

POEMS

1940

Book XVII

Poems by

John Hewitt

April 1940 — September 1940

9th April
1940

Mocked by the bell that tolls each day
black doom of nations far away
as lurking shadow cold and blind
swings terror closer to my mind
I find my tired and truant eyes
turn from prints ink smudged tragedies
to trivial things like budding trees

16. IV. 40

lines from 'Ars Poetica' (Horace)

The lyre was strung that we might rightly praise
- gods demigods and victors in the race.

Whose touch is clumsy will not take the cue
lest he be shamed by those whose aim is true
yet he who has no skill to pace and spell
emotion's urge by balanced syllable
will rime his cantos tho his flagging mind
limps stray foot after and with broken wind
The sole defence that he was taught to write
owes none a farthing, sleeps at home o' night -
far better shew to one who is concerned
with your good name and he will see it bound
or if you cherish still your poetry
lock in a desk and throw away the key

16. IV. 40

When wars heed terror till the shining air
drones with the threat of danger everywhere
and every flapping poster on the street
tilts its black letter victory or defeat
a victory bracket with memory of sons
pensions and pleasure spattered from the guns
or from the springing apples voice and voice
my anxious heart have patience or rejoice
that David has now thousands slain than Saul,
or screaming list ill printed grey and small
for name that labeled men I may have seen
hunched in a subway with a magazine
when on the train tap fingers that can spell
only the lowliest images of hell
my heart ticks madly and my smarting eyes
see but a throbbing mask that multiplies
this side and this in series infinite
the empty eyes of one gone mad with fright

30. IV.

Caesar and Solomon
imperial and wise
both are now gone
with their sonorous lies;
but Helen, Dido burning,
Maave the tall Irish queen
gaze in the hollow eyes
between
a fevered head's turning and turning.

30. IV

As contradictions shuttle back
across the throng tendentious in
conditioned mind becomes aware
that somewhere in a rash attack
in numbers I am left to guess
young men like me are lying dead
this with a raw steak mesh for head
this spattered in a bloody mess
and yet it is so far away
in places I have never been
my mind in past records the scene
in heart rejects it all as play.

Imagination that was once
the painter's hand the poet's word
for face of queen or jabled bird
for lighting brow or blade of bronze
contracts into a narrow span

of life immediate to the sense
the looking finger's evidence
to gauge the sufferings of men

Poems in May

Born of a little people of the north
 familiar with the rain and roaring sea
 let my weak words go forth
 in a black gale of mounting tragedy

as I have seen a full gale wind and rise
 sheer in the storm's cliff with undaunted heart
 that beaten down still flies
 intent to wedge the wall of wind apart

So then my prayers for little peoples all
 the bound and beaten Czech Norwegian Dane
 to those about to fall
 as the strong nations spread their wide campaign.

Epitaph for a Conscript

3.V.40

I go to seek the peace they could not save
 because they left it to the fool and knave:
 will maybe find instead my father's grave.

Class observation

where villas are a smell of new-cut grass
 fresh painted railings, burning rags and soot.
 The truth hecks on me as I gaze and pass:
 the bandits trim and tidy up their loot.

3.V.40

Two lovers went before me up the path
shuffling on gravel stepping carefully
over the little streams between the stones
stretching their hands to help and laughing shrill
their strong love geared against the breathless slope.
Then at a level place they turned aside
walking on clover seeking shelter bush
of whin or heather in an open field
where they will sprawl & crush thecelandines
in sterile gestures of frustrated love.

3.V.40

Quiet

I can possess my quiet in the hills.
Abandoned quarry offers me its heart
among uprooted stones and shattered rocks
intrepid moss makes effort to restore
to the green purpose of the rain and sun.
If I have patience birdsong dies away
the darting martins and the climbing larks
pass out of sight and hearing. If I go
too far to westward falling water's savorish
thro' hanging grasses will intrude and heave
with white jets splashing tilted ledge to ledge
the mirror surface of my mind. And if
I scale the cleft there suddenly will sound
a fan wind in dark hooted pine and fir.
So pacing here my twenty yards of chalk
my heart is finished. There is but to wait
between one birdsong and another song
for wordless truth I nearly over hear.

325.V.40

Brief Harmony
Against a sunset sky
The hill was crested by
-a tilted stormlash bare
and suddenly a bright
star hung alone in air
gold in the silver light.

I knew at once for sign
set there in perfect line
the star the bush and me
one moment in the flow
of god's eternity
before I just must go.

And then the bush shall rest
in clay as be forgot ...
Star bush and man elipad
for this brief instant here
shall even disappear
from god's vast cooling mind

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325.V.40

Walking in spring my helpless thought
into a ravel'd tangle caught
I asked the blossoms when as thorn
why men are born.

But they no answer offered me
more than the wind in leafing tree
the little streams made no reply
as jet with rain they tumbled by
the birds involved in nest as soap
stopped at my voice but not for long

8-9.V.40

Over the bright green rich with celandine
where in the level light of evening
each frightened lamb distinctly limed with gold
projected heraldic on the scroll of spring

a low mound moated with a brambled ditch
coppet by small blow patch of brown broken sods
upon its brow among the nettled stones
goats heering round like old friaric gods

the wild crabapple with no petal yet
but hinting crimson promise tangled arms
of cherry spikt with froth for cruising bees
the sycamore that dreams of summer swarms

the blackthorn bushes delicately masked
beside the sky blue stream abrim with rain
yoke flecks on which the liltin larches hung

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with light green plumes along the tufted lane

this was in Antrim walking with my friend
remarking danson gay the misty crest
of beeches tall above the dove grey house
at April's end when life is lovehest.

Somewhere in Europe men were locked in war
and rocket to crush us from their tilted peaks
We spoke of urgent things like poetry
but there were certain things we did not speak.

The dead efficient masks rock home by bus
 peering at print, are hung in hall with hat
 or left in bathroom mirrors overnight
 til soap and razor slick them on again
 Bland masks smokes over knife & glancing cup
 Tucking new scores to sympathetic mask
 Lettered inside domestic wotter size
 but rubber tightens with a snapping snap
 the wearer mumbles jidpato disappears
 is found by rose bed puffing at a pipe
 or silent slipped tripping after bowls
 the old crest shiny mask with sagging jaw
 lifted from peg beside the rough tweed coat.

Self portrait

a round smooth face not creast with any pain
 but set in lines of firmness to defeat
 the vacant leer that lurking there mane
 woud follow shapely legs along the street

The firm step and the slightly lurching stride
 insist a certain manly carelessness
 the sharp unkind remarks intent to hide
 the inmost need to prophecy and bless.

9-10-V.

We bang our skins and jumble in the gloom
are elbowed out or bundled with the stream
our light geared eyes as in ignorance assume
dark holds the sharp proportions of the dream

life offers to eliminate the pret
no easy causeway twist enclosing walls
no witty neatly laundered usherette
with jet smooth touch that winks across the stalls

10-V.

19

The naphtha perfumed admiral
with voice unused to eloquence
stutters a hoarse and student call
for some nelsonian and immense
attack upon our lethargy
more men more ships to meet the foe
beneath a splinter ragged tree
a lad lies dumb on bloody snow.

Now steady in the pace and span of prime
 youth's noisy raptures gone with breathless time
 I pause and turn my qualities to assess
 defects remarks and better fortune bless
 no longer choosing for my base and guide
 those men and books whose glittering words supplied
 blue print emotion symbol for delight
 fought on through days or vast dream peopled night

X
 No longer the high ode rhetorical
 that bids huddled Europe heed my warning call
 the tense messiah meanings built upon
 something I hope for but have never known
 nor the swift fancies flashing into song
 caught on the wing before fact proved them wrong

Henceforth my slow skill I must only spend
 to phrase a lyric or to mourn a friend

to state the convolutions of my thought
 in quiet stanzas delicately wrought
 leaving Keats' color, Shelley's mounting line
 for humbler country that I map as mine
stronger to passion never strongly moved
to those affections use less not approved
 responsive to the year's flow spring and fall
 saluting winter at the end of all
 not better vain or longing to be free
 from the dark textures of mortality
 yet hoping that in twenty years I'll find
 wisdom like Marvell's comfortable mind
 and that my thought and action prove to be
 secure in similar integrity.

11. V

Portrait of a Lady

With fat face like a rotting hip
yet poised on dainty feet
she tacks across the traffic
across the crowded street

No war envelops Europe
and earth's great empires rock
her gaze is concentrated on
a sale price summer frock.

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11. V.

During the Invasion of Holland

An apple tree across the hedge
knotted with blossoms red and white
a dozen calves knee deep in grass
were soaking to print weary sight

so it seemed right to sit in sun
to let the heat stroke chin & cheek
and burn bloodred upon shut lids
and hear dim sounds and never speak

Then sunset on a silver sky
with new moon and a little star
above the cold black line of hills
brought thought of death by age not war.

Kirk

I remember walking over the lonely roads
 high between bogs dug out and left for good
 the water lying brown as liquorice
 and sudden coming on a dozen people
 the men a stride ahead with Sunday suits
 with stiff peak caps, and clean uncollared shirts
 hands thrust in their high pockets never speaking
 the women after with strawhats well pinned
 and long skirts flapping on their high laced boots
 coming from midday service at the Kirk
 where the strong wine of grace has been poured out
 in the same measure that their fathers knew
 salvation shining bright as flaming sun
 sin black as bog and far more treacherous

It seems appropriate to meet them there
 in a bare open world where life's endured
 under a changing sky that but repeats

for all its changes the through seasons' rounds
 the certain hope in sowing, the slow care
 the harvest ripeness and the winter trace
 we in the city insulated from
 the stirring earth, walking between walls
 have lost the glass of worship.

22.V.

I have fingered all the books in the penny section
the tedious sermons, the passionless lives of saints,
the crib to the classics, the volume of secular essays,
the reports on the foreign missions, the dead propaganda,
the verses by magazine poets with obvious rhymes,
and walking down the alley out of the market
between the mahogany dresser and the hand basin
the marble bust of Augustus the needlework picture
I muse on the vanity of human endeavor

Surely there was a moment in the menses
between the finish sentence and the concordance
of sudden light of unaccustomed glory
of sheer revelation of life.

Surely a moment
when the secular essayist paused, when the magazine poet
tapping his cigarette on the curving initials
heard on the edge of earshot a lovely poem

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that sang in the heart like distant water falling:
then I recall the moments that sang to myself
that shed a sudden glory over visible things
and how the color and music has died away
leaving only a broken words on the scumbled paper -

Sonnet:

Today there has been matter for a song
 a cuckoo crying always out of sight
 the swift labourer suddenly alight
 that was a sooty tangle for so long
 a restless thrush that forays for her young
 beneath tall elms and in the windless night
 fragrant with thorn and hlae rising white
 the moon in birchleaf tracery is hung

These were the data my conditioned mind
 remembering other verses claimed & caught
 that in the quiet midnight I might find
 for each a mood and image in accord
 who scarce dare force a line out word by word
 in this imperiled instant terror fraught.

