini  
 gets rid of his failures quickly enough"

I who had not spoken so far interposed  
 on the other hand we promote them to the rank of  
 field marshal  
 These men laugh unnecessarily  
 doubting my allegiance  
 but my wife reassured him  
 "and we can still joke about it."



## Sonnet

Absolved by chance from danger for a term  
 while towns I love go down in crashing smoke  
 and death descends on forty million folk  
 who scared and tortured stand against the storm  
 I follow the same round my being tried  
 thro paths of dream and knowledge since I broke  
 from fettered feet and rid me of the yoke  
 my fatters fashioned postulating God.

Yet interposed between my urgent speech  
 for art and meaning and the thronging themes  
 that offer ample fruit I strive to reach  
 chill hands of fear sketch out a clutch my heart  
 and I wait impatient a prey for dreams  
 whose terror is not exorcised by art.

## Sonnet.

If terror come and what is worst befall  
 how shall I stand in that Apocalypse  
 a merry jest upon my trembling lips  
 or whimpering in the shadow of a wall  
 or running down the roaring streets to call  
 for present mercy from the lashing whips  
 of my sick fear? The mind for comfort slips  
 into stale tropes of rhetoric, and all

The stainless armor we have stepped well  
 against the pain prophetic disappears  
 when the far hour looms probable  
 crowds round the heart, tho we in former years  
 foretold this hour with tireless tedious voice  
 when time still gave or seemed to give a choice.



18-XII

The men who brought these days about  
still gibber in the halls of state  
and shamelers in their treason flout  
a patient people dumbly great

yet surely as the spring returns  
with trusting bud and blossom weak  
until with whin the mountain burns  
the patient people yet shall speak

43

18-XII

## Stanzas

1  
In easy days I joined my voice with them  
who prophesied a new Jerusalem  
nor dreamed the outcome of the years should be  
a far more terrible Gethsemane.

2.

If I should live to see the earth  
when hate has done its worst and gone  
have I the skill to tend the birth  
of justice in that chilly dawn

3.

We fretted of the flux of time  
and how life postulated change  
yet yearn for its recurrent rime  
and shudder at the new and strange



Stanzas

4

We dream of peace a curse on luck  
that nest us in a span of wars  
yet who dare use our little clock  
as measure for the marching stars

5

We in our time have gone into the dark  
and school our wisdom to conform with night  
yet sudden in the lonely silence hark  
far in the east birds greet the breaking light

6

We grumble at our fancies denied  
by the compulsions of a great event  
until we see the orphan at our side  
gaze up at us in childish wonderment

Stanzas

7

We get no sugar for our tea  
and blame a fool in Germany  
yet never think of other fools  
who cleared him when he broke the rules.

## Sonnet

I wrote a letter to an alien  
 who was my friend in better days than these  
 and now is exile over the grey seas  
 with others I have known as trusting men;  
 and to my friend the poet, whose wise pen  
 has ratified my lyric loyalties;  
 and to a third whose heart found tones of ease  
 in words I made for one not seen again.

I sent the letters out into the night  
 black night of Britain battling for her life  
 irrelevant and personal as they were  
 like words in bottles bobbing out of sight  
 caught in the winds and leaping water's strife  
 not knowing to what star lucky shore they'd fare.

Have you no pity for the dirt and death  
 packet as a powder, loosened in a blast  
 that splits an alley with its bitter breath  
 and leaves no gate to rattle for a ghost?

You who had pity once and sniffed your grief  
 for men you never knew in far Cathay  
 or seasawd twist - despair and hushed relief  
 when loyal chain shrank stubborn day by day

Have you no pity now for those who lie  
 chill night by night in shelter's sweetly stench  
 that you must mouth of high diplomacy  
 and what may happen to the hapless French



Now that our life grows harsher and the sky  
threatens

it is good to remember the rich days

That afternoon I went with my father to Lords  
to see the players play the Gentlemen  
Sutcliffe the wicket with the sleek black hair  
and Holmes with peeks and jaws against the sun  
and Woolley at the Oval scoring forty  
in his last season

the thoughtless music of the dancers' feet  
threading thro' Swan Lake and the little Nersine  
leaping grotesquely in the midnight sun

the smooth tall hats the belly adders brass  
the little horse's head cut out of jade  
the long scroll painting of the hundred geese

the long hours in the shade of Dagswell park  
discussing revolution

and the hours  
spent drifting past the meadows and great trees  
at Hatford where the touch of Constable  
still sparkles on each leaf:

or at the Dome  
knocking our drinks back at the empty bar

That night the poet came and read his play  
in clear voice northern resonant and full,  
the white streaks down his beard.

These glittered from the matrix of our days  
that even lacking them had certain values  
moments of exaltation and delight  
instants of wit and laughter, quiet hours  
finding an order in appearances  
and working out that order in the mind

But it is over now: one motive unless  
loching to bring til the fingers tire.



Walking in April on the level meadow  
 between the hedges gay with crab and thorn  
 the sun still bright upon the orchard bloom  
 over the river, calling back the dog  
 from scattering the ewes with lambs at foot  
 the first rocks leading home to the black trees  
 then supper in the low roof living room  
 with shadows smearing over the book and walls  
 and mist upon the lawn, the darkening trees  
 crowd closer round the house; long threads of cloud  
 like foam upon a wave-top beaten back  
 be these remembered for a little while  
 like faded snapshot shown in confidence  
 to someone chosen from the rowdy room  
 because of a name dropped or a gentleness  
 playing a moment in a stranger's eyes  
 but hurriedly withdrawn when the harsh voice  
 of the course sergeant duty intervenes

When I was small old John my grandfather  
 told sometimes of the days when he was young  
 the places played <sup>in</sup> and the faces seen  
 the great Revival, the P. Statue blight  
 and the hard weather that froze up Long Neagh  
 Once I remember he described to me  
 the solemn Friends with their plain Year and Day  
 and sober scinting, how they'd lived for years  
 in little hamlets keeping to their way  
 altho' around them field and people changed  
 roofs tumbled in and fences broken down  
 the children emigrant beyond the sea  
 but these remained traditional unchanged  
 like little kingdoms lost among the hills  
 or twigs in foam fringed eddy of a stream  
 I could not think then with my lively mind  
 involved in the lighter colors than their cloth  
 that I myself one day might seem like them  
 in the drift jostle of modernity  
 with my slow verses treading out the year  
 not jiggling with the hourly bulletins.



Verses in 1941



5.1.41

As women change their fancies  
for furs and hats in fun  
the students read the poets  
that fashion hits upon  
Now Maxwell's poet hedges  
have replaced the craps of Donne.

and in ten years' time the talkers  
will discover Tennyson

14.1.41 55

Wholl spare a thought for Chamberlain  
whose every hope was proved untrue  
whose boomerangs swung back again  
and struck the fist from whence they flew  
and in their fatal circuit slew  
six little nations - None for long  
has even been so often wrong.

February

12 - 2 - 41

So many songs unsung because the days  
thrust crowding questions that annex my thought  
It's still emerge the fragments of a phrase  
that lags, a splinter of the mood uncaught.

Already frost's attendant miracles  
snow's muffled wonder and the turning leaf  
passing my eyes have prompted the old spells  
that held the heart above breath's plodding grief.

God's world, the world that throngs each tripling sense  
must be laid by awhile - and leave us freed  
till a new age of moaning violence  
erodes the skill its complications need

14/15 - 2 - 41

57

Caught in bad days like frantic fly in glue  
where each rash gesture makes the faster grip  
I win no solace from the faith proved true  
the mind once offered homestead, for I find  
corollaries beset no fellowship.

They still need voice and handclasp who are blind

Even those hours that broke the brittle glass  
and let air thro and fevered hands caress  
the tapping leaves inevitably pass  
in the blind lens to shadows vague and pale:  
the moment's heart uplifting happiness  
turns rubbed in texture no repeated tale

One such was when we went between the wars  
before the med desert had gathered speed  
and we grew numb beneath the marching stars  
to island cliff against Atlantic foam



seeking a peace time had denied our need,  
peace as the heart's inviolable home.

