Book XXI

Poems by John Hewitt

December 1944
— September 1946

Bell March 48

2·XII

Museum Pieces : one

My trade takes me frequently into decaying houses
house not literally in the sense of bricks and cupboards
but house in the sense of a tottering old lady
who bears a name once famous for trade or wealth
or skill or simply breeding
and is the last of that name.

Take for instance the tall woman in tweeds
whose grandfather was an artist of repute
and had his quarrel with the academy
and wrote his angry letters O pitiful letters
I keep the copies safely in a metal file.
Her mother had been part of the caravan
he trundled through Europe, eloquent, passionate, poor.

Now she offers us a few inferior copies
made in his student days when Rubens hit him
like a boy's first cigar
~~slug of whiskey on an empty stomach~~

a badly cracked head-of-a-girl from his Roman days
and a bronze medal from the Exposition
and a beaded chair cover made by her grandmother.

She will die in a boarding house.

Bell

Two.

I remember too the old lady fairly well
her white hair brushed up in a manner
that was then out of fashion but now is in fashion again
her deafness and her gentle smile
her way of handling things as if
they were as fragile as the porcelains
her cabinets were crammed with. I remember
her conversation not quite so well —
something of Assissi and Siena and Giotto
and the children singing at evening
and mist coming up the valley and bells in the morning

I remember too her shelves of books
Okey, Henry James, Berenson Vernon Lee
and a number of popular handbooks
like Chaffers on Pottery Marks,
and the maiolica plaque of a smiling head
and the large glossy photograph of Mussolini

on the mantelpiece

She was a widow and I remember thinking it strange
that she displayed no photograph of her nephew
who was at that time a Cabinet Minister

She died later at another address
and left us her ceramics, but her books were to be
divided among the friends who used to come in
for an evening's bridge in the winter.

Bell

Third

She took me up to an attic piled with boxes and trunks
offering me antlered heads of Kudu and Ibex
a ship in a bottle and an ivory rickshaw model.

She panted a little after climbing the stairs
and sat on a box to get her breath
and shewed me a golden photograph
of her tall brother who died of fever in Spain
just after his first leave home.

She has gone to live in a house among trees
left by an aunt, in the family two hundred years,

I took a rough edged book in wooden covers
watercolours on wormholed rice paper with unstuck silk
— a series of Chinese tortures of prisoners.

Mr. Bell

Four

There was one small and dressed in black
who rang for coffee brought in on a silver tray
she had studied in France and Switzerland
She remembered a procession once in Verona
Corpus Christi it probably was
and the fat little priests hawking and spitting
and blowing their noses as they went by laughing & talking

She had no regard for the Pope after that.

Pound's luck

Pound's luck to be the first to praise Gaudier
to spend himself on the jangling troubadours
till the dusty songs brought a lump to the throat
and on Chinese poets with Japanese names
to be technically alert mannered pedantic
on a fernwork of scholarship
to loosen the ~~tall~~ corsets of our blowsy verse
to have wit and completely to miss the point
to be an inexhaustible quarry
not only the young men have carried loads from:
to be aware of the peril in the ~~foothills~~ mountains
but to have a bleak eye for weather;
and to disappear, a cantankerous crazy fellow
caught on the wrong side of the ~~crash~~ avalanche

listen - shortly you will hear the derisive laughter
from those that chance whipped into the winning pack.

Poetry Ireland 1.XII.44

Awareness of Time

Awareness of time has always been
chief symptom of a certain type of mind
Gardeners have it and cricketers and some librarians
[Time last-surviving not only in the compost
time present not included only in the leaf
time future not merely throbbing up the branch
but threefold time the dialectical moment
in the gasp and the laugh and the carefully uttered word]

Eliot for instance in our day
attempts to digest the published assertions
of physicists and astronomers
through the juices and tuices of Rome and heraldry

Sir Thomas Browne was another
baroque wit trumpet, sensitive
to the shard in the mould and the hare's foot in the drawer

and Morris at his loom or prodding his stick in the vat
called out to Chaucer in the next room
to bring him in Das Capital from the top shelf

Most men need a song or a stone to invoke it

In Ireland here it is a different matter
the past persists in every knuckle and sinew
drips from the eaves and runs its little way over
the shavings on the floor.
The future can find no crevice to enter by
and cannot call down for the din of the keening host.