Cormorant

In meadow woods with secret bog
 the cormorant hidden deep in grass
 venturologist that never tird
 plays all his tricks til I should pass
 from mound to mound with quiet tread
 I followed where my hearing led.

So for a minutes heedless space
 the universe with troubled stars
 burning to birth or slowing down
 with shouting men and flashing wars
 had narrowed to the interval
 twist step and call and step and call.

30.V.

So far avoided end on foreign field
dwelt under debris of a Gothic spire
or wet hole quickly cut and rudely sealed
with tangled mess of plank and rusty wire
I use each day, repeat the gestures made
in ten years' practice of my quiet trade.

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30-31.V

A scholar's verse assured and cool
for fancy first by Marvell found:
the stanza reaches easy end
the turn is deft, the lines are full.

No more than this for all my care!
The measurement of style with style
the patience of the lens and file
the crumpled paper's wry despair?

But never once to scar the page
with ragged cry of love or pain
or line a man might mouth again
to be a scabard for his rape.

2.VI.40
x5

Abba at chaos hurled a burning shape
chaos recoiled defeated giving way
to the hot light that folded up his mists.
This was the sun and Abba was content,
his limits leapt, and emissary light
stabbing its legions thro unfounded space.
So also stars and moon well disciplined
guarded the marches, charted his demand
Chaos came back, here choked a guttering star
saturated allegiance of aeft-meteors
froze the bare poles clamped down his iron frost-
sealed thro and thro against advancing life order
But abba latent modified his thought-
attempted motions complicate and new
joles that better then mere plunging light
could glance at tangent, darting back and forth
the calm gull cruising down the baffled gale
the shy jaun trotting back into the trees

defying chaos for a certain term
each perfect - and within the limits set
skewing life's grace and easy mastery
a little while, only the flaming sun
remains the longest triumph of his will
Therefore he ventured forms that could achieve
not the mere shape and pace of knotted thought
but thought itself, himself to multiply
thro consciousness, that restless in its turn
might model form from chaos unresolved.

Man caught mere sound that had a use before
birdsong or meteric call of hungry lamb
or consequent upon a changing thing
rock's falling thunder sea's roan voice of storm
made words and music to bind chaos down

Then on a day sent thought into the dark
sleer beyond shapes and qualities of sense
it circled round uncertainly in space

struck Abba's face in shadow and surprised
broke back to mind reporting innocent,
the bulk and features

Abba considered: First my face and heart
Then seeking deeper may discern my will
Knowing this then may turn away open
and fold the darkness up, give wedge of light
into that muddering shapelessness I hate
till chaos whining crouches at my feet
and bids me use him wisely for my ends

So for this instant I may rest content
altho this consciousness may also turn
back on itself till thought has begg and thought
by interbreeding tenuosity
eating its vitals, nurturing no more
on the jet stuff of chaos
as I shall have to trim worm fish or bird
to fit new scopes of being - as desire
within adjusted frames of space and time

Sonnet

I turned from filded stories bright with blood
of how an empire shawnd across the earth,
choked older nations, smothered some at birth
and spelt a freedom they misunderstood.

Remember too the starkling multitude
who filled the cities with the raps of death
as bowed to riches as the crown of worth
and dreamed ^{an} endless leisure sum of good;

I said: "In danger let them face despair:
The rulers are accurst, the people blind."

Then suddenly a voice out of the air
spoke gravely, "Shall you so forswear your kind?
Amid the tangled strands some virtue lies
to touch their magic. Be your enterprise."

5. VI

And do you know a man was born
in your steep street of brick and slate
who made his life a simple chart
that he might keep inviolate

the clean precision of his sight
for curve of hill and field and tree
that he might set their colors down
with delicate economy

Altho tall chimneys leered him on
and gables bound the sky with bars
he came thro' his best years between
two fatal disasters wars

and tho' the hearts of men were torn
he held his patient way alone
and while earth shuddered with despair

matched mass with mass and tone with tone.

5. VI

I walk beneath light jockeyed trees
because men fight for me in France
secure in my philosophy
by pledge of their continuance

6. VI

with Hitler's winged armada near
as crisis hit or crisis rides
he draws eight hundred pounds a year
for cataloguing lantern slides.

Assistant required - Nursery School Belfast

The junior assistant mistress out of a job
 living on the farm with a dotting father
 and a married sister whose husband's in the army
 sees the advertisement in the morning paper
 She copies in schoolgirlish hand
 the testimonial from the rector
 and moons over the red tablecloth
 dreaming of the city and the boys and the fun
 life an endless round of church socials
 with a little not too distasteful work thrown in

The thirty nine year old governess
 leaves the folded newspaper
 on the marble washstand beside the jug and basin
 opens the second drawer under dressing table
 and jumbles for her references
 This may be the end of dull days
 subservient to Mrs Knox - Mason
 not permitted to be intimate with the servants
 laughing at the Major's familiar jokes
 of Fort Sandeman and the muckin wallah
 wiping Mester Frederick's dribbling mouth
 and moving tobacco brown forefinger over the lesson book
 This may be the end of dull days
 may ever be the beginning of a new dullness

Yet a certain regret
 for the antlers over the doors
 and the collection of sticks in the hallstand

strait gnarled and polished Sunday sticks
ashplant, frayed cane, black thorn
sticks that somehow told how people lived
who didn't mind dullness
having led hundreds of years to get used to it
sticks you tapped on stones to recall the dog
when you went walking in the October twilight.

Finding the Blue Lake Monnes 1933

Passing a gate I stopped to ask the way
of a bent farmer grubbing in a field
My tall friend with me had been bid to find
a certain loch within the barren heights
and we had followed the map to the nearest road
that ended in a heap of broken stones.

"A good three miles" the man said shaking
"but no one goes there now except for yowes
strays maybe from the flock in the little hills

So there's no road there nor a track to show?

No. It's grass over nearly all its length
But I remember well when I was wee
that every Christmas Eve the people went
to sail wee kail boats in it for the sport.
The young folk that is, for the way is rough

an heavy gain' if yer win' is bad

But why?

To sail wee ken' boats.

What's the sense

in sailing little boats on Christmas Eve?

Jan better stay at home from the sleet and snow
and have you fun out round the blazing turf
with songs and stories - dances if there's room
It must be a deaft as bitter place to go
in the bad weather winding up the year -
maybe in June if you like - but Christmas Eve!

I cannot tell I disremember now
I am not rightly sure if I ever knew
It was a thing the people always done
but give up down when I was a lad

We talked a little more then thinking him
stept out to make the journey while the sun

still swung above the cloud frequented hecks
climbed over the stones dykes replacing all
the little stones dislodged in getting over
squealcht thro bog cotton & the bleacht bog grass
jumping the best brown streams that cut across
the matted tussocks and the flat scord rocks
my tall friend running steadily ahead
I slowen heusing now & then to wonder
why folk should ever come on Christmas Eve
to sail their ken' boats here, & searching becks
thro all my reading for a reference.

9.6.

Here in a quiet summer afternoon
soaked in the daylong sun of perfect June
I sat between cool walls and idly read
dead man's verse of poets long since dead
it seemed as if time bored and passing by
had left me in the centre of a sigh.

Then as attention crawled from page I heard
three separate sounds as natural as birds
calling its mate or whistling with delight
that leaves were thick that flying clouds were white
not anxiously or crying out its dread
for hawk or kestrel somewhere overhead

Three sounds: the first, a child upon a swing
with creak of rope and grinding metal ring
then someone sawing timber clumsily
with rhythm uncertain, rasp of dandyery
and then a woman just across the way

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passing an open window giving play
to her clear voice in some remembered song.

That instant these wipt out the bitter woe
our days are mocket with, and the gnawing doubt
that pricket my mind with conscientious thought

These sounds: the saw, the lyric, and the swing
made life a simple serviceable thing
not the harsh gust of fear, the loarse obscene
~~deanness~~ ^{impersonal} horror of the mad machine.

Knowing little of the Greeks and Romans
 even their big men in the high days
 only this translation which for me
 has always only the flavor of the translator
 spilled over a tedious mess of commonplace
 Surrey, Dryden, Cowley fitting into place
 with the broad mannerisms of the period.

Knowing little of the Greeks and Romans
 I cannot tell

how poets faced the passing of an epoch
 whether they held the new order, glad to go
 just to what degree they became degenerate
 trivial in subject matter arch and coy
 with epigrams for juvenis or eulogues
 for the fat trusting lover that overwhelmed in
 or lamentations for the good days gone
 nostalgic of the old jokes and titillations,
 the wrinkled cackling whores and the withered peeps.

the damp squibs of the brilliant evenings
 or the epigrams that have lost their edge

Knowing nothing of the Romans and the Greeks
 I am undecided

whether to let my pen repeat and repeat

the supple rhythms I know

for faces and places I was happy with
 or whether to try my teeth on a new music

for my terrible sense of fear

judging in its lilt a new courage maybe

and a bright hope ... for other men

Perhaps a Sumerian had similar thoughts.

14.6.40

I Recriminatory Sonnets

As I foretold as thousands also knew
The soon infection spreads from land to land
since with hide tape and gleaming spear in hand
The negroes march in comical review
first shining bombers spraying searing dew
& then that shuffling cancer swiftly spread
The stricken frontiers at a harsh command
and white with dust the Spanish troops withdrew.

On Soetehof and Karl Marxhof no more
The peoples' banner on the peoples' day.
2 Prague the dumbstruck crowds can only pray
as shaking sky vibrates with engine roar
Now down the depleted boulevards are rolled
southward retreating guns as I foretold.

14.6.40 51

II

As I foretold as thousands also said,
after Madrid then Paris follows plain
how long shall London's freedom then remain
when sunset smears all Europe fiery red?
These were the days hope was as yet not dead
when many gave their rights or lives for Spain
believing not their masters so insane
as thus to thrust the block beneath the lead.

Then Munich when the three old ruffians planned
Daladier Mussolini Chamberlain
to lube the trap with fat luscious bait
to turn his terror to the tempting land
as glut his hunger on the black Ukraine
or better smother for good the workers' state

14.6.40

III

We did not know we could not even guess
That Brussels Oslo Amsterdam should fall
with Poland left a stinking wilderness
before the guard be mounted on the wall
before the rascals looked from the hall
retire in silence curst but conscienceless
while those who once led flock to praise and bless
the Jarist agreement heed the warning call.

We thought for sure the light will sooner break
and these will realise their jeopardy
and those who died in Spain or Germany
will rise renewed, will muster wide awake
undaunted hearts resolving to be free
or dumb in death for baffled freedom's sake.