There with the sun and wind it seemed attained  
no insulating layer twist source and sense  
on cold vexations crumbling there remained  
the tall unfallen natures moving free  
breasting against the times indifference  
as gull on wing or gull upon the sea

The grunting puffins shuffling on the ledge  
beside the shag upon her ragged nest  
the whistling tern that charted the winds' edge  
with kittawake that squawked its raucous name  
these somehow offered nurture for our quest  
their qualities of purpose were the same.

Yet there are menact by the cruising gull  
the black backt rascal with hoarse warning tongue  
whose noise and wing spread still is beautiful

altho he take the eiders chick for prey  
or cannibal, devour his sisters young:  
he shadows life across the brightest day

15-2-41

And Yeats is dead and after him James Joyce  
the Irish both who link them in a thought  
for shedding his first cloth of gold one caught  
the vigorous patterns of the natural voice  
and made himself the inipe of his choice  
a randy snob to fullest abtrance brought.

The other by chaotic days distraught  
tore speech to scraps of meaning and from these  
created little cantons baronies  
where truth is valid twist a valley's walls  
and gortred dwarfs describe the waterfalls  
in terms that elsewhere are obscenities.

7-3-41

## Threat of Spring

I scan the trees with eager eyes  
the beech the lime the sycamore  
the tall elms on the bare and trodden grass  
and the small shabby thorn

but no twigs tipped with light.

The bluntest bud still keeps its black lips shut  
the black sticks rattle in the wind  
colder for the blue sky's need of green

As if this spring might waken me  
to the old humor and response  
like insects' iteration on the tides!

The green leaf on the sycamore  
will mean only  
the floods of terror cracking thro' the ice  
far back among the foothills

pulling their spates to swamp us

and yet there is no terror in my gaze  
that scans the soddy twigs.



## The Threatened Place

Safe in the city hunched behind a book  
 left shoulder light not shadowing the page  
 with friendly sounds thro' walls or from the street  
 I suddenly recall the tall grey house  
 high on the north shore of the grass rimmed bay  
 and the drained hours of terror there alone  
 the crowding pines that scratched across the slates  
 or poked the windows feeling for the latch  
 the swift bats knocking down the swishing leaves  
 the hugging darkness when the lamp went out  
 the dripping taps the cooling bars and pipes  
 that shrank and knacked and shuddered thro' the house  
 and sweating in the cold bed's twilight cave  
 hearing the hollow stairs remember me  
 feet on the road outside come near and pause  
 steps on the gravel when the moon has set  
 the chatter of the tunnel over stones  
 like someone mocking at my impotence

and running the wrong way to ring me help  
 the wet leaves slapping in the moaning trees  
 as sheep cough on the hill behind the shed  
 til the whole night's a thumping heart of fear

Safe in the city I remember this  
 each accent of my terror, shade of dread  
 thrusting its image in my quaking mind  
 til I grope round the <sup>room</sup> ~~room~~ with fumbling eye  
 for frame or post or book to balance by  
 and I regain the instance and the hour  
 safe in the city hunched behind a book  
 stirred only when a passing car's cold gears  
 cry like the siren I am waiting for.



## Epitaph for a Lost Generation

Recording only pulse and shape evoked  
 exploiting reading and report of friends  
 altho the cool mind lifted formal hat  
 to blueprint futures we enjoyed our youth.

I think perhaps too often of our fate  
 astride the buffers pinning gaze upon  
 the lines that meet in space but swing apart  
 as down the long slope we accelerate  
 towards the disaster always farther on  
 that has already happened in my heart.

Could I but watch the ledges as we pass  
 quick now with land and life or turn to gaze  
 on roof and keel, or cars that move away  
 from tangent smoke, or frost upon the grass  
 or dammed at level crossing of the ways  
 the painted carts with wind bleached loads of hay

could I but see these with untrembled eyes  
 that fear no longer smears into a blur  
 of general desolation numbing pain  
 would my dull thought grow for an instant wise  
 see life as some remote philosopher  
 who loves the tangent knowing it is vain?



14/3

If time should mock me with a crippled life  
not maimed in limb not even that alone  
but wrecked in spirit by access of strife  
from the brief peace precariously known

how should I now or seem to now beneath  
familiar skies alternate night and day  
with all the shapes that drew admiring breath  
bleasted to rubble trodden flat in clay?

Shall I find right and logic in my fate  
shapt now to fit a sick distorted frame  
and call my limping being fortunate  
since narrow life must offer all the same?

14/3 67

Issued painlessly and imperceptibly into a new incredible world  
of shortened rations and depleted papers  
of strange men walking with heavy boots  
or slipping Polish arms round noisy girls  
of a new jargon of wardens and a foist jauntness  
wearing a tin hat with a certain boyish pride  
finding my hours invaded by new activities  
I suddenly remember  
now that the volume of birdsong has increased  
that in the old world it would be spring again.

1913

Sonnet 1.41

I think of Glasgow where reluctantly  
I had to pause and loiter for a train  
to carry me from its black smoke and rain  
to Portobello and the wind-whipped sea.  
Later returning, one companioned me  
who knew the place in childhood, and again  
was glad to greet it. Now these days remain  
ambered in love for its stark poetry.

Wet street and gantry, chimney, gaslit close;  
The piper in the alley pacing slow.  
My native town a friendly kinship shows  
in least and feature. When I heard last night  
that death had set its sober ways afoot  
I saw instead the flames in Sandy Row.

20.13/41 <sup>69</sup>

Pitch black when I lay down to sleep  
on a low stack of last year's hay  
before the dawn I sat upright  
and saw the new moon in the sky

I felt my pockets for a coin  
to turn my luck in coming days  
but soon gave up remembering  
I saw the last new moon thro' glass.



20/3

No longer now the sailor and the tramp  
free in their footing seeing new suns rise  
over new places continents away  
with easy gift for telling fluent lies  
- the tall gowillas calling in the swamp  
the luck of Manchester or Mandalay

Some eager offer in their shuffling stead  
the blue-eyed airman and the engineer  
masters of gadgets counting drag and strain  
making their skill in deeper a career.  
Success is measured by the graph of dead  
the nimble knuckle and the blueprint brain.

Yet who shall celebrate these quiet folk  
cautious and truthful with no skill for steel,  
who open doors to slow and aimless feet  
and loose the knotted shyness and unroll  
the cold fixation in a happy joke  
that otherwise may end in bombed street?

20/3. 71

S2

With manifestos and with argument  
we bawled solutions thro a megaphone  
but Ieruchs not easily overthrown  
was thronged with ignorant multitudes who went  
about their niggard cares of games and rent.  
Then suddenly as our bald script had shown  
the high bells crumbled stone by trucking stone  
and darkness sneared across a continent.

Some that were noisy then are silent now  
hoarding the resolutions in the heart  
ready to rise when the agenda bids  
while others traitor to that early vow  
curse all humanity and walk apart  
recalling Memnon and the Pyramids



I use flat words to phrase my fly blown thought  
 well worn and rhetoric-roomy bespress  
 the tangled subtleties of <sup>the</sup> my distress  
 to which my shrinking wit at least are brought.  
 My lazy hand has now so often wrought  
 the well scanned stanza's routine business  
 that I repeat the pattern more or less  
 yet know the rising birdsong still uncaught

So I must learn first to destroy the art  
 the seeming art begot by apish wit  
 and then begin as one who can but spell  
 new shining words of single syllable  
 where with an innocent and merry heart  
 naps tiny corners of the infinite

" This will revolt all men, in time. We'll wake  
 a shamed, and fling aside the cruel dream  
 and never turn again to the bad old ways . . . .

Having seen violence in the public street  
 the crowd backs from the gunman down the steps  
 cleaning at corners late a mile away  
 hear sharp explosions, in the morning paper  
 a house front shattered and a woman killed  
 Bolide with men with rifle up his coat  
 seeing the young man rammed against the wall  
 till the strong limbs turned sawdust with a moan

- For Gestapo I read the Black and Tans  
 ambush or cheer'd according to the place  
 the green fields slash'd in two and bitterness  
 dribbling down to the corners of every mouth  
 Not one revolted, all accepting it



as part of nature always them not us  
I thought of Europe after these bad years  
full of the gerrymender's cretin stunts  
and good men's harsh reprisal, and good women  
shutting their lips on kindness and their hearts  
to shysters who may wear another sign

I remember this and turn to sorting flints.