I walk along a road or over a bank of earth
down a green path between deep black water pits
and I never walk alone
Even the men I met on the crest of the mountain road
swinging his heavy stick and marching to Ballyvoy
was mustered with fellows hero sidhe and ghost
Cromwellian trooper or peasant on the quay

watching the full blown ships diminish to the west
and the tonsured mason chipping out
the sustaining hand of God under the arm of the Cross
Here in the Irish land they are heaped together.

The English ghosts are orderly, keep in their places
Sir Isaac slippers his steps with shining buckles
the crabbed Norman yawns in his bare stone hall
They march on stated days in their generations
like the figures on a mural in a school
growing smaller and diminish up the hill to the back.

When they speak of the wandering Irish who carry their slums
and dump them down by railways and foggy canals
the clever men of the books have an answer handy
the scabby potato the smallness of the farm
the set in a cleft of hills or wedged in the mosses
cliff edge of Europe, pressure of Mongol ponys
I have said as much myself

But the answer they do not give, are unable to give
not having the ~~data of doom~~ doom of the data in their bones
being orderly logical men
not born in an attic close to the wandering moon
is that we here are haunted haggridden bewitched
and run from the hailing ghosts to be free in the light.
yet are never quite content in a ghostless place
and will be haggridden till the Judgment Day
when ~~and~~ the trooper the peasant the boxer the tenor the priest
are standing together free ~~in the light~~ on the land of God.

3 · XII

Form

This verse is slack and yielding but it can hold things
that the regular march of syllables could never contain:
you must let the cupped hands seize with the driven ball.

20 · XII

My fluctuating thought this year has run
from dry abstraction back to Mary's son,
and round behind him to that shaggy man
in whose slow brain thought's treachery began.

Here at my desk, the house quiet, ready to resume,
I wonder what poem will emerge.

The police have fired on a procession in Athens,
and planes may be seen through the coarse
pillars of the Acropolis;
the net of war tightens and slackens according
to the place:
I was talking today to a young man who foresees
his job petering out.
And I also part of this aching world,
I find my thought turning like a needle
to a Tang poet who complained that the men
who could have appreciated his verse were all dead;
nevertheless he continued to write;
twelve hundred years after, in another tongue,
and in an island, december-soaked and draughty,
I remember him and begin another poem.

3·XII·

Ivy

Coming from the red brick hospital
where I have just taken leave of an old man
who had been prepared to die but still lives on
I hurry up the path with its stenges of steps
for it is december, the light is failing, the rain
sags ready to fall from the sky and the naked twigs
and I observe with my nervous voracious glance
the clean and virile ivy everywhere thrusting through
the laminated leaves on the wet ground
and reaching up the bare ~~twigs~~ boles of the stripped trees
as stubborn as life

Exposition

The man with the cleft palette reports
on a recent performance of Don Giovanni: how good
it was. Not quite first rate but better than
he'd really hoped for. Mozart stands shivering
in the bare hall. The lady looks up at last.
Cold to the knees now. His fingers dead.
To ask if he will please play something.
She is ready now. Could it be gay?
He bows. The clavier is out of tune.
Mozart goes home to write an angry letter
on the cost of coaches for social calls
The man with the cleft palette we suspect
of being a homosexual: he is talking to
a half bald young artist who hopes
admiring his own words

Brendl with the long swept aside locks
not understanding the chairman's speech

hoping it flatters, smiles at the audience
and sits behind the smile remembering
how once he raised a loom on that picture
of the little village down in the blue valley
beyond the fir tipped bushes. His native village
The famous painter gave it to his mother
born there he frequently returned on vacation.
Handclaps and coughs. The Minister rises now
to declare and thank and congratulate ..
Brendl wipes his fingers with a white handkerchief and looks
in every face for answering affection unsure as a jew
You would be unsure too and put the sleeve
or bolder hug the shoulder of any one
patient enough to wait if you would had gone
up in bitter smoke and you were left alive
with the necessity of living and finding bread
and finding affection to sweeten the exile cup

We never have pity enough, caught
in the cracked rainbow of a dream's mirror

our friendliest grimaces are for ourselves
we ~~betray~~ expose ourselves in frames and platelass windows.