15.6

53

Epilogue: To You from Us
An English Refugee Poet salutes those that remain

Now the war's worst days begin
certain comfort walls us in
we are glad we took the trip
from the crater's crumbling lip

Back in Europe Oslo fell
Brussels Amsterdam as well
and the French ^{re-criminate} (are fighting hard)
then way into a fascist state
(down the last left boulevard)

while the flood of danger crawls
up London Bridge and Derry's walls
Under Asherwood and I
sit here safely high and dry

Under teaches in a school
where Ox ford accent is the rule

Islerwood is bickering
with Sam Goldwyn's second string

Rows of Yankees round me stand
keen to shake the poet's hand
on this sea of vacant faces
I must smother my commonplaces

But we often sit and think
of the wenchies and the drinks
and merry times when we
praised us on the B.B.C.
but the lust for life prevails
as we've had to trim our sales

You have felt the death wish too
staying where it may come true
but lust for life has sterling worth
in the safest place on earth
So we toast you once before
you hear the gunbutt on the door.

14-15. 6. 40

55

IV

The Phoney War

When war came in the very note and tone
of that loud word there seems an urgent cry
some rose obedient in their rash reply
but that note dies as there was only blown
the state as tedious brass that we have known
as burdened on a base and worthless lie:
beneath the trumpets of democracy
we heard an empire's sweetshops stir and moan.

They told into position, face to face,
gaping from concrete, dropping paper bills;
the old gang safely rooted in its place,
with not a gesture, not an honest word
Jamaica or Karachi might have heard
that offered decent end to apologetic ills.

Tossin : written before the
French surrender.

16.6.

Now at this time when our high bastions fall
you call on Arthur / Cuchulainn call
who never met in life, were wedged apart
by shadowy years whereof there is no chart
but surely in that place where heroes pass
twixt skies unchanging and immortal grass
they held their converse weeping blade with blade
and greeting some new smirch with rann made
they have grown weary now with so much speech
of the flung sword, the duel on the beach
that they are glad to turn from revery
to face the braggarts listing by the sea
that they are eager once again to ply
the fearful trade they got their honours by

Who knows if weary of immortal years
already they among their merry peers
at Breux muster called by Roland's horn
to check the onset in the Norman corn.

20.6 57

V

The Economic War

So for a tedious spell we stood at ease;
life varied little in its mean content.
It seems no sin to wander indolent
along the river by autumnal trees,
concerned with certain colored subtleties
more than the daily millions lavish spent,
or the so young self-conscious lads who went
in uniform and wrote from overseas.

That lulls dull time there was no offer made
to India or to our native old
that lit the heart with hope. Instead of this
we heard with endless windy emphasis
how by the virtues of expanding trade
we'd win the war judiciously with gold.

VI

Now Arthur has come back with Lancelot
and driven southward Roland dies alone
first the deep anger anxious to atone
for all the useless dead now left to rot
by Somme and Meuse, then rage against the plot
the numbing doctards woe who stand have known
our enemy not so gently overthrown,
his infinite ^{felt deep} proven treacheries forgot.

Let these then not be banished from our thought
if we speak not awhile but bind our strength
for the red screaming nights that gape ahead
until the issue is to quitance fought
then such of us as are not safely dead
shall argue out this matter at some length.

The young girl slackens the leash and lingers while
her brown dog checks the gatepost by its smell
aware she must not interrupt or tug
him from the ritual of the lifted leg.

Yet all the time her firm and virgin heart
hugs memory of the boys who pay her court
but my lewd mind suggests alarming state
if they should lift their legs to mark her gate.

22-6

Clerihew

It is interesting to compare the impatience
of some non-latin nations
with the cunning dalliance
of the Italians.

It is a bad thing now to be a poet
 when people have no leisure for our verse
 when the true heart needs song but dare not show it
 caught in bad days and dreading even worse

Before this time the chiefly disregarded
 always we found a friend or two to praise
 and in some measure thought ourselves rewarded
 for the tense anguish of creative days.

But now our friends are dumb, or come not, scattered
 by call and threat, by coiling of the war.
 The little fences round our peace are shattered
 - as our late talk packet sessions are no more.

We might continue hoping that our labor
 be well against the drought and found again
 when man shall use to succour his spent neighbor

our ancient rapture wrung from love and pain

But even that slow hope in dark maturing
 chance bomb or gunfire may eliminate
 not only us but what we thought enduring
 against the heaviest knocks of careless fate

It would be better not to be a poet
 and turn our hearts and minds to time's demands
 to have no more than one man's worth and know it
 with rifles in our unencumbered hands.

24.6
[begun in March]

After the black frost and the bitter days
waiting for war behind the shuttered light
the child heart hunkered at the dying blaze
eyes aching for approach of certain night
when sudden noon in February was bright
and thaw'd life runneld down familiar ways
we sought the liberation of the height
to move a moment in the healing rays

The cold tomb life forgotten with its fear
in sense flush'd rapture of rekindled blood
we wandered on the little hills apart,
but chill against the languid open heart
came breathless dread that with the springing year
the sluice of war might break in sudden flood.

Taught by a time of pitiful event
when the best dreams of men appear accurst
to hope for nothing, to expect the worst
now all our generous impulses are spent
and god and nature seem indifferent
I plan and space my heart's defences, first
a cynic corps of snipers bred and nurs'd
in disillusion's merry regiment.

Behind their posts I loose and jettison
the lumber of responsibility
that doubled dread like nervous sense of sin
so on the inner lines I may be free
to chose position, back towards the sun,
when sirens warble and the bombs begin.

Sprawling in sunshine with our German friends
 on the warm fragrant grass within the ditch
 duply an Irish chieftain to defend
 his rock topped camp four hundred years ago
 I gaze at leisure into the vast blue
 where great white clouds blow urgently across
 and hear lulls voices telling over open
 stones that memory shelters from the past
 not past remote of fierce and shouting men
 raising their banners in this famous place
 but gentle stories of Hans Andersen
 Then on a dark night -

drowsy bees cruise by
 a fat fly bends a grass blade as goes on
 Cuckoo out of sight are singing

came a knock
 a rapped girl all dripping from the rain

A German boy remembers his mother's voice

speaking beside his bed in gathering dusk
 and you remember reading in an attic
 a thick leaft tattered book with garish plates
 and I remember my sister reading to me

Now we are lying lopsided in the sun
 on the warm fragrant grass at summer's height
 and the whole world is perilously poised
 on a sheer cliff of terror. These our friends
 may wake tonight to hear the policeman's knock ... *
 and messersmidts may race across the sky
 or even tomorrow it may turn to rain

* Siegfried Alexander interned 25/6/40

Set fair swings left to change: a rising wind
 Tumbles the clouds that white and moving slow
 make the long weeks of sun magnificent
 a sudden shroud of grey between the hills
 splashes in jumping spots upon the ground
 The busy people on their noon concerns
 shew'd women with their baskets, travellers
 with stabby leather, bowler-hatted men
 market on the collar with bright golden thread
 hurry to shelter; message boys retire
 from corner rendezvous of joy and bike
 with older lads who stood round clustered pubs
 and under the grey awnings huddle close
 like fowl beneath a tilted country cart
 silent and dreary used to being bored.
 The wind dies off. The rain falls steadier
 flattening the crumpled paper at the kerb,
 until the sun drowsed and exultant
 is dead and stabby as a blind man's wife.

The fall of Paris! Sudden consciousness
 Tears open the scrap album of my mind.
 A hairy satyr's fist - grabs beauty's breast.
 I gamut the revulsions and despairs.
 But in the later hours remembering
 my pity peeks its grief when I recall
 the dusty workman in the second class
 who grasped the ropes I offered in bad french
 and sealed our comradeship by breathing hard
 on the ground metro window, with blunt digit
 scoring the symbol of the soviets
 What happens to the Louvre concerns me much
 what happens to Picasso rather less
 but what has happened to that workman?
 Was he already shot for sabotage
 and to the thousands like him whose they hang
 their thin guilts in the sun street after street?

26.6.40

Translations & Variations of Voltaire

Epitaph

The world has lost Penelope
who pleasure loved and art and truth.

The gods who gave so lavishly
forgot to add eternal youth.

Epigram (Jean Freron)

The other day by chance I saw
a rattlesnake like Evelyn Waugh,
and wondered long what might betide
until the snake curled up and died.

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a M. de la Harpe (1765)

With eloquence you praise this house
It glories in your offering
- Thus Sophocles who in his spring
engarlanded old Eschylus.

a M. G. rigny. [author of 'Mides']

Your songs the nobles deprecate,
we praise who are your peers -
Alas you know the ears of the great
are after the great ears.

Variation on V's lines from Seneca

There is nothing after death.
There is neither night nor morn.
After life where can I be?
Where I was ere I was born.

Variation on trans. from Seneca.

The court of Plato, the three headed dog,
the fearful serpents ever poised to strike
Styx Phlegethon are merely children's tales,
are tedious dreams, are words devoid of sense.

Epigram

27-6-40

That lachrymatory adept
old Jeremiah wept and wept
foreseeing with prophetic eye
whom he would be translated by.

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26.6
Translation of Voltaires' trans. of Lope de Vega

The Vandals and the Goths in garish way
have scorned the attic and the Latin stance.
Our ancestors have also gone astray:
our ancestors were crude barbarians

Abuse Triumphant, art and reason flee
and he who'd like to write with decency
with art with taste will have no influence
will live disdained and die in indigence
I find that British ignorance to please
I must forget Terence Euripides
and the great classic masters I have had.
Senseless my style when writing for the mad.

My master public I must serve with care
must give him what he loves for ready cash
make his desire not mine the whole affair
and seek success which can but make me blush.

25/26.6

Cormac : Ballad the First

Achta spake to her husband: Last night I dreamt my head
was stricken from my body - and out of the gap there grew
the mightiest oak in the forest with heavy branches that spread
to the uttermost coasts of Erin and high in the arching blue;

but a great wave out of the ocean crested and broke it down
and from its gnarled writhings another monster rose,
not yet so vast in stature as the oak tree overthrown
and a bitter wind from the westward smote it with terrible blow,

and it too fell in disaster: O husband rede me this.
Her art replied with caution: meseems I can spell the truth
The son unborn you carry shall make all Erin his
and rule with love and mercy delighting sage and youth

yet end at the Lands of a foeman from over the Eastern Sea
leaving a son to follow not yet so great in his strength
but earning the praise of the people and honoring thee and me
to fall beneath the shields of the Fenians, Janons, defeated at length.