Tonight I go to speak of art  
to a club of working girls and boys  
The curate having heard of me from a colleague  
thinks that they will enjoy it.

I shall find the street with a little trouble  
yet still be early  
shake hands with the curate and club secretary  
who may well be an overhot girl with red knuckles  
be introduced effusively and begin  
chanting my commentary  
as on the sopping tablecloth  
Velasquez, Delacroix and Botticelli, jerk  
and white faces under the lantern's beam  
open dark slots to whisper at naked breasts

There will be votes of thanks  
and hot weak tea with sugar not certainly afterwards



and then they will discuss next Saturday's ramble  
and I shall have become suddenly superfluous  
beside the door by the curate  
with my box of slides  
into the dark to find  
an unfamiliar man to take me to the city centre

I can only hope that someone there who paints  
pale watercolor copies of calendars  
will open her eyes just once and try her luck  
and that at least one lad will never again  
tear out the photographs of nudes from library books

There must be men who like me not  
yet are not quite my enemies  
because rash words I have forgot  
still give them instants of unease

In these strange days precarious  
when death may drop from any step  
mechanical anonymous,  
I lose no time on enmity

For enmity is personal  
as each man's scope is limited.  
There is no time to reckon all  
the blessings found upon my head.



21/3

Take from the mind its little bitterness  
and the vexations which inhabit it.  
Release the deep capacity to bless  
the sense of being somehow infinite

The dangers round our days are like the rain  
that falls on good and wicked equally.  
Only the fool, the privately insane  
wears the assurance of his victory.

79  
22/3

Time; Bomb

I sometimes find my own optimism remarkable

When the great clock was being wound up  
that ticks out judgement for cities every night  
when the old crookes were winding it  
one for china one for Spain  
The king of Judah shall never wear his crown again  
one for rubber one for oil  
we may give the nazis a tenth of our spoil  
another for China and another for Spain  
and a long strong turn for the black Ukraine  
I said: this has gone too far  
we must have a popular front  
and then the clock will burst in the old men's faces  
and we shall return to telling the time by the sun  
and free men will walk without glancing behind

Then the clock struck



and the reverberations hung black bellied  
over the misty fjords - and the rough Greek islands  
over the flat French fields without ledges  
and little reverberations, hardly more than echoes,  
tinkled the glasses in South American bars  
sprinkled a pinch of plaster into the drinks  
in Scotland Road and Stretford St Mary

and Leopold was Hamlet

and Judas was Quisling

and Lebrun shot his pants

and Pétain beat on his medals

and Chamberlain reluctantly resigned

and all the little jews on the continent wept

and the flat roads were crowded

and they machinegunned the refugees

And I said: There will emerge

a new Europe after this

There will, there must

Justice and Mercy, Justice and Mercy

but other men who have also considered the matter  
would substitute for the word mercy the word love

After the bombing of Glasgow

I still think mercy will be quite enough.



24/3/41

Sap in the sticks again  
and birdsong growing clear  
but the fine drifting rain  
retards the stupor of ear

as the reluctant spring  
fears what might yet befall  
before the swallows' wing  
shades the sunset wall.

24/3

83

The warm romantic mind  
has grown dissatisfied  
with comfortable dream,  
benevolent and blind,  
that drifts along beside  
the heedless headlong stream



26/3

54

## Sonnet

When now with quickening bud and sod the year  
 lengthens the days for hurtling violence  
 and mobilised by subtle diligence  
 great armies gather perilously near  
 the seasonable sky once high and clear  
 with cloudy rumor lumbering immense  
 mocks the free mind that lapsed its indolence  
 with bettered faith and complicated fear.

Faced with hope's certain end in our defeat,  
 and sober doubt if those we favor win;  
 men still in bondage class still leeching class  
 where is the causeway whence we may retreat  
 the crag toothed cranny we may shelter in  
 until with time these dread occasions pass?

6/4/85

A blackbird singing in the April dusk,  
 while still the low hills held some smoky gold  
 with faint light falling from the moon's half disk,  
 seemed crying for the spring yet unfulfilled.

I listened close attentive to the still  
 that brought all birdsong back from days I love  
 yet could not share the hope within the call  
 since this same spring may be the last I'll have.



6-8/4/41

When I remember how that good man died  
my father's father drowsy with the years  
his son and son's son standing by his side  
the ripe occasion cancelling their tears

I think of him as richly fortunate  
beyond the chances time can offer now,  
when hating or indifferent to fate  
each hugs the grudging days the fates allow

and dare not pledge his strength to guide or guard  
the adventurous gestures of shy innocence  
lest uncoloured years remain as they stand,  
indentured but to fear and violence.

8/4/41  
87

Along a causeway paved with lengths of hose,  
puddled with mirrors dismal as the sky,  
and walled by empty windows banded with black,  
I trod on glass, until the ember'd fire  
gave making comfort to my blood drained face,  
and as I stood to watch the weary men  
direct the leaking jets there suddenly  
woke somewhere in the world the song of birds,  
the dawn crescendos of an April day;  
and for a blessed instant I was free  
from the stenn'd tear and the frustrated heart.



13. V. 41

I am not brave. My heart is sick with dread  
when the dark bombers circle overhead.  
I crouch beneath the stairs afraid, alone:  
my terror matching the approaching drone  
till the whole earth seems rocking with the noise  
and tho' I cry no one can hear my voice

Yet as the long hours ebb insanely slow  
there is one comfort I have learned to know -  
to hear the wanderer's reassuring feet  
clatter the quarters down the empty street.

19. VI. 41 85

## Hexameters

Sitting in summer evening reading by wide open window  
Saintsbury's scholarly essay on nineteenth century poets  
silently praising his fairness approving his sturdy detachment -  
conscious alone of the craft and the artist's narrowing glory  
When in a crazy epoch the world collapses in murder  
mashing men and their actions in general trouble and terror

Here where I sit the swallows are flying and skimming thinly  
maddened and disconcerted by drone of aeroplanes stunting  
High in the scarves of cloud, catching the last of the sunset  
On rigid wings tilted fearful over the gaping people  
Dumb in the streets below them motionless at the marvel  
Caught in time's vortex of horror, only able to watch it  
Bound to the city structures, tethered to stakes of disaster  
Clear as the slate of a schoolboy my mind is writ of its wonder  
Bare and grey as a slate with no words scumbled upon it  
Not words of simple meaning let alone poet's glory.



22.6.41

To the neglected memory of John Fisher Murray

I was thinking of Ireland  
and those who were famed in her story  
victors in Emain Macha,  
defeated undaunted in exile  
dead in their youth unfulfilled,  
old among alien faces  
named in a penny ballad  
or quoted in annual oration

Then I remembered these others  
not famous for death or disaster  
legends no longer of glory  
made light by the contrast of shadow  
unremarkable men  
who stood for an instant transfigured,  
then into history vanished  
leaving only a footnote.

22.6.41<sup>91</sup>

Irish Rann

Rann of the ancient Irish  
of lovely music at daybreak  
Heroes scouring their armour  
and vigorous trumpets blowing  
shreds of grey foggy wind with  
the whistling arrows tattered.  
What of the brown battalions  
tented now on our meadows?



22.6.41

Lynni : In its Place

Robin leave the bright-laburnum  
you are drab and shabby there  
haunt the ledge of withered blossom  
till the trees are winter bare.

Rook fly even in the treetops  
riding high against the storm  
here you sober labor wing spread  
takes a bold heraldic form.

22.6.41

From the Irish : paraphrase

Be hospitable while you may,  
keep open door for any man  
lest when you come to God's own house  
you cry and beat the door in vain.

Triad from the Irish : paraphrase 23.6.41

Three things that men might scorn  
weak fragile things indeed  
that bear the great world's bulk:  
the thin green blade of corn,  
the thin grey husk's thread,  
the thin white jet of milk.



24.6.41

Tried from the Irish: peraphrase.

Three churlish acts which merit hate:  
an old man mocked; a cripple's gate  
by hale men held to ridicule;  
a wise man gibing at a fool.