This woman approaching is tall, over sixty
calm as a spire. She offers peace
skilfully with flowers and letters. Age has given her
peace to dispense in ripples. She knows what she does.
Her verse is feeble in spite of the passion
that makes her gentle, in spite of her chosen thoughts.
She said once: "I should like to be wicked for half an hour,
really wicked" as then on another occasion
"The Chinese have more of the true art of living than we"

This stocky man, now grey, is inheritor of a name:
his numerous male ancestors were accounted with
and clever with their hands. The mantle smothers him.
So he must be emphatic because unsure
and catch the passing laugh because he is sad.

The speeches are over. There is a scraping of chairs.

The platform party descends as Brandt descends
hoping to hound the handshake against the program
tomorrow's photograph will be also evidence.

The aging artist revolves in a climate of his own
shaking hands with commissions or near commissions
measuring wallspace by the lady's shoes.
Once life was passionate as a rowdy party
and genius elbowed genius down the studio steps.
Now to keep going till the famous critic recalls
his
the flattering estimate that varnishing day.

I hand out cheerful words. I smile and nod
coasting from cliff to cliff, avoiding the reefs
under the shining water of their greetings
myself unsure unable to engage
the winking current in the twitching gestures
unable to wake and warm.

Blake sat in his garden waiting for Solomon

and Solomon came: and Richmond jotted a note
and Blake's eyes shone with glory. He seized
his pencil and remarked the terrible forms
that clash about us and wrestle in our hearts
and the most terrible One distended with power
his long beard blown with the stars.

The coarse men driving home from the sporting slain
and the shrinking embers had worried eyes
~~but~~ not for the coughing children in the pits
but for the taller smoke jets from the ~~dust~~ valley
Their daughters fainted easily. Their wives
died with repeated pregnancies ....

I have read the books. I know about William Blake
just as you know about Christ but have worried eyes
and a stammer or talk too loudly, or make
small ineffective gestures that deepen the moat.
I talk too loudly and blush more readily than I need
but all the words of Blake on the tip of my mind

can never grant me pity or confidence enough
to be the torch and trumpet to awaken and kindle.

I carry my penny candle with cautious steps:
am happy only arranging words in a bowl.

and Brendl goes and the slender man and the artists
and the spire woman and the cleft-palette man all go
out on their cold orbits among the stars.

18.44

Somehow I know but why I do not know
the needed answer is not violence
when the harsh instant's coarse indifference
strikes to the marrow like a javelin blow
when the bad angels mustered row on row
crowd to betray each swift reposting sense
before I mobilise my close defence
and the heart's moscow builds its walls of snow

The Land will scar with rock. The eye will close
before the Lail's sharp onset or the storm's.
The flesh will flees. The arm be overwhelmed:
yet such a peace inevitably flows
from the deep mind that all the traitor swarms
must cower and whimper terribly afraid.

13·XII

19·44

Proud in my heart but diffident without
I laboured at my verses year by year
Alas now and then a poem should appear
To stifle the wry mouth of my slow doubt
And that in printed sheets a single scout
Should now and then report my presence here
I dreamed my dreams and feared my deepest fear
And in grave stanzas spelt the matter out

But since because the values I believed
Yet cared not prove have found their witnesses
I now discover that I am received
Among the many poets of this land
Whose names have right and privilege to stand
In the near heaven of anthologies

20·44

When once the balanced power of peace assume
Its blessed kingdom in th' unbaffled soul
That like the simple beggar's proffered bowl
Takes pound or penny in its open womb
Regarding not from whence nor yet by whom
The gift was flung as jest or duty's toll
So chance becomes occasion and the whole
Assault of things becomes a roaring loom
And the full web emerges gradually
As the swift shuttle adding thread to thread
Lays bare the pattern where before was none
That life's true colours may be seen to be
The blue of sky and water — and the red
Of blood, the green of leaf, and yellow of sun

20. XI

21.44

As life now vassessed and understood
by deeper pulses bids me offer it
not the mere surfaces where notions flit
lightly deflected easily labelled good
but the whole creature: thought a dream a blood
at once I know, my laboured skill unfit
to utter more than slack superfluous wit
irrelevant to this full attitude

Thus out of dream as out of the deep sea
the urgent image's demanding hand
insists the act of death that I may be
reborn absolved redeemed and innocent
so the dumb poet wades far out from land
as the chill water mounts with the descent.