25/26/28 - 6

Ballad the Second

When Art was slain in the battle
on the Janons field of the Swine
and the traitor son of his brother
had shattered the Connacht line

Achta the dreaming woman
his spouse and the daughter dear
of the greatest nester in Connacht
who hammered the warriors' gear,

fled from the spears and the trumpets
to seek for her husband's friend
Dune the chief of Corann
to succeed her state and defend

as Art had urged her earnest
for the sake of the child unborn
when he cried farewell at parting

on the eve of the battle morn

Alone in her rocking wren car
save but for a serving maid
she fled from the jubilent banners
dejected and afraid

but ere the forth month horses
had reacht the Dun of her quest
she knew her hour was upon her
and bade the horses rest

The serving woman led them
aside to a tangled wood
and coucht her wren in a clearing
on a wilty bed and made

and there in the place call'd Creewaph
her weary labor was done
and she bore on her to a hero,
to the Hundred Fighters son.

When she had rejoict at the man-child
and laid each restless limb
she bade her serving woman
watch over her and him

for she was sore aweary
of the day's distress and the flight
and fain would sleep a little
neath the branches and stars of the night

but the maiden was also aweary
as her watching gaze grew slack
and she also slept in the forest
right in the skewolf's track

who roand in the gloom to succor
the hunger of her brood
and on her ere the day was breaking
she found them in the wood.

She rose and snuffled round them
as all asleep they lay
The woman white from her labor
and the terror haunted day

The sewing needle turning and turning
Between with just shut eyes
The puckered baby silent
hush with life's new surprise

The shewolf gazed at the woman
surveyed their weeperless hands
then gently lifted the baby
by the firm bound swaddling bands

and bore him safe to her haven
a cave in a lonely hill
where the snow lasts into the springtime
and the winter winds are shrill

The mother woke with the dawning
and screamed in her anxious alarm
for her son was gone from her bosom
and the shelter of her arm

Then she roused the sleeping maiden
and they sought till the sun was high
for sight of the stolen man-child
and the glade where he might lie

But never a trace discovered
till it seemed he well might be
in a hidden forth enchanted
and bound to the Seenaun Stee

Then while they still were seeking
came Lona of Corann chief
pledged to her aid by her husband
to share her pitiful grief

He set his gillies seeking
by cairn and stream and glen
but the little child had vanished
from the tangled paths of men

So he brought the mourning women
to bide by his friendly hearth
the wife of art defeated
accused the rights of her birth

And she in awhile remembered
the shapes and hopes of her bride
and knew that her stolen baby
nasty at return to her side

To fulfil the strength and wonder
of the oak with the branches spread
over the oaks of Erin,
over the high king's head

So while she had still hopeful
and the slow foot years trailed by
a hunting gillie of luna
to the wolfhome wandered nigh

and there mid the tumbled boulders
where a patch of grass was found
yelping
from snarling cuts and a baby
rolled on the trampled ground

So he lifted the child on his shoulder
and turned to his master's home
and so the wolfhounds after
jeanlers and friendly come

and thus is the tale remembered
in song and ballad and rime
of Cormac the child of the Wancar
and King in the older time.

28.6.40

Midsummer Past.

The white hens gather patient at the gate.

The two white geese pass arrogantly thro
the hush assembly, angry being late.

The waterbutt beside the kitchen door,
with last night's shower near full, holds all the blue
cloud sky & judges from a sycamore
a pale leaf twirls and spins thro the warm air,
falters and drops and floats securely there.

The roses overblown along the wall
with scorch from edges let curled petals fall,
on the crackle dusty earth. a yellow snail
ventures from ditch lush grass to cross the road;
and there are spiders on the last turf load,
grey cobwebs on the rusty square cut nail.

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30.6.40

Sonnet I On Reading Wordsworth
after a long walk in the country side.

Seeking for Wordsworth's resonant counterpart
of stream and mountain, bird and wayside flower,
and all the marvellous forms that had the power
to mask the plight of Europe from my heart,
just in the quiet permanence of art
and waiting guenchless to renew that hour
I followed where he led from birch hung bower
to lonely peak where the vast thunders start.

Familiar stanzas woke remembered joy,
but all the passion needed. Endlessly
the poet, out of habit, must employ
a harsh luxuriance, puritan excess,
for the sharp instants of sheer loveliness
that will not tarry for philosophy.

Sonnet II

Yet tired with Duddon and its dreary flow
chills with the dismal regrets of the leath
who moralise logarithmically of death
or die untimely in deep drifts of snow
sick even of the meanest flowers that blow
to beauty disregarded underneath
analysis verbose, I catch my breath
when some heart-breaking lines a radance throw
over dark places of experience
with joyful triumph.

And ~~she~~ in Britain's need
in those high moments when she stood alone
against a braggart tyrant's insolence
and would not deign to parley or to plead
he spoke his hope out in prophetic tone.

30.6.40

If I could keep my hope as bright
as stars in a november night
and let my troubles take ban
like dandelion free of care
I'd wear the incidence of grief
like raindrops on a cabbage leaf

Poems in July

1st July

Sonnet : Cushtendall Fair

Where four roads meet beneath the Curfew Tower
The farmers gather for the monthly fair
to talk at corners or to prod and stare
at calf or buttock dripping from the shower.

Beneath brownessian covers sucklings cover
in painted carts draw up with rigid care
and grunt and snuffle for the warm wet air
as their dark masters bargain hour by hour

With hands in pockets or with twisted sticks
The farmers speak of well stacked hay with pride
concerned no whit with victory or defeat
for they are Irishmen and Catholics
and with dull nose like jacks step aside
as khaki lorry rattles down the street.

2.7.40

Sonnet Quiet

We sought the stillest haven that we know
from the loud city's unregarded noise
of wheel and flexon, lift and dynamo
that only in the midnight hour annoys

when some late lover jumbles with his gears
or thoughtless down the street with window wide
one gapes for wonder that he never hears
and turns the squeaking knob from side to side

But in the mind's best moments are unheard
on print or talk or labor all intent
here where a passing wasp or tree-hid bird
asserts its separate nature insolent

twigsnap in hedgerow or returning rook
playskeroc with certain love with the wisest book.

2.7.40

Sonnet

By the sea's edge on gravel and on sand
I pace at leisure marking out with care
the steps of one unknown before me there
and weighing colored stone with idle hand
white flint ~~or~~ veined pebble that the land
surrenders to the ocean's wear and tear
and by some magic I am pledged to share
in a rest peace I do not understand.

Tonight an empire hunches to decay
its mode of thought and living growing stale
yet free from trivial rumour of dismay
or threat of fate I care less pace the shore
where the great waters beat with endless roar
and Carthage is a long forgotten tale.

2.7.40

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Custardum

(from a discarded poem)

And where the valley opens to the sea
with whitewash rock and weedbrown estuary
where grey gulls face the wind along the sand
a tall man mends his nets with nimble hand.

2/3. 7. 40

Sonnet

The Guess

^{the} At a door of the bus waiting room they stood
two farmers late returning from the fair
They talked of how the prices offered there
were, all in all considered, very good
They spoke about the war, the cost of food
what further taxes they might have to bear,
of shoes abandoned, of Pat Kelly's mare
-and the distressing scarcity of wood.

All this with certain lack of interest
repeating phrases they had heard all day
till one, the smaller, gave a chuckling laugh
and told the other how he'd rightly guessed
the weight of Mr. Turnley's "Dolly Mary"
She was eleven hundred and a half.

3. 7. 40

Glendun

I saw the valley - patch by colored patch
potatoes oats and grazing fleck and lay
the whitevested houses with rain shabby thatch
the bigger houses slated blue and grey
the shorn sheep nibbling round the mounds of gorse
the red calves at the gate, the lonely horse
and one man rowing slow across the bay.

I thought of Europe, of the bitter fate
that hung above us ready to descend
my generation cursed, unfortunate
-and waiting for a miserable end
each step regretted as it nearer came
the uselessness of the apportioned blame
my failure or the failure of each friend.

And walking in this valley in July
I made a prayer who do not often pray

living by no revealed philosophy
but by slow knowledge gathered day by day -
that when fate strikes God should in mercy spare
from the abyssal thralldom of despair
this little valley and this quiet bay

Sonnet

We stole five days from terror and despair
despair and terror of a waiting world
before the screaming demons of the air
against stern Britain's citadel are hurled

and in the hundred hours our open eyes
were given to the meadowsweet and swift
the scrolling alternations of the skies
the small waves curling and the turps adrift

the woman calling to the hungry calf
the broken walls that guard the nameless dead
seeking, no more, - a simple epigraph
as amulet for what might lie ahead

"They loved the little world they might not save
yet in its quiet wisdom they were brave"

Sonnet To Irishmen North and South

We said harsh things of Erin that were true
 to the objective and unbiast mind:
 her sentimental showmanships; her blind
 refusal of solutions overdue;
 her slavish homage to a shiftless crew
 who batten on old quarrels ill defined,
 and make their task done she does not bend
 her weakening jagged tugs in jagged strong and new.

Now in the heat and terror of the hour
 when liberty collapses land by land
 awake and startled must at once decide
 what course will offer even chance to stand;
 who'd then be brave enough to see her cover
 with Czech and Pole to save his stubborn pride?

Retrospect

I have of course spoken repeatedly of these days,
 having been correct in my analysis all along,
 having seen everything happen as foretold
 Thanks to the proper books.

I have solicited support for the Peace Ballot,
 that was, looking back, too much an affair of Church Halls;
 speaking in Coop Guilds, and youth organisations,
 being commended by the rector.

wrote letters to the press protesting, demanding
 attended committees with professors and comrades,
 single track mind colliding with single track mind,
 and I not handy with the synthesis.

Yes, we have scuffled with rowdy undergraduates,
 showering leaflets, eager to break up our meeting;
 and later nodded to them in the Gymnasium,

applying for a commission.

I remember a resolution I pronounced
to the No 8 branch of the District A.E.U.,
even the treasurer counting the weekly dues
supported the resolution.

Those days when I lectured on art and Poetry
I always without fail dragged in my King Charles's head,
was betrayed often into flamboyant gestures,
but was nevertheless sincere.

I remember the Basque dancers and their costumes,
and taking the tickets at doors of draughty halls;
Mandala-skyline with a morbid love of foreign stamps,
Aurora dancing, Dolores dismal.

I remember the times I made for the People's front;
debates with the P.P.U. and the Labor Party;
my wife busy addressing duphated circulars,

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packing clothes and soap for the refugees.

Yes, we saw it coming. The black cloud spreading.
and then the little wave of Austrian and German Jews,
some flashy like local furniture dealers, others gentle,
seldom talking of Buchenwald.

At Munich time in the days of the Lambeth Walk,
I remember the lull before the thunderstorm,
and how tears came into my eyes when I saw the first
sandbags round the City Hall.

I even remember sitting alone one midnight,
when my wife was snatching a day or two at the coast,
hearing the radio reporting mobilisation
and men marching to closed frontiers.

and how for half an hour I was lonely and sad,
Thinking of my wife and our busy years together
and the time we had spent on committees willing good,

our talk of Massine and Dali,

our hopes for me: and how the men marching were marching
against the flimsy frontiers of Poetry and art;
and when at last in September the war came
we breathed easily again.