Poems in September

1315 95

1  
Already autumn silently  
has come to stay and field and tree  
the leaves fall from the lime  
the oaks at golden brime

Soon my October will be here  
to mark the cresting of my year  
and set me loose to find  
hope in an older mind

The reaper to the gleaming rocks  
has left the fields. The tilted stooks  
shadow the moon bright ground  
where bivouac is found

for you and your jagged company  
who narrow blurs of shadow lie  
until dawn's chilly star  
renews your blueprint-wan

II

Since June was hit on head and hand  
and Thunder roared the lush green land  
I've had no skill or time  
to flush my wits with wine

Summer must not forego her praise  
because she brought our eager days  
with certain gifts of eye  
not less interestingly

But for that crop and harvest of  
symbols and shapes that woke my love  
to ripen I must wait  
nor be unfortunate

Better because they were so new  
the pulse dare hardly swear them true  
I must allow the mind  
to keep them undefined

and greet this season I have known  
both text and texture of my bone  
with old accustomed phrase  
that served in safer days

III

Now at this hour when wheat fields mock  
the sullen regimented men  
and lurching guns and bonies rocks  
monstrous melody and alien

it may be time to take our stand  
on hills' advantage to assess  
what streams or dreams could make the land  
more than greed's ledge nest wilderness

We have on James, you and I,  
of justice friendship tolerance  
that men may learn to live thereby



nor share the best nostalgic glance  
of the wire rhythm of earth survives  
Good masters measured out to all  
until each instant of our lives  
moves in a conscious ritual

IV

You mid the con not yet asleep  
a certain trust with me may keep  
and rest with me alone  
but many another one  
who waking when the moon is high  
sees in the bare untrobbled sky  
no meaning sign of wars  
only just burnisht stars  
and knows that age by bitter age  
men here and there has sought his rage

and remind his leaping fears  
to the slow stiding years.

With star for gauge, with seasons' debt  
as flew to map the patterned web  
time holds a hooded chance  
Keep we but tolerance.

13/9/41

X ✓  
A weed of smoke broke from the train  
like James unbottled in the train  
That coil and twist and ravel out  
The knitted logic of a thought  
It lit and hid among the trees  
Then tossed a circus honey's kiss  
and passed into the lower sky  
to end a rain for sun to dry

Another bundle of the stuff  
tumbled as rolls, rumped hammed and rumpk,  
thru gap in hedge, then slowly spilled  
over a dark potato field.  
Unshadowed, these gray bales of light were bright  
against the earth's last gasps of light.  
Their sudden shapes no tenure held  
even in a swiftly crumbling world:  
void as unlettered diagram,  
the wind ran get no good of them.

13/9/41

101

Here in this Berkshire cornfield set by fate  
you must have glimpsed in momentary dream  
beyond the lamels and the little gate  
you field of corn that stinks the steep bank stream



16.9.41

## Western Wedding

We could not wait for the wedding  
in the red house at the port  
tho they told us of the spread  
and the number of the courses

Cousins from Galway and Dublin  
and kinsfolk widely invited  
all those who'd kept out of trouble  
or lived this side of the tide

But praise the Blessed Virgin  
the name was high in these parts  
there'd be at least seven clergy  
- and five or six noticers

Yet I met a man who hated  
the pride of Galloghly blood  
and could remember the Tailors  
when the place was ragged enough.

153  
16.9.41

## Salute to Horace

I thought of Horace in these raging days  
the poet with a place in court and hall  
who was not shamed to give a rich man praise  
or praise the farmer in his dung-flooded stall  
who loved his fields his bees his waterfall  
and traced his close-knit songs of famous girls  
of merry evenings with brave witty men  
and named as alien  
the glutton's haunch, the playboy's scented curls:

remember too his care for natural things  
the patient shepherd watering his flocks  
the thistle-down that flies, the vine that clings  
and the rough violet bounding round the rocks  
yet shoke without excuse of paradox  
his fear that Jachin might disrupt the state  
that slick patricians shoud to slow their craft-  
fore frantic overdraft



on the bold virtues that once made Rome great

I thought him wise and happy tho I know  
the fate that crasht the pillars in the end  
since certain scribbled lines are left to show  
a Roman poet had a noble friend  
read books, loved women, was content to spend  
a Sabine life from action who in youth  
had led his legion for a cause held dear  
but most the moving year  
with all its changes yielded richest truth

On being taught Latin

I only in my brief latency  
limp'd after Caesar's dreary files thro' Gaul  
and mouth'd the tedious words of that old bore  
about old age; with fifty snort nos'd Lads  
stumb'd dopsers'd cribs...

Set for a certain term  
to learn the way to earn my bread without  
the loosend collar and the callous palm  
I sat at mercy of the ignorant  
dull pitiless men who raspt sarcastically  
and pickt dry phrases with stale pedantry  
One not so feeble was too often fool'd  
into a bog of memories of his youth.  
Another who oppos'd against his name  
long consonantal links of scholarship  
was the chief monster and grammarian  
He never taught the vulgar work of Rome



in its square set efficiency and style  
the useful carved letter or the pipes  
tunnels beneath the deftly laid mosaic  
the viaduct the arch the stabbing sword  
His craft was verbal. Yet not once emerged  
mid the declensions any golden word  
used by a man to fix a moment's film  
in amber to endure time's chiding tides  
He cursed us as barbarians and strode  
slugging his gown: with grave proconsul steps  
deluding no one. Yet I do not blame him  
the arid incisor of his labored thought -  
thrust him marooned upon us and unable  
to set the Roman life against our life  
and watch the current leap the little gaps  
So he was left with cold imperatives  
a bilious humor and a thinning scalp  
and we were left with rags of snobbish slang  
the names upon the honors board belied

107  
So those tall books were chained upon the shelves  
and all I knew were postcard views of Rome  
and certain stories my wise father's told  
to keep me quiet till he'd swept my knees  
when I was small and very prone to fall  
about the geese about the Rubrican  
but these were mixed with Andersen and Grimm  
and his cold children shivering in the Moyle.

Not till I later found good men dressed sturpeth  
from grave Lucretius, till at essays' end  
old Cowley's (pictured on the title page  
a merry Milton with a cherub's face)  
vast sprawling stanzas of thick twisted prose  
that at sharp corners wore a cuff of gold  
woke me to wonder till I cast about  
rummaged in penny boxes where I found  
John Dryden, Martin, Conington, De Vere,



and saw my Horace thro' a clouded glass  
Dryden the first who used but half his mind  
mere flourishes until he found his aim  
and feathered those red targets of his time:  
Martin' who loved his master but conceived  
a Swinburne rather best express his wit  
Martin the husband of that Irish girl  
who was commended by our Ferguson  
and sits at table, slept by Foley's hand  
and this de vere, the son of Wordsworth's friend  
the sonneteer; the brother of that other  
who wrote of Maere before her name became  
familiar in the rolls of private schools.  
This man loved Horace too and spent his days  
stretching his narrow talent to include  
the gusts and tempers of a Roman age

109  
To this I add a moment's memory  
of one, my friend, who took the volume down  
from the drab rows of textbooks - and remarked  
'this was a poet that he still admired  
altho' he had to sweat him for exams

I marvelled somewhat at his scholarship  
remembering my lean and niggard skill  
and having come by ways circuitous  
to the same angle I was well content  
having the approbation of his mind  
- a stay and buttress I am thankful for.



S 5/41

19.9.41

## Sonnet

Among the many selves that throng my flesh  
 that clench the fist or urge the feet to run  
 that peer in mirror every morning fresh  
 to search my face for whose mask lies thereon  
 that jostle on the lips to say, unsay  
 the words that prompting circumstance demands  
 but one recalls the body's built of clay  
 and one that clay is shapen well with hands.

And one's a child that whimpers quickly bled  
 by jip or sting and quickly reconciled.  
 And one not yet the master gay and wise  
 in latitude lets the sagging mutinies  
 in turbulence and silence troop to bed,  
 forgives the haggard and enjoys the child.

23.9.41

## At this Hour

At this hour

eleven to on twentythird September 1941  
 when all can hope but none dare prophesy  
 when we are caught below the toppling cliff  
 what am I to do?

Continue as before the neat stitching of stanzas  
 on old familiarly emotive things  
 that have lost their relevance and most likely  
 will never regain it now?