20/21 . XII

22.44

The sonnet - somehow is a clenched fist
to have and hold the sand and water run
to lift on knuckle raindrop to the sun
to clutch the darting flash the eyes had missed
to strike the Judas mouth that would have kissed
and so been traitor - and to beat upon
the firm shut door and when the rage is on
to insulate and knot it in the wrist

And yet the sonnet is an open hand
to lift the thistledown to free air
to take the snowflake falling from the sky
to let the half tame creatures feed and share
to offer gently or to make demand
so friendly heart unmoved can hurry by.

23.44 On Reading Lord Alfred Douglas' Sonnets

This tinsel sonnets jarred with redolent
and slack repeated rimes that in their day
were prefered as rich symbols of decay
that sick hearts sought for and their sticky scent
still clings to drawers and cupboards never spent
yet not as those frail ghosts that mime and sway
when well skilled fingers for a moment play
on the thin wires of some old instrument

The sonnet yet can have the organ's shape
fit for the changing gusts of calm and storm
solemn at midnight lyric with the dawn
which it shall mould and master into form
not merely the chance pipe a strolling ape
may mouth his unfelt fantasies upon.

24. 44

This foolish lordling who once hit the news
because his luck had set of his feet beside
rich tempered men caparisoned in pride
who gave the craft of wit a nimble use
now turns the spittle of his sick abuse
on act and cause for which brave hearts have died
by Jan Jaranas or the Ebro's tide
while yet remained free Britain's choice to choose

Yet such the nature of his craven choice
he stands condemned to cold oblivion
when a clean people find life offers them
the scope of pencil fiddlebow and voice
by good men mastered when the rape dawn
falls on the towers of New Jerusalem.

21/22 · XII

25.44 ✓

Men went to war, built temples, spanned the seas
as god or hero prelate judge or king
shared blessing only with those worshipping
who shuffled to the throne on praying knees;
while women laboured thro their years' unease
as bedded lover wife or chattel thing
bowed to whatever man's rash will should bring
and happy only as they chanced to please.

Men wrote the books. And yet when all is said
it is to Helen that the young men turn
Helen the idle who made Troy to burn
and widowed half the bravest hearts in Greece;
to Mary also ague fermented
who was the sky and fountain of our peace.

26.44

Byron and Greece! It seemed we had the right
to feel in token we had paid the debt
the free mind owes to Hellas, Hellas set
forever as a proud and beacon light
above the tumult and th' enclosing night
with Homer Sophocles and Plato yet
masters of life enduring who are met
where gentle Shakespere heads Parnassus' height.

But now because he fears a people free
and loves a pinch beck crown, one man alone
who might have felt the pride of gratitude
mocks his harsh fate and strikes at liberty
Hellas remains: but be it understood
the shame is also ours till we atone.

28 · XII

Once out of terror into terror come
keep in your heart the interval of calm
and set against the towered Byzantium
the dove-topped roofs of quiet Walsingham.

28 · XII

How shall you be at peace
when all the images
that throng your baffled heart
move sullenly apart
and can no concord make
even for mercy's sake?

I told my heart to rest
and let the tempest rage
because the loveliest
of man's gay lineage
went by in quietness
to their appointed place
slow moving but to bless
with unobtrusive grace

But then my mocking heart
rocked on a stricken sea
and this I moved apart
the tempest followed me
until I knew at last
the storm and I were one
its rage shall not be past
til time and I are done.

Poems in 1945

17. 3. 45

We went today where we have been before
where the wild garlic fills the sultry air
and the full hawthorn's heavy on the heart
in early summer. Now the unclenched buds
the brazen celandine the puckered leaf
and hardly opened primrose wake again
the half-sad wonder that the wheel spins round
sun moon tide season never wearied yet
although the best hearts weary and grow old.

Tiger my mine power pads my, gently, dream
lollops and gambols like charaded rug
glass eyed and kindly with his whiskers wire
humping to brush my fingers. I parade
his barred docility along the street-
and cash the admiring glances in good coin
of preened esteem. But in between my steps
a ghostly footfall haunts a shadowed track
a cold breath snipes down my brittle spine
that he may wake and leap and lay his claws
on the blank admiration of the mask
my fair world wonders at under; if my lip
twitches to anger please remember this
and give me your forgiveness and your piety
to be a bit between the snarling jaws.