It began almost exactly as we had foreseen,
but with differences. The Party line wobbled,
and, those were not in the party, we wobbled too;
the dialectic not rooted deep enough.

and how we jeered at the businessmen's war of blockade
and reconnaissance flights, until with spring the ice broke,
and Norway and Holland (just names), a Belgium (Mendelvic),
went flat under the Nazi tanks.

we began to take things a little more seriously;
my wife involved in plans for evacuation,
my chief concern for the future of my verses

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-dropping copies at safe addresses.

and the A.R.P., the badge, the triangular bandage,
the decency of ordinary people caught surprised
in an earnest comradeship of reports and stretchers;
and our friends among the German refugees.

And then we stole off for a brief holiday,
snatching a breath of green fields and tangled hedges,
men cutting hay with scythes, rooks cawing, wild roses,
walks along the sand,

deck chairs in the sunshine between the showers;
moving among people who didn't believe in the war
caught in a fantastic timelag of race and creed and
geographical isolation.

and we were very much in love with each other
in the easy way of tested, successful marriage,
loving the same things, well written books, and jokes,

and the color of wild flowers.

And then a telegram came recalling my wife
to take her expected place in the organization,
and we decided I was to remain a little longer
with the seagulls and the speedwell.

And that chapter came to a belated and shabby end
with a wave of the hand as the bus went round the corner,
and I walked up the hill to the house among the trees,
to my books and verses again

See "Desert Cactus" by Julia Heyneman 1934
hope references
in margin.

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5-7-40

Desert Cactus

Arthur Putnam speaks [A.D. 1914]

You damned reporters always get my goat
trying to pickle a life in a double column
with blacker type for the bits we'd like to forget
but I'm in the mood tonight for a sketch of talk
so I'll tell you more than you may care to use

Of course I was a lazy boy at school [P.5]

played hooky, broke down fences, fell from trees
one loss when I was nine was maybe the cause [P.6]

of my retirement from the world of art
Yes I've retired for good. It's time to say
that art retires from me. But let that pass
You probe that point and I'll be quarrelsome
So careful kid. Lay off the tragical stuff.
Reminds me, there's a bottle in that box
a neighbor brought it with some other junk
to help a lonely wastrel to forget

his friends and triumphs - most of all his friends
to enjoy the dismal company of his soul.

I used to think the soul was the shape of a ham,
a yellow ham you'd see hung up in a store
and even now I am not sure I'm wrong.

I never could adapt myself to school
for they used words there when I wanted things

[P. 5] that you could pull apart to see how they worked
like frogs or beetles. Did you learn at school

[P. 14] just how to pick a tarantula up
safely like this on the back with finger and thumb
yet you can count way up into the thousands,
divide and multiply - There's a dirty joke
just peering over the rim of my lazy mind.

[P. 15] I reapt pumas once at twenty dollars a time

[P. 9] Drifted into surveying where I found
in the clean places in the woods at night

[P. 84] the delicate forms lie tried to recreate
with these two hands in clay and stone and bronze

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Bronze casting! Was that ever taught at school
would teach you all the chemistry you'd need

I had to work the whole thing up myself [P. 62]

tho later learned a deal from Luigi Patti [P. 98]

but that was when I'd got over the stiffest bits.

could make a good job of it - or so they say.

Now art. We're onto art. It's safer ground
than the thick swamps of personality -

I know for instance never trust a friend.

He'll do you down - just out of jealousy

but not vindictive, just his lesser nature,

that he can't help. I had good friends I thought

folk I was kind to, glad to help a bit

and they all did me dirt, pretending that

it was to help me to become myself

as if ever I was anybody else

even now when I am only half a man

But the half that works O Boy you'd never guess

the nasty things the half that's left can do.

But art now. Well you see the muck I've made
the crawling creatures and the bounding things
I put breath into. God and I are buddies
But so far He has got the wider range
including shapes I'd never set my hand to.
Not that I blame Him. Artists take no sides.
All's one to them, the preacher or the lecher.
God often makes those one, in point of fact.

Then I was working well tips to my sketch,
was getting what I wanted and where I wanted,
[p. 81 they] that they tried the scent of Europe to draw me off,
the slick Italian finish, the French finesse,
the sugary buggery shapes of the hissing boys
but I had harder stuff, the coiling life
stirring under the hide. A lump of clay
I'd make it crouch and scream or leap and fall;
but the little fellows living under my shadow,
painters of candy cartoons and calendars
were just plain scared of life. So they settled me.

They laid a surgeon butcher to open my skull [P. 182]
and scoop out the very bit where my genius lay
like you'd core an apple before you ate it,
the best that belonged to the tree and the sleeping seeds
just that they wrestled out of me to leave
good succulent sexless stuff they'd batter on.
But the old tree mockt them. I am still a man.

O yes my art! But this, just this is it:
the animal moving easily under the skin,
the living squirming sweating laughing thing
you put a shirt on so it doesn't scare you.

Yes I have been abroad. I mentioned it;
sold troupes to the stiffest stunts in Paris
P. 88 played in a family orchestra in Rome
with mandolin guitar and castanets
to draw my benjo strumming from the west
Yes sir they were good folks good honest folks
rented garlic eaters fond of wine and olive

not like these dust veined Yankees. For they lie
who say we should be stingy, dry and tough:
The Cactus - that's my totem's fat and clean
but has its prickles too and does it need them?

[P. 195] And so I live alone on Ocean Beach
in crazy shanty without a relative.
My wife and kids are somewhere in the States;
my mother too. But I'm in eternity
where I belong and where they can't come near.

[P. 202] Grace came to see me but I hauled her out
[P. 201] her and the frightened kids. My sister's a fool.

[P. 200] But there are other women who are kind,
+ 205 and not afraid to give eternity
the little moments that they have for souls.

I swallow and move on, like a boa constrictor
just now a firm fleshed girl is being digested.
Soon I'll be hungry for another a dozen steers

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I had a wife once but I drove her out [P. 202]
she tried to help me but I grew afraid
that I might strangle her; and so did she.

[P. 176
or seq.] I had good friends who tried to meet the price
the cunning herlot life placed on her charms
but she has hurt me. I must surely die
having enjoyed some moments to excess,
must rot by inches who was all alive.

Here take you little plaster tapers
It may remind you later of a man
that made a living thing that ate him up.

Get out now or by Christ I'll murder you
and put that bottle down. I got a thirst.

6.7.40

I sit here gazing at the tranquil bay
as slow waves curl and crumple on the shore,
and grieve for all the things I cannot say,
they have been said so many times before

10.7-

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At noon I sat upon a heaped rock
where the great waves with crests blown off in spray
swung round and poured across the bright brown wrack
and thought: this is the shape of history.

At sunset walking up a tangled lane
with honey suckle fragrant on the air
the farthest hills sharp cut and firmly drawn
I thought: this is our moment's metaphor.

landscape at Stower - July

Blue sea as sky with white puffs over Garrow;
 a brilliant sun upon the emerald fields
 that shadow yellow patches of the rock,
 first limestone white then brown basalt layers
 ground with deep shadows where streams fall unheard,
 the little houses white across the bay,
 the white gulls flashing in the shining air,
 and skylarks singing close against the sun.
 Then cooler breath with randsdrops on the hand
 a black cloud with low eaves fringed with light
 found over Derigedon steen in the west-
 most of the flat tops and winding strips around
 the slopt escarpment plucking sheep from view
 as a black shadow travels down the glen
 coils in a steady stream like dirty water
 down both sides of the glen as casts black arms
 over the bright fields and the lead dull sea
 each house recedes in mist, is blotked out

only the grey gulls calling, flying lower
 remain of that clean world. But to the north
 the rounded hills and fields near Custerdall
 are glimmering ~~and~~ in the west and gleaming air.

10. 7.

Nocturne.

Within the Tall Camp's gold circle

I read my books til one o'clock

Then the chapter being ended

before I climb the narrow stairs

I go to the door and look at the night

it is nearly the darkest hour

at this season

nevertheless the light has not wholly gone from the sky
which is still too pale for the stars to be very bright.

The trees round the house are motionless

beech fir silver birch and mycamose

save for a leaf rusted by a fluttering bat

but at a distance I can hear

the far pulse of the sea following its endless purposes

and on the hill to the right

a tireless cornerake last of his clan

repeating his harsh incomprehensible message

and down the road just outside the village

the troops are backing and loading their lorries

I hear the trundle and rumble as the guns start

on their long journey back to Portadown

their three days' practice over.

I close the door, climb the narrow stairs

and quietly undress

for fear of waking my sleeping parents

and as I lie in the cool bed

in the half dark room with the gray windows

I can still hear the lorries jangling now

gone down the road to Waterfoot

and the cornerake tireless

and the sea oblivious of the comings & goings of men.

10.7.

The bowd man with his scythe in a tangle of weeds
looks up from his steady labor for a moment
to talk of events. He is an air raid warden
'down in the village with the other boys'

The other night at the barnacks the Serpent told them
that raiders had been over just before dawn:
the coastal watchers had seen them and reported
and they might come again any time now

He thought the Norwegian tanks would be little use
with these high ditches and the hilly roads
Besides there's fellows here if they're rightly roused
can place a steel trunk or blow up a bridge
as neat as a reference and all get clear away -
haul up a collyum and go home to bed
Then he went back to his scything, rasping the blade,
and swinging in his stride as the log swells fell
just as his father's cleared the selfsame field

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11.7

My gaze that once particular
tract vein of leaf and curve of stem
reflection of a single star
on weed clumps in a field of corn

now opens to a wider keen,
is only stemmed and satisfied
by the broad shoulders of a glen,
or colors of the changing tide.

12.7

Grey sea, grey sky;
two things are bright:
the gull-white foam,
the gull foam-white.

After a sunset of magnificence
 undisciplined a boisterous play of hue
 the vast sky scabbled with winds violence
 the headland orange, sea a turquoise blue
 and far horizon mauve that shades away,
 bearing a rainbow shaft abrupt, to grey

The next day follows in a mist of rain
 that never ends but breaks in frequent shower
 lashes the leaves to frenzy, fills the lane
 with gurgling rumbles, beating down the bay
 as the wind alters with each dismal hour
 that yawns across a wasted holiday.

The third day the low sky is dome of cloud
 that crams the valley hides the mountain crest
 and mingles with the sea now rough and loud
 with cold bleak breakers on its tumbled breast
 that strike the shingle with a drapping roar
 and spill brown foam upon the wind bare shore

A Meditation on Pain

flout
 occasions ~~mark~~
 When harsh events deny the easy faith
 in generous providence
 that seemed to give even to untimely death
 the sign and value of intelligence,
 when good men suffer while the world goes on
 its ox-dull way and will not turn aside
 save but to mark the crucified
 or fling the thoughtless stone
 then at this pass a man must, endure
 the thronging torments of times wilderness
 assess and reassess
 the little truth of which he still is sure.