Or vex my wits with the new harsh patterns  
 privately fashionable, shod in jargon  
 limited to the severely conditioned responses  
 of a clique and the periphery admirers of the clique

Both seem absurd

when I think of the battered ground round Smolensk  
 let alone the battle in Human

There isn't much that I can do publicly about it



5  
+  
in face of the mobilised inertia of five million men  
and the snake's hypnosis of a ruling class

But there's no use just sitting around  
pulling long faces listening to the news

I think it will be best for me  
to slate my thoughts as fairly as I can  
spread out my curled evasions to the light  
box my compass,  
open all the little doors

The record if it survives may comfort me  
or make me laugh. At any rate it can do no harm  
and it seems sensible also

that I should use

these tricks of speech I am most handy with

X  
The Lagan in September.

There was no wind and ripples only broke  
where two drab swans were groping after grub  
small ripples soon subsiding, Even the smoke  
from misty chimney kept straight shape in air,  
and no leaf mood or fell.

The heavy burdened trees had lost their gleam  
but only showed stray edges of their age;  
their dark reflections passing thro' the stream  
grew downwards stiffly into endless space  
but won no motion there.

In the dry rushes of a narrow creek  
a moorhen jerked its head and drove for home  
its white tail feathers and its yellow beak  
distracting eye adjusted to the shades  
of the autumnal dusk



23-9-

56

## Sonnet

Not often have I found the sunny hours  
thick with good fruit for plucking as I passed  
the long days - gave a languor to the flowers  
that seemed more lovely at their first or last

Even here where sudden rainclouds wipe away  
the ripening sun and hailstorms in a night  
have swatted wide acres I must wait for the day  
when memory offers me her second sight.

But with the first light kindling touch of frost  
I wake to wonder, see the world afresh  
as dawn cold water stings the drowsy flesh  
and in a frenzy lest too much be lost

breathless I seek <sup>heap</sup> my harvest but to find  
far more than I can cram into my mind.

25-9-41

115



They gathered from half a countryside  
to wake the merry man who'd died  
the bearded man who had lived alone  
with neither chick nor child of his own  
They came by horse they came by train  
from over the hill and down the lane  
they came by twos and they came by threes  
from half a dozen baronies

They sat and smoked and talked of his work  
no better fellow had traveled the earth  
they smoked and ate and the grub was good  
and the drink was better than the food  
and hard it was to go into the night  
when the fire was high and the lamp was bright  
but when morning came some lay on the floor  
and some in the midden beyond the door



5  
till by twelve o'clock - and the time to shift  
There wasn't a dozen with strength to shift  
So the five bold men with the clearest wits  
lifted the coffin by starts and jits  
and carried it down to the Boghill Gaps  
where the minister sat in his pony trap

They took their turns as they carried it high  
but the way was long and the work was dry  
for the graveyard lay the most of a mile  
on the other side of the mickin' stile  
so one suggested they'd ease the load  
with a quick cool drop on the country road  
where a decent house is kept by a man  
that even the minister knew as Dan

When they reacht the house they left their friend  
in his coffin propt at the gable end  
and they went inside and call'd a round  
for the sake of the man going underground

117  
and the weight of him and the length of the way  
and the time of the year and the hour of the day  
and round by round determined and grim  
they knocked them down for the sake of him.

Then one by one the dozen diminisht  
till two were left when the last round finisht  
had there been three the minister might  
have made a fourth for the job alspight  
but the clergy man was a curious chap  
- the coffin was there but not the trap  
for the time was already a quarter to eight  
and he woud not bury a man so late

So they went in again a horse bound  
to wait like the other crayturs came round  
as what with words as what with blows  
as a name mispleed as a bloody nose  
it soon was time for the house to close



So one by one they were soon laid along  
the side of the trench in a sodden throng

At half past ten they began to stir  
and call for the bloody minister,  
and sob up in despair and doubt  
as dead to go home or to finish it out

By eleven o'clock they lifted again  
and shuffled further along the lane  
but the gate was chained & the sexton's door  
was half a mile away or more

So they climbed the wall & with grunting care  
carried the coffin fair and square  
and stumbling blindly mound by mound  
came to the gaping hole in the ground  
and laid their load in the open clay  
and tipped the clods in and shuffled away

But the lonely moon shining over the wall  
gave never a hint that she saw at all  
that someone was buried without a word  
save the fearsome hoot of a nightbird.



27. IX. 41

As I grow old I find my hatred less :  
Must then my skill for love diminish too ?  
Can Tolerance beget its own excess  
and passion for the truth become untrue ?

I have seen men admir'd retire and sink  
into a neutral greyness of despair  
as time's stiff fetters shorten link by link  
as tides recede and leave the foreshore bare .

But this is not the curve upon the graph  
my slow wits spell. If grace should grant me time  
the curling years I'll notch upon my staff  
shall give me wiser stude - and richer rime

20  
2.X

## Poems in October

### Neutral Topics

We shelter'd from the sudden showers  
by horse and house along the road  
took off our coats at many fires  
and talk'd about the sour black bread

and talk'd about the lack of oil  
that makes the winter blacker threat  
and how the Irish learnt at school  
is all so easily forgot.



## Odyssey

At the last door we sought in sudden shower  
The schoolmaster's tall wife invited us  
inside to crack in comfort for an hour  
till we should hear and catch the passing bus.

Her husband when he brought the cows to byre  
came in and argued politics with me  
The woman pats more turf upon the fire  
and put our child to bed and made us tea

Beside the window on a high back chair  
a little boy knelt gazing at the rain  
his restless body frozen to a stare  
for high adventure sliding down the lane

His name was Seamus. He was going now  
on holiday to uncle Peadar's farm  
and waited escort. With a soapfresh brow  
and paper parcel tucked beneath his arm.

## The little lough that has no name

There in a bare place, in among the rocks  
grey rounded boulders shouldered from the ground  
where no field's big enough to yield three stacks  
and corn grows on a fistful of black land  
is a small narrow lake, narrow and brown  
with whistling rushes elbowed here and there

and in the middle is a grassy stone  
that heron or some other wanderer  
will rest on darkly.

Sometimes there will rise  
a squawking mallard with a startling spray  
leading far inland that the swift eyes lose  
in the low mist that closes round the day

The many things I love should disappear  
in the black night ahead of us I know



I shall remember, silent crouching there  
your pale face gazing where the rushes grow  
seeking between the tall stems for the last  
black chick the grebe is cruising round to find  
my pointing finger showing it not lost  
but sheltered only from the ruffling wind.

125  
✓  
1/2 - 7  
X

## Dedication.

I have a certain skill in phrase  
can trace and space the stride of mood  
and from the clamor of my days  
beget my own beatitude.

For tho' the years have stupefied my mind  
of haunted shrine and murmured creed  
the gayer unfeathered senses find  
the ritual that all men need

not in the hallowed bread and wine  
the blessed relic or the bell  
but in the shaping of a line  
that mystery makes a miracle



## The Sailor's Grave

A little girl, a Wordsworth child  
with sunburnt legs and naked feet  
came running over when we called  
from the low wall on which she sat.

She guessed at once before we spoke  
we'd come to see the sailor's grave  
and told us that she often took

We followed her beneath the cliff  
along the narrow track of grass  
then up a pathway bramble rough  
and over fences and across

a turfey sward that bit down  
to little hollow with a bay  
where stretched a beach without a stone

and made a corner of the sea

and as we went her childish tongue  
rehearsed the story legend-glib  
of how when winds were high and strong  
her sister seeking cray and crab

had found a body wedged between  
two weedy rocks along the shore  
swollen as tho' to burst his skin  
his eyes pecket out, the sockets raw

and how they brought the body up  
and searching in his sodden coat  
they found a folded envelope  
that gave his name & rank outright

I marvelled that a little child  
should speak of this so easily  
my sensibility appalled



I had to turn my face away

She stoppt and pointing down below  
remarkt the pebbled ring, the mound  
as there beside a ~~gray~~<sup>well</sup> we saw  
the place that we had come to find.

The troubled sods were green again  
and two black cows were grazing near,  
among mounds without a stone  
not twenty paces from the shore

The sun was high, the air was clear  
the world was washed in shining light  
behind the scattered islands far  
the blue sea stenderd out of sight

Here in the bay the water shone  
bright green unwrinkled on the sand:  
a white gull cruising by alone

flung a slow shadow on the mound

and tho it was a savage fate  
that drown'd & draggd the sailor here  
I thought how once old Homer wrote  
of someone by another shore.