10.5.45

✓?

County Down in Victory Week

Here in this land of little hills
my shadow falls towards the sea:
-and every rounded summit owns
its private skylark's ecstasy

Sun on the whin and scarves of scent
from hawthorn splashed with suds of bloom
the new corn dusts red earth with green
the future wears no shade of doom
and death

Cocks, distant, crow and near sheep bleat.
the bramble drones with busy flies:
-and round the field perpetually
moves white bull calf with sullen eyes

The wind is west and flogs the clouds
headlong before it, tilted, white
and planes roar past innocuous
no longer wombed with dynamite.

✓

The golden birdsfoot, leafless thrift,
a small white flower I cannot name,
here on a shining cape of turf
a coloured paradise proclaim
above the flat worm-roughened beach
rank with brown weed, tide rubbed and dull,
its desolation broken by
the wingbeat of a random gull.

Sheep with their shadows graze across the hill
between me and the sun, their fleeces rimmed
with the slant rays that fall upon my lids
and bid me turn
my back on brightness to enjoy the light.
So must the close, maybe, of my spent day
open a richer landscape than I knew
in my bowed urgent hurry to observe
tomorrow's portents in the setting sun.

Of all the birds that sang today since I
lay in the sun and heard the morning lark
till the light left the blackbird on the bough
what dare I single from that web of song?
One note or two, the cuckoo on the hill
twig-balanced robin, finches in the hedge
chiffchaff or starling-chicks in cleft of tree
tho these should fail I never shall forget
the slither in the yellowhammer's call.

10·5

✓

In early summer I must, to confirm
from the small tenants of the tangled hedge
some hints and gestures I have overlooked
in the lit evenings of the smoky rooms
and the bare days between the high dark walls,
learn from the vetch to take convenient hold
yet have the strength, if needs, to stand alone
not reaching far and cumbering my stuff
like the assertive ivy, closing up
secure like daisy for the dark, to be
as furtive as wild strawberry in grass
and in adversity as unashamed
as those bald lawyers who have lost their wigs
the windshorn dandelion, with my Roots
of stitchwort sensitively and poise
and my wide primrose wonder at the world.

✓

County Down S.1

This rounded country ends in fat leaft wood
distant and warm against the summer sky
The slated farms spread their prosperity
hedged and manicured to the utmost rood
Each field's a hill, each hill's a kingdom viewed
by its own skylark narrow as its eye
beats higher, broad and home the last notes die
to the safe whinfost and the gaping brood

And yet I turn for sharpness of the breath
and naked lift of heart to bares hills
where March to March none but the shepherds come,
where no stiff tombstone marks the final death
where singing to itself the peat burn spills
by rock and heather to the sagsoft home.

34 W 1

23.5.45

To Roy McFadden on reading his "Flowers for a Lady"

S.2

When I have read your hard and lively words
I know your landskip stuffed to wave and stone
the knuckled fingers dealing the stiff cards
insisting player and the game as known.
Unreasoned violence may charge the crowds:
you name the current and the killing power,
will meditate upon the scattered shards
mortality must make of any flower.

When I have read your words, no more alone
I face the chill flints and the sucking clay
companioned in a place, inhabited
so long by ghosts, well enriched by what you say
in answer for the living to the dead
and in no other voice than this, your own.

From the script of "The Angry Dove" June 1945

41

Columkille founding his Derry Abbey.

Then returned
to the broad Foyle and its small friendly hills
he built his hut at Derry, place of Oaks,
Derry, forever the darling of his heart.
And there the walls grew up, the timbered roof
vaulted the echo of his singing voice
and monks vowed service, and a little town
of fishermen and farmers lit their fires.
Here joiner mason thatcher blacksmith came
and consecrated their deft artistry
till Derry of the oaks, like metal charged
drew colonies and reborn bits will
and gave a name that has endured the traffic
of troubled years and courage and betrayal.

Here Columcille with frugal meal and water
set an example few had strength to match
for close devotion and humility

bowing his proud heart down obediently
in daily labour at the mill - and prayer
in cell and church - and silent penmanship
and ceaseless care for strangers; all the while
checking his urgent tongue that longed to play
with the fine curves of rhetoric, to phrases
that paid the small coin of companionship
exactly, without alms or flourished gesture
till free in worship he outsang the choir

A Monk speaks

Yet he was used to slip beyond the walls
and in his easy stride come to the shore
where the loved waters broke with foam and weed
on the smooth rocks, and there he'd scramble up
an overhanging cliff and watch the stars
die out with dawn, save the one morning star
that waits till the first shadows rib the dew,
in silent meditation, never sleeping

but armoring his soul against the day
and its bright tempter colours.