This then is true whatever else may fail
 distorted turn to poison, or avail
 no more against the cuffs and buffeting
 fleet from its unconscious qualities of things:
 the only human absolute is pain;

That man is cursed who willingly allows
his hands or others that he might restrain
to press the bloody crown upon the brows.

No universe could offer grace or love
for men to cherish if these were not weighed
on the long balance of each opposite
our senses need to yearn or be afraid,
to account the sharp and peace the joy above
or choose the lesser joy for lack of wit;
the pang accepted till the joy be won
joy known as joy but by comparison.

Granted the schoolman's point. But life is such
that from the things of nature grief's enough:
to bruise or wound endured from sharp or rough
from flame and water, change of sea or sky
the hair that flows along the tracks of touch
hand touch tongue touch and touch of ear and eye
to these add aught as it is sudden overmuch.

117
man binds to men, not only thro' the loins
that chain him to the ape ^{by dark degrees} that cracks his fleas
the very nature of creation joins
his breath and fortune to their qualities
the objects of his passion also these.

No frosty isolation of a tower
can stretch the canvas for his scope or power.

Yet man must live within a world of things
things seeming lifeless to his narrow eyes,
things having motion, having form or wings
that set the outer limits to his skies,
things he may give an order that supplies
the ^{decreasing} ~~decreasing~~ comfort till the hour he dies.
He ~~learns to judge~~

He learns to judge and estimate at length
the hurt and nurture and the worth and strength
of every gesture's upstrokes he may start
by the sword disc within his simple heart

that marks the belated curves they may be make
or jagged rhythms of failure or mistake.

It is enough for him
to thread his patent steps with anxious care
thru the intricate air
of weekend being and its steep cliffs of dream.

No other man dare claim
by law or right or any other name
to thrust between him and his own intent
with hair's impediment
erective shot from an event
that never has been his
to which he neither signals war or peace.

This then the solid Keystone of the arch
whenever man may march or countermarch
with resolution undoubted, free
to seek the course his senses urge him find

where he may yet achieve the conscious mind
only the knowledge of necessity.

Out of my Time

13-7-40
[1.30 A.M.]

I set myself a threefold task
to try my suppleness of mind;
first, from behind a painted mask
to imitate another's thought
by logic of his nature signed;
as then to tell a story caught
eavesdropping over an eunuch
with competent simplicity;
and then to map a track of thought
that coiled or spun within my brain
at recent moments and unsought:
a brief analysis of pain.
These things be done as well or ill
as I have had the wit and skill;
and resting now I hope I can
declare with something near to pride,
I am an honest journeyman,
apprentice boy, but qualified
to do whatever job may come
under my forefinger and my thumb.

{ Revised version in Black Book } 13.7.

I spy [To be weeded later]

For fifteen days my cobweb spun
from Waterfoot to Cuslandun
has caught and lettered many things
besides the flies' prismatic wings

The fungus crumbling round the door
Bright colored seeds of sycamore
white bindweed's flower, the foxglove left
of all save topmost bell bereft
The fuchsia and the whelton next
The rattling tap the plumber fixt
The foot upon the gravel gate
The dribbling muzzles thro the gate
The fat sheep struggling in the dip
by two men held in iron grips
The smoke track of a venisit ship
and Scotland's coast too plainly seen
new fields of corn an acid green

omit

omit as Red Bay Castle's ruin seen
where Pierce M' Donnell's landed here
the way tails darting on the sand
the men who hauled the nets to land
with bladderwrack and crabs and jugs
the black calf's melancholy cry
the seaweed with the rising tide
like tea leaves floating: the new bride
who sat upon a Lemnarriffe wall
and let her rings be seen by all
the boy who shouted he was fit
to handle horses: cuckoo's spit
upon a weed with leaves gone red
the rainbow's end on Ganna Head
the broken rainbow on the sea
the shape of one peculiar tree
bleasted or twisted where hot cows
find ease from fly tormented brows
the cream horse in the thistle field
the ^{near} ~~dark~~ land concrete well concealed

123
but just like that I heard at home
the spilt milk pattern of the foam
the gress that ^{curled} welketh with leads in air
and Lunnegan always there
with a flat ~~top~~ ^{the} summit neatly cut
the shower that fell on Waterfoot
from the black cloud that filled the glen
as ink falls up a ^{fountain} parker pen
omit [The skylarks singing in the sun

omit [The bridge we know at Cuslendun
but in a watercolor clean
loved all the more the place is seen
flirting dust of butterflies
the black birds' and the curlews' cries
the seagulls wheeling in the rain
the drops that cheat the birds in vain
the mended nets spread out to dry
the spinning, atlas of the sky
the great red caves at Lunnegan

omit [The coal at twenty bags a ton

omit this page

backsides of bullets running off
the puffed cow's consumptive cough
the letter of the squealed farms
the naked signposts lacking arms
the tall tall names on gables now
obliterated any how
the fat men with the empty shops
where all the persing buses stop
the grocer's shop where all the girls
are like the father wigg with curls
cut hay and honey suckle smell
the dog outside the Lens Hotel
the soldiers strolling thro the town
so very young ^{so} very brown
the rows of tents behind the links
grass stand with buttercups a park
and cannon trundling muzzle bound
with sacks: the badge my father found
among the meadowsweet at day
the games of cards the natives played

The house we lasted one afternoon
where Jidil swept a rebel tune

All these and more, but over all
the sounds and scents of Lushendall
the rooks asserting in the trees
the privilege of families
the old families seek of peat
[that I prefer to scents no sweet]
and Turnley's tower where four roads meet

Now I have market as sorted these
in all their varied qualities
I'll find a plea to dress them out
against the months of thirst and drought
the knots to the cobweb net I spun
from Waterfoot to Lushendall.

For patient hours I used a reed
to find if Dryden still was dead
yes all these things with Latin names
dedicated to Charles and James
I'll never need to scan again
that academic weatherworn.

So with relief and joy I found
Wordsworth more hospitable ground
the Prelude spread a friendly field
to which no visit failed to yield
a fragrant fist of colored stuff
even when the going was most rough.

To these I add the plowman's play
of Mr. Bell in 'Corduroy'
that glittering thriller 'I am for Sale'
and 'Turpin' Pident's smutty tale
and sundry verse of J. E. Brown
and sundry verses of my own

Valediction

Now goodbye to swells of maver
cloven thistles nettles mingled
with the long grass rain bedabbled
to the sheep upon the hillside
and the rain cloud in the valley
and the smoke among the branches
curling from the fire newly kindled

And goodbye then to the sea shore

to the haunted huts that offer
host cards taffee spades and matches

to the little slated shelter
with the women sitting knitting

and the boats above the tide mark

green and blue - The Audrey, Dolly

and the old man telling stories

of the years when he was stoker
in the British Merchant Navy

So goodbye then to the village
with the postmen standing talking
to the men from the mountain
men and dog from mist-wrapped Ma
and the shop that sells tobacco

jam, and salted fish like cardboard
all the walls are rows of bottles
and the shop I bought my prayers

where the small red light is burning
always in the smoky kitchen
at the image of its virgin

or some legendary picture

and goodbye to honey ruckle
with the cuckoo spit upon it
and the meadowsweet and jushua
flaming gipsy of the ledges
with the flaring blood drop earrings
and the leafy-tree of apples
spreading right across the roadway

standing tiptoe you may reach them
but they still are green and bitter
and goodbye then to the turf stacks
up against the cottage gable

to the old rheumatic farmer
calling in the cows for milking

and the reaper standing idle
tyres a-brim with rusty water
and the rake upon the haystack

and the little fluffy sparrow
juller out upon the roadway
but returned to leafy heaven
and the fluffy snow white goslings
sitting quiet in the meadow

and the rain foreboding rainbow
and the half moon yellow miled
high above the flat topped mountain
and the little fields of Garra
when the rain blew off as shews them
shining emerald and yellow

131

and goodbye to look as starting
↳ the trees or crowding homeward
↳ the cold pale gold of sunset

I have been your friend and neighbor
for a fortnight rich and varied
sun and rain more rain than sunshine
So it is with you I leave you
for the roaring gritty city
with the gossip and the rumor
and the faces pale and anxious
waiting for the sure invader
waiting for the certain raider
paper strips across the window.

Tho my city surely perish
man and nature shall not perish
There will blossom from the ashes
thistles nettles even juncos
as a man may find an order

fleat upon his aimless being
drawn from nature and abstracted
from the notion of the seasons

I for one shall not be sorry
at the end of endless viles
with their talk of bridge and tennis
and the pawnshops and the bookies

I would have a race of joiners
blowers teachers electricians
every one potential artist
wiring circuits, writing poems
with the weather in their faces
and the seasons passing over
giving nourishment and purpose
to their generous endeavor

Incident

lit my pipe at Ballymena
 pufft it all the way to town
 loaded with a strong tobacco
 tarry black and nigger brown

Then the man beside me spluttered
 grabbed the window gasped for air
 while I sat - a Lens beclouded
 Covenanters do not care

Then the sky grew dark and darker
 and the rain came beating in
 while the sister shivered, wondered
 if contempt were mortal sin

Twice she sneezed & twice she shivered
 shut the window then sat down
 silent, chinking beads, remonstrant
 in her black redundant gown.

Glenariffe and Pairmore

Go to Glenariffe if you know this Antrim
 from Waterfoot's side street of lime washed walls
 with the broad sandbank where the children play
 and the gulls cry among the billowy washing

Go to Glenariffe, take the rising road
 the curving road that hugs the northern slope
 that winds and rises up among the trees
 and spreads the little valley flat below:
 the corn and grazing trimmed and well defined
 by the dark lines of ledges: here and there
 the grey gleam of a lane from farm to farm
 the houses white and slated neat as toys
 the river like a restless snake that darts
 from cover of the clothed mats of growth
 The valley's other side is ribbed with streams
 that fall and hang like broken rods of glass
 unheard against the greater central roar.

The road still clambers up till on the right
your eye is level with wet boles of trees
and on the left below a well of air
often mist curdled, ranks of pointed firs
Then suddenly the way is bracken blanket
where hazels clothe the steepening slope with green
and turning left across a high stone bridge
the glen lies wide to the east beyond the trees
thro' closer temple hearing louder now
the water roar: above its breathless fall
the river is a bog brown mountain stream
cruising and cresting over rocks and moss.