### Couplet

3.7.41

A man should be reminded now and then  
the sword is also weaker than the Bren.



## Sonnet

When whale brain yellow lifted up his arms  
 against the grey disk in the curving light  
 the lean and angry prophet smote his palms  
 and bade the rockhorse thunderbolt attend  
 to wipe the mercy slate for his sick friend  
 hanging as stiff as fingers belennite

Pod soft and hairy as a seeded weed  
 the blessing drew against him, rubbed his sides  
 nested in blood congealed as stiffly glued  
 in the red tears that scalloped the blue lids.

But the admonishing of rain and wind  
 on the bare skull, smeared tear and blood away  
 what once was gilded was not even mended  
 a nested socket now, a robin's eye.

58

## Sonnet

Sometimes a farmer digging in his field  
 will rasp his metal on a labor stone  
 or find the dark clay speckled with white bone  
 or break a brown, ribbed pot with flat slate seal:  
 and the little guesses what's revealed  
 his slow mind holds a wonder of his own  
 and pays vague homage to the eyes gone  
 that schooled his hands and gave them skill to yield

In after days when with a cunning drill  
 he splits the clod or in the failing light  
 he scratches with a chard & sharpened staff  
 will the rough edges of rust crusted steel  
 or dull bomb splinter knit to sudden sight  
 provoke for us a friendly epithet?



6-XI-

✓ Rann

Three signs of peace and rich increase;  
the lowing of calf-heavy cow;  
the hammer's clang; the swish of earth  
each side of the dividing plow.

Note: Distich

9-XI-

We mouth scramble letters to a stone  
already graven with an epitaph.

13-XI ✓

X Altho the tide should fling a man ashore  
to bury with the other shipwreckt men  
& tho the oil is scarce a turf is dear  
the Irish love their music & their cards.

25-XI/  
6-XI-

Botany

Who dare tell the botanist  
what his pocket lens has missed?  
That the names which glibly slip  
from the dry tongue - smartend lips  
cannot make the wind rocket flower  
overstay its fragrant hour  
which in poet's sudden phrase  
might outlast a Caesar's praise?

But the botanist replied  
mine is not a pedant pride.  
With my lens a scalpel I  
Teach a plant to multiply  
him a ~~gapped~~ bloom to dare  
alternations of the air  
bid a little patient seed  
swell to meet a people's need



## Fragment for 'Apocalypse'

6.XI

It started unobtrusively one year  
with a common garden herb that lost its scent  
the fact remarked by many but unrecorded  
it was so trifling. After twenty years  
the loss was noted in the newspapers.

Then came an epoch of when sharp violence  
became the normal pattern of behavior  
murder of princes murder of famous men  
black in the headlines - and in narrow type  
a drooping coroner's sticky platitudes  
on a man who killed a child with a metal box  
and only wore the ring of a rubber stamp  
stamped in his wallet. I was only twelve  
when a thin man tried to sell his gun to me.

Then wars in the picture papers, rapidly scanned  
waiting my turn at the barber's: men <sup>with</sup> rags  
bound round their thick legs trudging thro' the snow

135  
and strikes and baton charges. Even ships  
ripped open by green icebergs. Then the drums  
pounding the faint nerves twisting the brains least  
the men broke into leady hysterics of noise  
convulsive jerking in thought a paralysis  
with certain crises of peace when the pulses flagged.

But nevertheless in those days many still  
made love, wrote verses painted colored panels,  
grew roses walked by rivers drank with friends  
or cheered from draughty stands their last free choice

Some led good lives then with or without regard  
for the strange tradition of a murdered god  
and a moaning peasant woman, binding the hurts  
of father children legislating for justice  
stabling amendments to the avalanche.

But few had felt the heart go out of them  
even out of the best who'd whittled life



to a clean bone of behavior sapping tense  
or so they hope, to heal in immortal spring

They were all masks or shadows but did not know  
not having a gnaw of life as it was lived  
before the air grew rank and cancerous.

On Reading Samuel Daniels' "Musophilus" in  
War time.

I sat in comfort with a friendly pipe  
before a fire I had no right to share  
concerned with double column's narrow type  
whereof old prose Daniel has to spare  
comparing Marlowe's verbiage overripe  
with lean Stew's stanzas bravely writ and bare;

and as I read in his Musophilus  
the general defense of learning's worth  
the loaded arguments ingenious  
the scholar's quarrel with a alien earth  
I marvelled how one dead should speak for us  
who have been cursed with poetry from birth.

As the leapt verses piled their rich effect  
in condemnation of the niggard time  
whose sullen season of a cold defect



had left him with the autumn's sepiess wine  
I did not blame the centuries' neglect  
of his dry gestures for the farcied mime

rather I spelt his honest words anew  
with wise and sturdy meaning throbbing still  
and what his brave heart spoke I echoed too  
the love he bore unto this holy skill

"This is the <sup>thing</sup> that I was born to do

This is my scene. This part I must fulfil."

Let cynic wisdom mock me for my fault  
that what I say of autumn's stubborn oak  
which holds its crisping leaves the best of all  
is worth remembrance.

I shall make the verse  
setting the vowels roundly sound by sound  
and placing the fine stresses carefully  
half out of habit as I move and breathe  
and half because I owe my heart the taste  
poor weary heart neglected long betrayed  
in the loose hours of talk with which I earn  
this bitter season when the khalaki men  
turn their keen vacant masks to watch my master.



## X Winter Plowing: Sonnet

Compels to silence by the urgent time  
 that sets my hours up in a vain essay  
 to draw use from me in another way  
 than I had reckoned for my easy pen  
 I let the friendly plowshare of my time  
 rust idly in the corner. Day by day  
 I planned escape to labor; but it lay  
 unharnessed & unready.

Now once a line  
 have shed the last leaves on the sodden <sup>earth</sup> ground  
 and later morning wakers to the frost  
 I snatch an instant for my proper skill  
 to split the clouds & tease the soil until  
 the season's temper hasten on the birth  
 of what so long I dreaded had been lost

This is my practice. First I find a note  
 a ragged line or two occasion write  
 on Lest's agenda, cryptic, marginal;  
 I spell it fair & even & try to call  
 into my whirling mind the mood & place  
 that got it. For an hour or more I trace  
 in vain the paths about it, then thrust by  
 the tattered fragment or with labor try  
 some dull set piece that I had meant to treat  
 with better judgment. This too incomplete  
 is left to fortune and I turn my head  
 & wish someone's verse I understand  
 in careful stanzas. The results so dull  
 I wonder was it ever beautiful:  
 but keep my courage, knowing I must go  
 thro' tedious thickets till the skill I know  
 I have attained at times begins to stir  
 and sudden verses easily occur  
 that have the sound & shape I long have known  
 not in that use and certainly my own.



8. XI.

When my October mournfully had hast  
with the blunt rain that started from the west  
till all the chestnut leaves were safely grasst  
and even the stubborn oak began to yield,  
last rendezvous from shower in sodden field  
to friend returned from far as bidden guest

I went in cool november afternoon  
to his gray house. The long familiar lane  
was trackt with puddles: where at crest of June  
wild roses flaunted were the rain bright hips  
unwrapped yet by thrush. The year's eclipse  
had strippt the hedge till only thorns remain.

The Clady River rustlt against the arch  
dark turbulent & gluttet. Where before  
we wicket beside the ranking fir & larch  
up the long field by summer scorcht a horn

mid out strokes thick with lay a thistle down  
the misted hill new crop of stubble bore.

A browsing cow was wreathed in clouded breath  
in a wet meadow as we hurried by  
The silent country wore the chill of death  
that the pale gold of sunset could not wake  
with not the smallest wind astir to shake  
the great red beeches stiff against the sky.



✓ On reading Auden and others.

These men have spoken for my generation  
 have offered phrases for the way disquiet  
 that yawns beside young elbows at the bar  
 or grips the heart constricted walking home.

They have given a form of counters for exchange  
 among acquaintances who meet to talk:  
 for nervous imitation blanketing  
 the individual pain in general grief

These men have spoken for a generation  
 but not for me. My conflicts are not new  
 they fettered men in jaded photographs  
 or stiff in steel engravings waving swords

and I have sought to find a common speech  
 not vowels into <sup>mode but sonorous</sup> fashion, round and clear  
 and <sup>and</sup> but phable enough to give response

to what I share in common with my kind.