The Little Miracle

Another Monk

Once he touched
the clenched crabapples on a wizen branch
and bid us eat them - they were clean and sweet,
pearsweet and dripping cider round our lips -
yet he would not taste of one all to we urged.

Columcille's Poem to Derry

from the prose translation of Kuno Meyer, etc.

Were all mine the land of Alba
from green centre to grey shore
I would rather have in Derry
the oakmast at my door

This is why I love my Derry:
for its kindliness and peace;
for the singing crowd of angels
thronging white in every place

This is why I love my Derry
for its peace and charity:
shining bright with little angels
is the leaf on every tree.

Little oakgrove, lovely Derry
where I built my narrow home

God above, if one should harm it,
let thy wrath descend on him.

Consequence of the War for the Book.

And famine crawled the roads, and the uncut corn
wagged in the smoky wind, and children died
and crowds like mountain sheep checked at a gap
jostled and snorted, till they turned and spilled
across the sleety hills.

The Embarkation

Conan: The midnight bell has sounded; the cables chain
the ship is eager for the night brimmed sea.
Already the captain murmurs anxiously
for he has purposed by broad noon to steer
past Corrybracken and its spinning crest;
and if you idle here will be overtaken,
in the coil and trouble of Rathlin's meeting tides,
by the black moonless hour. Master, let us go.

Columcille : My sentence said Tomorrow. Can I not wait
till the first cockcrow calls the yawning light
and I can spend my last gaze on this town
wearing the stranded gold on his highest peaks
and see the dawnwind ripple the Foyle's grey reeds?

Conan will still be mine for a league at least.
You'll hear the cockcrow off Magilligan strand
and still have your first daybreak to remember.

Columcille : Perhaps, my Conan, if I saw and heard again
the brown larks rising and the tide of light
breaking in foam of song from field to field
I should in my soft nature shelter my fear and
and tempt a worse end than the wide horizon.
Conan, I come.

The Coming to Iona

Others have told the story of that voyage:
the island found as blessed by prayer and labour,
the beacon among the Picts, the town to Britain,
the streaming light that lit a thousand places
in glen, in valley, over other oceans,
spreading the faith and the singing discipline,
heralding mercy to the lightest Alp
and making Iona one of the blessed islands
to which men turn when life grows arid and
as wellspring in the shadow of a rock.

Cremin Kean's Attack on the Bards

My Lord and King, the three provincial kings
have laid me slate on case against the poets
and not kings only, every subordinate prince
joins with us in this challenge.
These useless creatures swarming over the land
are locusts that eat our substance up. They come
with their fat beans, like tinkers in a clan,
revelling drunken marching thro the land
each party with its Beggar's Pot for alms
swung from the chains that loop their lazy spears
demanding shelter ending with possession
just a seat by the fire and a sup of broth
then by degrees the half of the host's own bed
Do-less, without respect or reverence
asking a lease of hospitality
which means those that grant it
and who dare not grant? If a man be strong
and hold his own right they hurl their rimes

at his poor head, they set their lies afloat
on the thick texture of their prosody
till every clachan rings with their abuse
and his good name is jostled, and children cry
over the wall at him or at his people
His servants leave him: none will work for him.

My Lord yourself you know their arrogance
Have they not bid you give them up the brooch
no King dare part with? Without deference
they stood before you, taunting even you
with strange thirst. It is a hundred years
since as old men will witness poets worked
in fields or granary. They are fat as slow
with jewelled fingers, paunchy in their robes
while we must plow and sow and mow and thrash
and slaggen with the full sack at their bidding
to bake their bread. They neither spin nor weave
yet wear apparel we could pray to touch

If a man here in Ermin has a son
whose face is dirty out of laziness
whose hands are smeared because he will not work
these folks call him to them as they pass
offer him wealth and plenty for a mere trick
accomplished sitting with a pen in hand
of putting words and syllables together
and after a comfortable apprenticeship
learning the old dog's tricks
he puts his robes on, lets his hair grow long
and mopes in an unnatural crazy hilt
seeking a kindly prince to batten on
till he has eaten him to beggary
and then goes off to find a richer victim
for they grow more rapacious with their years
till they are monstrous like Dallen Foxpaw here.

