



"The Bell" Sept. 1942 6-XII-41⁵
"The astronomer"

(Epitaph for My Father.)
"The astronomer"

"Look," he would say, "here are the Pleiades,
and here Alnitak - that one is Capella."
walking bare-headed in the frosty air
and pointing with his pipe stem to the stars,
or in the twilight of a long summer evening,
he'd stand at the gate into the cornfield
and search the broken clouds in the bright west
for the first sight of the young crescent moon.

I will remember him not impatient or angry
but in the quietness of this truthful mood,
each time I mark the moon's rising or setting
or the slow tilting of the milky way.
Neither he nor I had use for granite
or marble texts, but he unknowing wrote
his name across the high dome of the sky
in all the constellations of the night.

8. XII. 41

Epitaph on a friend who died of surgical tuberculosis

I remember her, happy when the leaves were green
and roots increased, tunnelling the warm earth,
her beauty that of all things like and young;

and again with bright eyes and quickened breath
in sickness, planning the days that were to come
not knowing, as I knew that all they'd bring would be death

Through all the seasons these cold limbs lie quiet.

The bacillus in its relentless multiplication
the mind may grasp, but the rebelling heart

will not accept this divine substitution
of a million blind living things for one.

30. XI. 41

Legan

Conscript

For me now there is neither dismay nor sorrow

Knowing that death will come soon for many of these
dragging their feet along the muddy drives
driving before the sun-dial, or at ease
on baneck-room beds writing their letters home.

Sudden and soon from the sea or the grey sky
may come death's implement tearing flesh and bone
to stop the racing heart and glaze the eye

This end has not a meaning: and for many
life has ceased long before the flesh decays.
But he who knows earth firm for the foot, who sees
like the curving blade of grass and the high
swing of gull's wing on the wind over the lough
he can walk free from the fear for all his days.

October 1941

Colin Middleton

Man lives in everlasting fantasy
a pantomime of yesterdays a play
performed by self in pre-determined character
before an audience of exacting selves

Points of emotional climacteric -
The self-images not to be forgotten:
We have no choice but to identify
ourselves with these, we cannot live them down

The unexpected three year old is red -
How well we've kept your secret all these years!
return again, perplexed, personified:
The heart still beats to measure out your dread.

The child that first beholds its own bright blood,
and trembles still, and still retains the taste.
The child that cherishes the first bad word
incomprehensible, a power to yield.

The child that took, the child that gave away,
the child that lost a treasured acquisition.
The disproportionate adolescent - rape -
a lost forsaken on a nameless threshold.

The child-woman of the first long dress;
The woman-child's first intimate caresses:
The girl who saw her father's lifeless face:
The youth who left his father's grave, a man

possessed of new possessions to possess -
an endless quest for equilibrium;
The self to balance self - a fantasy
of days and yesterdays, in pantomime

* * * * *

To all my selves cast of their own emotions,
my fellow characters on this broad set
that is myself, I give, and take, to cure -
We are the tide, the tempest, as it will,

Our wide horizon.

So greet its prompter, Pantaloon himself -
He mirrored my HK, the self of predilection,
The gay companion ready with a gesture:
To you dear John - the - Dauntless, Lord of the day dream,
Inimitable double - thanks a lot.

War Memorial

I somehow knew what things would be like when I went to check up on its wording. Seen a month before - with my mind half swept by the beer brown river current just crossed on stepping stones - the parish war memorial left a vague impression; yet I thought in thinking of it afterwards, were the names which ought to be together separated? Officers one side rankers the other?

Anyway, to verify the point was worth a ride well worth a little sweat and bother to see if death did really thus divide in stone formality one fellow soldier from another.

I knew it would be so. Each stepping stone once staggered across the ford had now been scattered - whether by stroke from thunder shower or done through spite I know not, nor let it much mattered. May be some soldier new to searchlight battery,

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browned-off, hassed, cleesed with general cussedness
of things, had done it. One, gawky in battle-dress,
stood with two more engaged in cockney chatter. He,
sensing my indecision, turned a 'No' to 'Yes'
by saying of I cut down by the mess
and crossed their Jaws (no one, he said, would ever
see) I'd find a footbridge over the river.

Thanking him for his help I strode across
the military ground, and no one ever saw
or asked what I was doing. For I wore
civilian clothes, and might have looked suspicious
walking past all their secret apparatus
hidden here in the valley with camouflaged intent
to rid this acre of sky of hostile plane.
golden lime leaves shore the weather worn
or shingled tower - a fish whose tail was bent
by long exposure to non-living element.
Crossing the stream, I edged past rusty gate
into the churchyard, neither soon nor late.