You reach the open country. Wide and bare
the rounded hills spread far as eye can draw
with great turf stacks built wedge like to the west
in further fields not easily defined
if stacks or cattle grazing in the mist
a place man never tilled or cut for hay
the seasons only marked by snow or sun

The raw earth gash with water cups the sky
with grey clouds moulded cold and desolate
and shaggy mountain sheep, great horned sheep
browse in the rain comb'd grass or shelter close
to the stone walls that march across the hills.
Here is the lonely station of Paircnoe
deserted now, grass rank along the track
hardly a tree, a dwelling here and there
a ruin
shell as a fortress in debated land
with less well fenced but empty like a fair
with all the stir gone from its naked stalls
maybe a mare with foal a lighter brown
will gallop to a gap to see who less'd

The road dips westward. Suddenly you come
on narrow fields of corn justest green
in the broad landscape where no color is bright.
Houses well thatched with eider bark and foal
replace the grey bleak barns where shepherds live
more numerous: you may count five at once

The earth grows friendly with well hedged fields
Kneedeep cars moving in the seeded grass
slow sheep neat headed lacking the curled horn
and children staring over a private fence
Trees shade the road awhile: slow running brooks
brushing the long grass edges as they flow:
Haystacks broad based as flax wind buffeted
potatoes flowering: beans in heavy leaf
Earth wears the shapes of use, in color and curve.

You reach the frontier at the swollen Braid,
a well tilled country prosperous and mild.
The heart contented now and riding easy,
secure in the slow customary things
that man has set against the rock and fallow;
but you already know it a lesser joy
than the bare moors beneath a heavy sky
where rock and sheep and stream are timeless forms
and Fenix may raise his cry on any hill.

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So you have traveled far from Waterford
not market inches, but in rhythm of pulse
the heart uplifted with the mounting trees
and falling waters, scooped out of the air,
and gapped beneath you as you stop to look;
uplifted from the transience of life
and held at level of lush ecstasy
as if with gull's shaft keel you pass
to the vast silence of unmastered earth.

X

Mortality and Ape

Consider

~~the~~ ~~thought~~ of Wordsworth in his wretched age,
 his high song over in ten eager years;
 the chill words spilled upon the tanned page
 that bring no joy or armistice from tears.
 Yet the old hand set long in habit now,
 must rime and stanga every trivial damn,
 must lift the silver locks and press the brow
 contemplative, altho the gleam is gone.

Consent to

~~and~~ ~~and~~ ~~and~~ pity bidding others rise

with face as fortune warm with flush of youth

and X less than images before ^{your} eyes

interrogating each for utter truth

^{she bore}

the tide choked Shelley and the coughing lad

^{drinking snapper}

the drunken Plummer and the lurching lord

and Owen whispering to the dead as mad

with blood smeared lips his pitiable word.

These by the limits of their fevered blood

could pour no more into the gilded horn
 for they had savored every altitude
 potential in the stars when they were born

The end of each lay cold within the glass
~~the fruit ungathered is not to be sought~~
~~the fruit ungathered is not to be sought~~
~~the fruit ungathered is not to be sought~~
 but scattered petals lie upon the grass
 who heard the wretched whisper what he saw?
 by weather worn to humors of our thought

What then of those who had the will to bend
 the reckless complications of the cord,
 the prisoned ^{Chatterton} ~~jaunty~~ ~~dead~~ without a friend,
 the drug sick poet leaping overboard?
 The death within those writs but planted firm
 the magnet in the music, ^{you shall} and we see
 the lovely architecture of the worm
 - coral cast of white sterility

This way or this: to take what fate may grant
 a singing summer and a barren fall
 as empty winter nights when ignorant

The heart only round its own memorial.
or the ^{white glory.} ~~sharp~~ anguish of the crestled wave
rock rocket that cannot reach the level shore
but tops its height and breaks and finds its grave
light caught an instant
~~an instant bright~~ the cost for evermore.

or the pale face that winces at defeat
and will not have the logic of despair;
among the thousand masks that troop the street
the merry eyes of one who does not care,
because he knows by heart his span and reach,
and is not bitter, in this truth secure:
inalienable value lives in each,
identified by self the future's sure.

and estimates the chances time may give:
the crafty scorpion at

Odyseus beside the bloody ditch

and dead men's chival a prefer'd to live:

Full Moon in July 1940

I saw the moon come up over the city
an orange disk in the valley mist
with a flat dark tongue of cloud cutting across it
as quiet and lovely as a Japanese print
and it seemed strange that men were standing by - guns
clamped to earphones, idling in billets

that people were sticking paper strips across their windows
and filling buckets with sand

that bricklayers were corking their heads at plumb-lines
on the half-erected shelters in the city streets
that we were waiting for disaster

The cloud least as the moon rose higher
losing its depth of color for pale gold
and I expect a rash hope that the crisis should pass over
and the paper strips peel off the glass
and the children make castles in the sand
and the bricklayers turn to building spacious houses for men.

X

21.7

Oasis

The rotting bags sag from the silts
 with sprouting growth and fungus stained
 by lepers' pockets of yeasts and spillo
 red dirt or pebbles mixed with sand

observe the patterns on the glass
 of tape and paper that repeat
 criss cross or complicated stars
 untested yet but very neat

The sticky labels everywhere
 that bid us watch our highest word
 desert enlist or volunteer
 tear coupon off or sign the card

are stuck across the yawning gaps
 the fissures in the nation's walls
 no name appears upon the maps
 but rumor confidently kills

143

21.7.

X

The grief of China grief of Spain
 • so long endured have sapped my lover
 that the kept honors of the hour
 shall not so strongly move again.

When Paris fell I spend a thought
 for boulevard and gallery
 the boredom of sure prophecy
 since Ingaljia has been fought

acts like a poison on the heart
 that leaves me listless unconcerned
 aware that history has not heard
 the exquisite surprise of art.

X
Sonnet Yellow Signal

Called by the urgent bell while yet the sun
lay deep beneath the eastern sea I rose
and ran about the night to summon those
by duty orders. Ere my task was done
the moon came up just zenith past and shone
broad on the sleeping city's blanched rows
of silent houses bleaching grass and stone
to chill perfection of a classic pose.

And as I hurried thro' the barren night
with my companions tensely jocular
it seemed we breathed an atmosphere more rare
than earth's aforetime, that in truth we were
inhabiting a dead fantastic star
where life still lingered in a borrowed light.

dates uncertain

Henceforth from day to day from land to mouth
wet thumbs for wind and hope it still is south

—
We in our time have seen too many things
ever to know the ease and peace of age
the slow wide beat of rooks returning wings
the thin stiff fingers turning the last page

—
At a pleasure round in wartime

The painted whore steps out of the shining car
as daintily as a cat and shuts the door
the curman stumbles out at the other side
with raddled face
the mill girl slaps the midge on her lotions leg
and laughs at the sailor's blarney

17-8.

Once more my season of the falling leaf
The clover singing round rain shadowed stacks
The flat fields naked, and the beets of flax
Heapt in brown steeples, apples reddening
The fall song over and the seaward wind
and morning mist that chills the heart with grief

151
147
17-8.

Sonnet Analysis

When self by self the man is stripp'd away
The self of speech and thought whose every word
is sign'd and dated by the time of day
The page or harley when it first occurred
and the slow self of habit walking round
The threatening ladder using for the taste
a tent of muscles exquisitely bound
by borrow'd sinews to a family mask,

The self that gazes on the litter'd heap
turns from the jumble seeking silver'd glass
that in its green recesses still may keep
some record of the eyes that saw them pass

But there is nothing to repeat the glance
and offer hope of vague continuance.

17.8

Tomorrow let the monolith ascend
beyond truncated runnels of success
that ticks no more or less
than brown tobacco of a cheaper blend.

John Caesar sickens in his envelope
and Byron wrangles hoarsely with a crutch
that answers back in dutch
with bandaged hands and epitaphs of hope

But this remains bejeweled with a blade
crosshatched with cubes of holist dolomite
that snaden left and write
scrapes bawdy riddles on the balustrade

157
149
21-22.8

With a chill wind that havers in the trees
a swirls the noisy leaves at kerf a well
with fainter sunlight & a falling glass
a splat of rain in sudden squall

The friendly door of summer's slammed & we
more anxious in a world of aging things
disconsolate but almost recklessly
endured the clumsy buffeting

with early evening cooling down the hill
& the grey visage of the later dawn
the high song of July now hushed & still
the rhododendron splendor gone

22.8

Vain is so much a vain enough to find
yet nurture for my vanity of mind
at sudden moments grown disconsolate
not that no nations or my wisdom wait
but that of all the masters that pass before
my searching gaze none lingers to adore
a bid me bless them with my charity
of free affection given to the free

151 3

24.8

Silent in autumn when a darkening wind
blows the green leaves to yellow in the wren
faint light, a lonely world distracted men
I seek a stable order in my mind

The pulsing words I bested my faith upon
from men who gave them breath to make them live
long useless like a ragged empty sleeve.
I cannot leave the shattered skeleton.

and from the aimless attitudes men wear
no skill proceeds for me to imitate
the rising terror of the drowning opiate
suggests no island that its wrath will spare

No use to urge my value to myself
as buckle to the indiscriminate
oblivious shrapnel of uncertain fate
that kills the child & spares the coarse blue delph.

X

Audit

I have lived well enough have known delight
delight of senses wide to the living touch
of senses glad to serve a succour such
-and more because of the promise of day & night
of the mood mastered & renewed again
for my own heart if not for other men

I have gone wisely, if a nervous care
be kin of wisdom, lest by thought & act
the unreind pleasures realised in fact
should lay an unreind coil of passion bare;
preferring so to walk that those by me
stand also more in quiet amity

Blame me as craven then that has not dared
the shoals & cliffs of passionate release
but loved the ample valley's mutual peace
more than the doubtful tempest's wadder stand

with some chance traveller halting by my side
and in sun's sudden moment glorified.

My path was cast within a web of wars
when the world shuddered lurching out of shape
and the happt millions died, but my escape
seems certified by my ascendent stars
and in its tumult suddenly apart aside
[I trod the lonely alleys of my heart -
I kept the brooding measure of my stride

and yet not unaware as one who goes
blind among blades, miraculously sure,
like just thro coral doubling back secure
as the vast headlong current headless flows:
each danger flung its shadow on my mind
and by its pity my slow scale defined.

The grips of nations not ignored but weighed
against the private worth of naked joy,
the balance struck gave gnaw & cold employ

when sheer event might gape at me afraid
to set me safe and loch my forward stride
out of the thunder down the mountainside.

These from my days by luck approved & built
now in my prime assist for permanence
in a chill instant of tall violence
that thwarts with firmness a cloud of death
the patient frontiers I have spent & planned
round the mild corners of familiar land.

30.8.

Sonnet

X

Comes now the season of my richest mood
whose labor music has a weary wing
and cannot match the urgency of spring
its small sharp breasts in pouting attitude
nor joins with summer that green interlude
balanced on leaf edge, 'twixt the blossoming
and fallen petal when the migrants sing
and life's a rumor of unquestioned good.

Now mist at morning and a cooler night
first touch in children's voices far away
the dry pod knocking on the crisped stem
bring back a sense of pity infinite
that wears the shadows of the haunted day
in the broad measure of a requiem.