For what's in fashion will be out of fashion  
 before they can remorseless is rewound  
 and I have spent too long <sup>not</sup> to be content  
 like some low mollusk with its annual shell.



## The Petteic Fallacy: Sonnet

Not since my boyhood have I been content  
 with whimsical utterance of the inanimate  
 the dreary platitudes of love and hate  
 my commonplace experience had lent  
 brook or twig; the dismal sentiment  
 of cap or ribbon; or the cinders grate,  
 red microcosms of a vision state  
 with drowning birds & senates eloquent.

It was too easy to indulge my thought  
 in these frail novel spinnings. I have found  
 a harder craft to learn, to comprehend  
 the parser's whirling phrase at random caught,  
 or involuted and neurosis bound  
 the careful explanations of a friend.

1

They call the house the Tailor's, tho' no cloth  
 is stretcht here save in usual woman's way  
 for frock or shift: and if you need a coat  
 you rap at the tin shanty down the road.  
 It was the widow's man was Tailor here  
 but died a dozen years ago & left  
 his name & <sup>house</sup> trade to three well doing women,  
 his trade to a young fellow he had taught  
 already married, so the two were parted  
 But the name stuck; & now as like as not  
 walking the sandy tracks of Mullaghbeg  
 if you should look in thro' an open door  
 to see the marvellous dresser, they will say  
 the folks that live there less amused than proud  
 'You're stayin' at the Tailor's by the port?'  
 or an old man half inviting you to poach  
 for eels or salmon will remark the same  
 & add that strangers there are treated well  
 & nearly always anglers keen for sport.



✓

II

There of a night (and even after mass  
 on Sunday afternoons) the men will gather,  
 strong laborers or fishermen with skill  
 to thread the wide flung filter bed of rocks,  
 maybe a driver stopping overnight  
 to take the early bus back to Sewardore  
 and every fortnight a Lank Indian  
 with well rubbed case strapped to a bicycle  
 to take a hand at cards. They sit around  
 the great white table underneath the lamp  
 and deal with nimble fingers. Always too  
 the widow joins them. She is mad for cards  
 and has been known to play til screech o' day.  
 She calls one rapid & the play is swift  
 They fling the full hands down & wave their luck  
 & shuffle quickly never saying much  
 saving in the way of trading or reproach  
 or reckoning the little silver piles.

13.XI.

149

✓

I have not raged in verse since I was young  
 and easily troubled by a braggart's tongue  
 as screaming headline or an open wrong.

I was too ready with a loaded line  
 to know the cutting edge is cold & fine,  
 of a clean temper never market as mine.

Now I am wiser somewhat, not thro grief  
 plumb'd once, or worn for years without relief,  
 but from the small attritions of my life,

I know each angry rash untethered word  
 but slews a score I cannot well afford  
 and is mere spittle on a coffin board.



10/14 - X1

Content that somewhere I am named or known  
for certain verses pulst or proved my own  
that show the mind a limit or an edge  
to its prerogative and privilege  
in winging patterns of significance  
from daily gestures or the normal glance  
when one word more, one accent overstressed  
will make a desert Sahara of the rest;  
that, held to the right tension, may vibrate  
with simple resonance deliberate,  
I keep my quiet way, no more betrayed  
into the rhetorician's masquerade  
where I must face sensation or display  
a bleeding heart heraldic every day.

So now I pray you all to pray for me  
that I depart not from sincerity.

---

151

29-31/X1

## Quatrains

From the dead man's mouth there came  
a double tongue of scarlet flame  
that licket or flickered or burnt-out  
leaving his lips mustached with soot.

This is our doom: to have so hard the mind  
to the bombardment of each stinging sense  
that when we need it we can never find  
the wiseman's armor of indifference.

With vague or quavering voice  
we face another year  
our fate an aimless choice  
What King or Edward dear.



## For a ducky Poet

I envied him his easy fame  
 the iteration of his name  
 the nimble way his verses slipped  
 straight into print from manuscript  
 when I who gave so many years  
 to the apprenticeship of verse  
 must watch the ink wherein I trust  
 my beating thoughts grow pale with dust

Then when I heard the manellin fact  
 of how his lonely hours are fact  
 with hell and horror and the sheer  
 hysteria of heart's despair  
 and how his life spins dreadfully  
 upon the fulcrum of a lie  
 I pitied him and prayed his fame  
 might comfort all who bear his name.

Thinking too much of what dead men have made  
 assessing how their skills wrung from their time  
 abiding shapes of passion or of whim  
 whereby the troubled mind is satisfied  
 for sudden instants or for years endowed  
 with the faint solace of a famous name  
 I suddenly discover I have come  
 to the blind limit of a ravelled road

And in my journey I have paid away  
 the tugging cord that bound me to my kind  
 and lack the taut and friendly skin whereby  
 my stumbling feet may gain remembered ground



Emptied of all emotion bare and dry  
 like silted harbor with its shipping gone  
 where even the grey gull perching on a stone  
 seems scarce to have the wit or will to fly  
 while the deep sea not yet outboard by sand  
 from its full color rides with pounding roar  
 white hoft on low reef half a mile from shore  
 but only dares to ripple toward the land.

So wait I here gone useless and inert  
 subject to terror sickened past despair  
 while all the monsters from the fabled box  
 swarm up to mob the legions of the air  
 and random combat sways to heel or hurt  
 yet leaves me lonely with my paradox

Forst to a leisure with no place to speak  
 the tedious themes that clutter up my thought  
 bored with the latest book my fancy caught  
 tricked in the jargon of the newest clique  
 without the will to leave my chair and seek  
 the pencil columns some wise craftsmen wrought  
 that give me hope for living I am brought  
 abruptly to a murderous year's last week

Can this last Friday of a ragging year  
 prompt gesture to trim up the leaking days  
 with nurture for my heart or help for men  
 some atom split some mystery made clear  
 or fix them by some quality of phrase  
 that touches tongue and never comes again?



26/27. XII

Will happen neither for I know too well  
The slipping sequence of these jagged days  
The necessary motions the delays  
The hands that coax the accents that compel  
Till sudden silence makes time audible  
and I stand lonely at the forking ways  
a full year older with a graven face  
and no whit wiser for the ~~two~~ strokes I tell.

If from the daily leases on my thought  
The absolute demand leaves margin free  
for private reckoning I dare not pause  
indulgent for, unbidden and unsought  
disaster tapes its rumour overseas  
a victory requires its sad applause.

27. XII

157

The Christmas Rhymers came this year again  
mere boys they were, and hammered on the door  
with "we're the Rhymers! Open up before  
wee devil Doubt has counted up to ten  
or we'll do mischief." So I scolded them  
from upstairs window, tho' my heart was sore  
for those that ranted on the kitchen floor  
and are not here now, being fighting men.

And as they tiptoed back along the lane  
a straggling and crest-fallen regiment  
with out a word - St. George & Janny Jack  
The Doctor and Sir Cromwell - as their train  
I knew that none that Christmas Rhymers went  
into the shadows never to come back.



27. XII

Green Christmas with the white fat heads of sleet  
on the black branches - and the shrivelled weeds  
and riding high in cloud, a disc of sun  
not daring to break thro the bundled sky  
But rising wind with night blew up and gave  
a gap or two where large stars bravely shone  
and somehow all the season used to mean  
came crowding back, the reins of January loosed.

27. XII

159

## Kinsfolk

My laughing cousin, fair and broad like me  
named for the season, whom I best recall  
playing at pirates when we both were small  
or shouting down from somewhere in a tree,  
has yawnd his half year in captivity;  
Crete snappet his chapter... let me name them all:-  
First, Maurice, growing stouter since the fall  
of France and his relay race to the sea;

Then Gordon the tall Scot, the artist's son,  
and Billy the sports baby - Where are they?  
Caught into khaki anonymity  
from whence their masters emerge infrequently  
that if they're lucky when this war is done  
will fling them back to us gone sour and grey

---



27. XI.

I've gone about the world awhile  
with this ones stide in this ones style  
and facing summer's frantic green  
that wiser eyes than mine have seen  
I've mimicked what I'd overheard  
the cadence and the colored word  
have used the tall pedantic name  
that I might share the scholar's fame  
and spun a coy allusive air  
round every object of my care  
til now when I descry a tree  
remembered stanzas cumber me  
and it is easier to quote  
what Clare what Crabbe what Thomas wrote  
that to know what I should say  
at such an hour on such a day.