And here again it was as I expected
it would be. One esservie man was cutting
grass in the graveyard where unresurrected
bones lay buried. Bird droppings from jutting
eave, splattered tombstones; gamboge lichen making
protean patterns, encrusted faint inscriptions
weathered by winter's frost and summer's baking
- But here is no place for conventional descriptions
of sentimental England. I came to dig
for something better, set a burnt-out torch
of pious platitude, something both small and big
- not picture-postcard roses round a porch.

There was the war memorial; either side
were names, in front a lapidary inscription ran
"Do them for England live" it read, and then
assured the reader, 'we for England died'.
On right the names of officers; on left, of men
kept ever, as in life, the great divide.
No seemingly alphabetic order came to hide,

in levelling death, the social inequality of men.
 Lieutenant Lakenfield, Lord of the Manors,
 faced south and Trooper Lewis looking north
 shared his cool shade with Private Edward Jenner
 forever back to back with Major Rawth

And then the mower, resting on his scythe,
 'They'll need a bigger one this time, they ought'
 I made some futile answer; feudal life
 and custom petrified me, tongue and breath
 in outward acquiescence; yet I thought
 of Saul and Jonathan - how lovely and pleasant
 (writhe their eagles) nor divided in death . . .

The sudden startled clatter of a breeding pheasant
 broke tho' the wood - from sordid Nissen huts
 some sergeant cursed a Tommy's 'bloody guts'
 and faintly over preserved waters came
 scream of privilege's reel, perennially the same.

Unidentified

The other day, sitting at home, we heard
 a strange and intermittent noise. You said
 'I wonder could that be a bird?'

And I, I thought instead

it might be short bursts of machine-gun fire
 borne on the wind half-way across theshire.

We held our breath and listened tense
 to find if woodpecker or gun made sense,
 but nothing further could we hear, and so
 it was not granted us to know
 whether it was a distant loud noise or soft one near -
 a harmless bird at hand or something far away to fear.

August Cloudscape

Curly, bushy, cotton-wool cumuli
swept over England, swept over Wyre,
stipping the steeple at Mortimer's Clebury
alternately shading and lighting the spire,
gilding the acre of fields up to abbey
acres and acres of ripening shire

With the wings of the west wind you wandered
ever since dawn when I saw a white beast
graying transfigured by sun-searchlight slanting
over a stooked field the colour of yeast
till now when I see you from slopes of the Brown Clea
ruled in the far, dim, inscrutable east.

There else a else heaped up, shoulder on shoulder,
rose-tinged, vast, mountainous ranges of snow,
a day's echelon sequence mess, contours overlapping
summit on summit in row upon row.
So will the clouds that to-day dappled England
tomorrow over Europe in convoy slide slow

Gardens and Views

It is possible to divide one's friends into two -
those who like gardens and those who like views.
The first are content with the tiniest box
of a room if its borders are decked with phlox
anthuriums and tulips according to season
but I prefer views (for a very good reason)
and if I could choose between places for dwelling
- one smothered midst borders, herbaceous, sweet-smelling,
where sight was confined by the boundary wall,
and one where eye-limits (if any at all)
were set by the fact of the earth's curvature
the latter would be my choice I am sure.

"Just look" I would say to the garden lovers,
"for flowers! Here meadows of pink and white clovers;
hi leather - August - and Hawthorn in May
and rusty-gold bracken in winter, to say
nothing of changes from pasture to plow
and fallow to grassland as layfield to snow,

Patrick Maybin

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From blades of green corn in ribbons raw-rolled

The stipple of stocks on a stubble of gold.

I've been like you, but now and far
as the farther ones slew me the shapes they are.

For me I would add as I came to the point

'There is nothing to worry or disappoint,
no borders to weed and no gardeners to pay,
my landscape, you see, keeps itself day by day,
week by week, month by month, at year after year.

I've all benign as I've nothing to fear -

The scuttle of rabbits away to their burrows,

The corduroy upholstery of upland fens.

My gardeners are rain and wind and clouds,
sun now and the magic of morning-mist strands

(Alts of course [surely] ^{strands} ~~stocks~~)

[that] noble land demands human sweat)

My flower-beds are changeable shapes of tillage

The sky like of seasons, blue smoke from the village,

The river, and "This I would argue, as you
would return to your garden - as I to my view.

Rain [September 1942]

It must have been August, he thought, that day so much rain fell:

(suddenly he forgot thirst and pain, the bright heat of the sun
and the steady trickle of blood from under the field-dressing)

August, and a cottage garden under the downs, and the rain
dripping from the eaves, running into the water barrel

The scarlet flowers of summer beans, and the rich green
of the wet hedges; and there was no sound at all

but rain in the water barrel, rain jangling among the leaves.