Already the spiked Thistle tufted brown
 the elder purple and the berries black
 on the Larch hillside. In the faded town
 the chestnuts rusted in fall's first attack
 are shabby round the still unarmist lawn
 and drop pale leaves upon the mossy track
 or crisp the tread, and saw at curling gusts
 the coursing sap mercurially withdrawn:
 the dust of march is now autumnal dust.

Excelsior

The labor councillor slumped in his seat
 gropt his fat thigh for coppers for his fare
 found them and leaned upon the seat in front
 hat pushed well back from fat and sunny face
 heavy in the jaw with a life of talk

Alone a moment. one sole passenger
 sat up in front with glasses and a book
 He could afford to relax. By God that's good
 no members to intimidate or coax:
 no boss to fence with: no committee men
 to talk him into intrigue or convey his words
 sharpened to scandal to the executive

At fifty six now. It was not too bad
 the district secretary, a councillor
 for a safe ward, a cinch for alderman
 when Peters took his cards and buggered off

Four hundred grand a year with extras added
and a well earned pension in nine years
He might run to a car but members would talk.
It's hardly quite the thing to own like hell
against injustice as the fat boss class
and slip home from the meeting in a car
There's always the Co car. for distant journeys
The kids were doin well. They'd had a chance
he never'd had. They might not go so far
but with the start they got they shouldn't slip
It had been hard enough. But he wasn't boasting
It was the will of the people and his ideal
that he must thank. Altho the people now
some of them rowdy irresponsibles
that communist wester now, the thin well rent
with the pale consumptive face and the bright eyes
he kept on sayin' things he never should -
a labor faker and a bureaucrat
in tow with Transport House. Of course he knew
the unsuccessful always found a peg

159
God knows he'd jacket damn little. If he had
he'd be in Transport House or in the City
like that minor fellow - but a man
must use the patient ways of compromise
and not mind being called a labor faker
for the sake of the good he did in his own way
His skill in that, and even the bosses admitted,
had given his men their present decent rates
and kept their gains in the worst days of the slump
well nearly kept 'em - show me another union
that kept so much: and they had him to thank.
All very well for fellows like the runt
to bowl their heads off in Das Capital
and the class war and Lenin. That would do
with Speers and Capper and Tom Ellison
on the other side of the table or the floor.
They'd just walk out and wait till you had done
and then come back to write you down off the map
NOT that old Charley Marx was always wrong
and Lenin too: but his job was not the same.

Our way of progress was a quiet way
with here a little there a little progress
until one day you woke up in a new world
with the people running the trains and owning the banks

In the meantime he had to keep on his toes
with 9 rubber poaching members and the men
beginning to listen to that bloody runt
who'd spoil the whole damn setup with his talk &
scare off the horses when he had 'em estin'
out of his hand like pigeons in the park

He ought to take a turn to see the cricket
some evening there. He was Vice President
and it means votes if you don't put on side
The people smell a fraud instinctively
and remember where you came from all too well
Besides he liked the game. It was like his work
You bowl like hell or clock them for a six
as they walk in to tea like gentlemen

He remembered once a Summerschool years ago
when they played the Local Boys. and the other times
smoking under the trees, in the evening
walking down to the village for a drink
and singing socialist songs the whole way back
and dancing in the lounge til twelve o'clock
He remembered the plump wee teacher from Somerset
She was a sport. Fred Williamson was there
Fred Williamson the Cabinet Minister
had yard with him in the punt one afternoon
and written once or twice in the years between

It was a Randers world now with stiffer problems
not solved as easy as the professor thought
with his low voice and green nail nibbled hands
talking of Plato and the beehive state.

He suddenly looked out on the passing streets
rose and lurched to the stair. He had come too far.

5.9.40

X

I think that words will not sing any more
in the harsh days. A man who waits for something
whistles disjointedly and looks about him
he has no heart for the full song.

Let us then concern ourselves
with the sick witty couplet
that may win a half attentive laugh
and the broad joke that needs no analysis

It is no use being nostalgic
and scalding our hearts with old melodies
that recall the good days
that will but make the present harshness worse.

There will be occasion for the full song later or
for some at any rate
let us gracefully yield them that privilege
for ourselves creative effort is impossible.

163
6.9.

Altho my Amherst is a city street
that's shuffled daily by a million feet:
the circumstance leaves me no less alone
self armored tant than Emily Dickinson.

6-9

X

I talked and raged and planned
I praised where it was due
I tried to understand
the scrammel modern crew
thl with the years I grew
a stranger in the land.

And now I turn within
and find in my own heart
the peace I longed to win
that arms me apart
making my private art
my lonely discipline.

6.9

Autumn already in a single day
 that took no leisure to assume its place
 closing with bronze what was a golden play
 but stark like grief upon a stricken face.

We had no time to catch our slowing stride
 to the new pulse of quiet withering
 for suddenly the green leaves failed and died.
 For them what use the rhetoric of spring?

A leaf fell on my hand
 I gripped and held it tight
 and flung a wish like a flaming torch
 against the approaching night

But the gesture pleased
 my heart remembered plain
 the little castles I had built
 and had to build again.

6.9.40

165

An old man walking in the falling leaves
 stick tapping harsh on stone and dumb on leaf
 save where his shuffling head crisped into stir
 in pale September sun: a gay old man

What chance that I shall walk in falling leaves
 when years have given richness to my thought
 and all the crowded pity of the world
 brushes my cuff like autumn offering peace
 and the dead sleep of winter for desire?

10. 9.

Guests

We sit alone at least / no sound save turning page
the smoke drawn down the stem / the strinking of the cinder
the comment at the text / the scripping pen

The latest guest is gone / Karl left ten days ago
after a year wherein we shared his blundering style
and helped him with the tongue / and found him dull

Before, for six tense months / Laura the salty Basque
at times hysterical / when Barcelona fell
and the loyal remain / was swallowed up

The latest guest is gone / the child who came too soon
here stalked from the room / of vicious country side
until the talk should turn / to some new topic

She was but two weeks old / as yet her eyes would turn
to watch the stirring flames / to see the light struck back

from my huge spectacles / she smiled for you

The latest guest is gone / The guests who came & spent
awhile beside our hearth / have gone their devious ways
Basque Austrian & child / the last mist most.

One gave a snatch of song / and one a joke or two
the one who could not speak / gave nothing such & slept
and yet we're richer by / a span of life

and sit remembering / her gestures and her cries
two people growing old / as life slips tip toe by -
What'll be the next to stand / outside our door?

We rose at noon having heard feet and voices in the street
 on a cool September day of cloud and sudden sun
 listened while to Schubert's symphony expounded
 and gathered the best stiff foods on the brittle stalks
 on home for reading in the quiet afternoon
 interrupted by a prizefighter and his little dog
 calling to show his latest bag of watercolours
 and ending in an argument about the Jews
 a large and friendly tea with parents growing old
 hearing the nonstop news in the other room
 of discotee's table tennis of shuttled raids
 then talk with companions by firelight of books and pictures
 reports of absent friends and swopping of rumors
 then silence at midnight for reading and meditation

This is somehow very like the former life
 but how long will it remain so? and will it return
 after the crazy interval of despair?

Having spent a decade caring for words
 learning how the competent men got their style
 being aware of natural phenomena
 and the qualifying of these in memorable phrases
 at length I felt myself adequately equipt
 for the tasks that circumstance might provide:
 the small affections and the sensitive responses
 to moments of despair and exultation
 that should naturally accrue to a character like mine
 I suddenly find myself in a place unpropitiated
 among accidents and events I have no tape for
 my labor craft somehow not suitable
 and my patient assimilative mind knocked out of gear,
 the general and familiar tides upset
 the seasons tilted, and the behavior of men
 not as I had decided according to schedule.

17.9.

Now in these days

when a tormented nation's mocket of sleep
as red eyes gape at terror, when the towers
familiar crumble in screaming flesh
as each day's lot a new thread of the screw
on the harsh couch of torture, we are allowed
a false oasis a Joad's Paradise
of nervous freedom from the actual pain
not from the hanging threat; and in that hush
to my surprise I find my thought involved
not in blueprinted future, or shifted flags
and earnest charts to better violence
but in reported talk of a great man
his backstage gossip and his appetites
his stories of his friends - the rotten apples
that Schiller always kept beneath his desk:
his blundering ornithology which made
Lark of a hedge row whistler; his advice
that I lay close, not to waste your strength
on a rest work compound of giant forms
but on the little bolts you nurse begets
out of the active senses.

17.9

We walked one August out to Flatford Mill
thro the green country and the clustered trees
with camera intent on Constable.
and I have gone alone in Somerset
past the steep thatches of the villages
with rambling names that I shall not forget

and we have stood at Dingswell holt in love
gazing on meadows as the slow moon rose
as the dark trees whose branches torcht above
scarcely stirred a leaf in that late summer air:
and seemed but kin and company of those
who paid the withered years before us there

X
 We in our time have seen the harsh white light
 glare from the screen across the cooling air,
 have sunk in plush to watch the dreamy flight
 of black shawled figures over cobbled road,
 have seen the plastered crater in the square
 the great flats shattered like a rubble road

Wedges' twist the features splashing gun & glass
 the blank ideal faces and the fun
 were spent just minutes watching raiders pass
 great rigid condors while the streets beneath
 write megalithic as coolie costumes run
 to fill the screen with juddered eyes, & teeth

Now in our time the night is full of noise,
 the landmarks perish and the people die,
 as we who did not heed the warning voice
 stand waiting voiceless, lost, without a guide
 as the skull riven gives its moaning cry
 and for our folly we are crucified.

Sonnet

Forsaken now the formal garb and style
 the solid sentence rounded to a pause
 the easy rime that wins a rime's applause
 the measured nod, the recognising smile
 when regular as overflowing Nile
 the channelled mood obeys the stanza's laws,
 is borne in memory a little while
 but at sirees blast of fact with draws.

too smoothly shaper and too delicate
 for the harsh wear of life. I find my thought,
 held in the axes of bewildered time,
 takes on a nervous and a shambling gait
 too hesitant and doubtful to be caught
 in the strict process of assertive rime.

21.9.40

Innocent as a peasant I might make my songs
of the casual chances of the season.

The immediate concerns and gossip lilted neatly
began a laugh at the crossroads of an evening:

and there would be good useful songs of the social man
work their corner in minds well furnished with love
even the little songs I sang to my self in the dusk
would be heard over the hedge and repeated

But to my verse gives no delight at best no use
for a group beyond the range of a single voice
I am not deterred but daily keep my accounts
with the fluctuating appearances I observe.

rather like the drum attached to a barometer
that is marked in purple ink by a dragging pen
recording the decline of a culture rotten ripe
for the glinting lenses of an antiseptic future.

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