27. XI 161

## The Long Field

I saw the long field plowed I saw the dark  
potato leaves close jostled in the rain  
I chased the sheep that blundered in one day  
and watched the battered earth between the rips  
cloud their retreat in dust. And now again  
I stand to watch the long field as the light  
dies quickly from the east: and that black earth  
is littered with the dead & shrivelled stalks,  
and wonder what will take the restless skies'  
beneficence or dole when next I come  
-and if they've jist the gaps the sheep came thro'.

29. XI

## Quatrain

Now somehow in my prime  
I know my heart at peace  
and find a defter wine  
for all my joys increase.



27.X11

## The Beastie

The man beside me in the crowded bus  
 had a small bag of sacking on his lap  
 that lurched & rocked with more than motor's sway  
 he was a red faced country lout, his cap  
 was cheap & new & worn for holiday

He saw me looking at the little bag  
 and watched the wonder puckering my brow  
 and chuckled to himself. I had to ask  
 It's a grey ferret man with hunger now  
 the grudging words dropped from his sweating mask

To demonstrate his truth he poked a hole  
 for wet pink snout like narrow finger tips  
 "If you'd be up at Kells ye'd see the set  
 Since Monday not a morsel's crust his lip  
 He'll hae tae work the day for all he'll get"

27.X11

163

## Winter

In the half light of morning on the hill  
 that fronts the sun not risen yet to sight  
 a clump of elms engraved against the sky  
 flings up a scethe of rooks that flap and cry  
 at random; save for this the earth is still  
 as tho' all else was eager for the light.

27.X11

It seems incredible that in the ground  
 the knotted seeds should trace themselves for growth  
 that white blind roots should grope & blunder round  
 for all above is mocked by rotting sloth

The sap drained things the pale & shrivelled grass  
 the black hedge budded only with the rain  
 the monstrous clouds that sag & will not pass  
 make even the finches' twittering in vain.



We had a right to better days than these:

grave peevish days that gave us room to grow  
who now are driven where we do not know  
before our hands have learnt the skill to seize  
the rich and many colored qualities

that flash from natural forms, who dare not go  
contemplative and brooding wise and slow  
mapping our fortunes by the marks on trees.

We were not all oblivious of the shapes,  
the monstrous shapes beg history labour with.

It was not we who planned the small escapes  
to sheer futility's mock innocence

that shamed the arts and made their worth a myth  
sans ecstasy and joy's gay diligence.

I cannot yet find comfort in my time  
that bids my twilight heart crown thankfulness  
for tiptoe instants of unstained success  
renewed at will or amber safe in time  
-accumulated years have buckled my prime  
but raised no habitation whence to bless  
and succor those who come in their distress  
as supplicants with peremptory mime.

Are we then paupers in a fulsome age  
snatching on justials when the chance affords  
or waiting meekly for the uncertain crust?  
Too starved our lacking blood to harbor rape  
that tho' we know the unjust from the just  
we hide the gaping wound with gauze of words.



We live in a poor country where the people  
 rasp spade or rake or plow in the deep clay  
 of low, the fields are flooded every year  
 of high the moss & heather stink the sheep  
 A man may grind at grass and only find  
 a score of acres on the lawyer's map  
 to point to on the wall when he is near  
 his last admonishing of his tall sons  
 and one has sent a pencil note for crêpe  
 There is no thickness in the dung stained kenep  
 his days have wept. His best qualities  
 are bare & lonely - and bereft of wonder  
 are hard bare gestures & slow whittled words:  
 his simple thoughts are regularly herded  
 between the tall pews & the small stone church  
 where a hoarse organ marshals the cold virtues  
 Yet set this man's foot on another ground  
 and he will round his haunch or fill his cheeks  
 and win a name for wisdom as a speaker

## The Irish

Fed on the slave's potato they grew fat  
 and filled the cobbled causeway with their brats  
 don't when the four roads met or swept their blows  
 on certain fairdays when the whiskey flowed  
 But year by year their lives grew harder yet  
 the London landlords glutted on their debts  
 as all the oats their little fields could yield  
 were shipped to buy a sack of yellow meal  
 They dropped the dancing marshalling instead  
 and marched to great Conventions bravely headed  
 by the coarse tribune of their mounting rage

Their food, the slave's potato took the blight  
 grew black & rotten in a single night  
 The oats still flourished but they were bespoken  
 for absent masters busily engaged  
 watching the white wake leaping from Folkestone  
 and certain men in green with carbines  
 stood guard on weapons in a steady line



as the clean corn was carried to the sea  
and women called to God in scabby knees  
as little child died while vomiting  
the nettles they had ate despite the stings  
men groped in the ditches for the rusty picks  
as snow before next harvest they would stake

29. x''

Out of this murderous year that flamed its course  
thro the sick nights of waiting, thro the days  
marked by the numb anxiety, the harsh  
unreal light upon the shattered streets  
the sideline impotence as town by town  
the soviet sixth shrank back upon its core  
as I stood useless and as useless still  
when in the raw months slowly hope began  
to press again across the broken earth  
to triumph that I had no right to share  
nor could have bettered by surrendering

167  
my name a habit to the nameless swarm  
who parry their nostalgia with nerve  
Out of this year and almost out of life  
let me hoard up the transitory things  
that lie the closest to my tick of breath  
that afternoon beside the full dark stream  
flucking my grass blades in its furts & checks  
the high sky blue and all the trees in leaf  
the ban let on the heavy uncut hay  
Keats' boots beside me and your moving gaze  
cruising with mine beside the blades of grass.



29/30 . XII

Let one accuse me that I tuck my verse  
in long outmoded pastoral properties  
erasing devices and inserting trees  
and setting plowmen over riveters.

Only the bogus poet still prefers

The old more cumbersome attitudes to these  
harsh on the tongue as yet and ill at ease  
in the mock stanza that so surely stirs  
old school book memories in the slackest mind  
and bids them take the surface for the thing

Not in our time is poetry defined

as words for music or as thoughts that sing  
but as a slick equation of the word  
with the first image that by chance occurred.

30 . XII

171

I bow to the assailant and admit  
that much I favor long is out of date  
even insist beyond the white wastgate  
the antiseptic byres are swept & lit  
by silent engines belted so to fit  
the darkest corner of mechanic state  
yet unrepentant and deliberate  
laugh at the feeble transience of it -

The world that walks me with fantastic slope  
holds a frail tenure and is like to end  
struck down thro monsters of its thoughtless lust  
and we alone shall make our sure escape  
from the disaster that its flaws portend  
by finding wiser symbols for our trust.



31. XII. 41

Here where year changes at the tick of clock  
in forty minutes and moves slowly across  
the suffering planet there is no surcease,  
no gap in action, interval in breath  
for those who wait the raider or at arms  
loket with the opposer sway upon the scale.

173

	400	6,580	
1928	<del>390</del>	-	<del>6477</del> including "St. Budget"
1929	254	2903	
1930	154	1901	



Table of Output

Year	Poems	Lines
1931	230	3233
1932	287	4120
1933	240	3438
1934	151	2255
1935	35	907
1936	205	3595
1937	122	1991
1938	110	1910
1939	121	1910
1940	200	3704
1941	102	1536
	90	1312
	29	696
Total for period	1,736	27,452
		<del>27,477</del>

This book contains verse from Oct 1940 - Dec 1941  
141 poems 2,208 lines 175

60,600  
 19  
 47  
 4807

1940	Oct	2	97
	Nov	11	166
	Dec	26	409
	Total	39	672
	Total	200	3704

last quarter  
 for full year 1940

1941	Jan	2	15
	Feb	3	60
	March	19	298
	April	3	31
	May	1	12
	June	7	50
	July	-	-
	August	-	-
	September	18	369
	October	8	138 [61-973]
	November	21	298
	December	20	265
	Total	102	1536

for full year 1941