My lord: two jakes only can come of this
the nation sinks distracted impoverished
while these gross maggots perish with the flesh

they aptly poisoned and desolation rules:
so we expel them, make them men forbid
and set them on Britain to devour that land.

My voice with those who here companion me
is for their abolition from this day.
Make it a crime against the King and State
for any man to drive the trade of verse —
No, further, for a man to teach another
the tricks, devices, patterns that half-mine
and mine can play with language. Abrogate
the privileges that precedent has bred
for these coarse brigands. If a poet be taken
strolling the roads, or sitting by a hearth,
with runes upon his lips, or wearing the habit
of the six bright colours, and can no way prove
within the week before, he wrought with his hands
let him be stripped and whipped and sold a slave;
his purchase money to be paid to the prince
of what place he was taken in. My lord,

our fathers let this cancerous breed increase
seeing no danger in one crazy poet
who, without wine, had still got charity.
We must not let one poet remain in Erinn
or he will breed his kind by swift contagion.
The slogan is Root and Branch; destroy or expell.

Columcille's Defence of the Poets.

High King and Kings and Counsellors, this day
you have heard so many words you must be tired;
and now you must listen awhile to an old man
sarmons with his years. Yet courteously
you will keep silence and appear to heed him
because the things he wishes to declare
are greater than any weakness in his manner.

As Cuimin Kean has said; these banded poets
have laid a tax upon your economy
hard to be borne. There have been drunken poets,
revellers, bawdy rimers and satirists
who wound the hand that feeds them recklessly

Fire is a wild inconstant element:
it burns the proud house down; it scorches the junipers
it licks and runs and runs till it's quenched.
Sometimes too great to quench it must be left

to ebb and die in its own bitter ash.
Yet fire's a fellow laborer, if held
in a hard vessel and replenished well.
It roasts the meat; it boils the pot of water:
it bakes the bread; it dries the traveller's cloak;
it bends the rigid iron to the shapes
we have for metal. In a cruise lamp
it lights the whole house up. It beacons war
upon the distant hills. It warms the ship
to steer outside the craggy cape. It warms
the thin cold fingers of the aged man.

The stuff these poets play with is a fire
and like a fire has uses manifold.
I must not weary you with counting them.
Let these suffice. It lights the darkness up
of ancient history with its simple ballads.
It warms the child heart with a snatch of song.
It shines a steady witness to the truth.
It gives a flame to men when duty's slack

and cannot move them. And it scorches vice
with its live tongues till the heart is clean as a bone.

I myself have found the comfort of a stanza
and made my rimes to check the ready tears.

But there is more. The blessed thing is freedom:
freedom to live with righteousness and joy;
freedom to choose to go or not to go;
freedom to choose – this is the knife-edge here.
For freedom to be gentle implies the mind
free also to be cruel, and therefore staking
an immortal soul upon the right of choice.

Poets are men and shouted as men be free.
I cannot give my voice to one who urges
that men be free to fight and yet not free to sing;
and further upon this. The written word
was written to be read. All scholarship
is so a reliquary of the past.

a sacred object to be shrined and tended,
and half our knowledge is cut in the stone of verse.
Cuculain - and Ulysses and singing David -
is here because a handful here and there
are wilful men
to be no more remembrance of these names
nor new names added to the tally of time.
Then should this Kingdom shuffle into the dark
- among unstoried peoples to be forgotten
and Crimen Kean be never heard of more
for all his acts of daring.

So I say,
for freedom's sake and for the worth of the craft,
let poets live - and prosper. It were well
- to shape the vessel to contain the flame -
that you, High King, with reasoned counselling
set up - a statute limiting their power,
their rights and numbers, clearly laying down
by rule and definition how they shall live.
Say, if I would not sway you to the letter,

- a grant of land to him who shall be named
chief poet of the region, that his land,
cunning with pen, shall not be slack with spade,
that he remain, for all his verse, a man . . .

28.7.45

✓

Except for words demanded as a task
that tipped the rim of my brimmed mind in verse
and told a story that belongs to me
as native in this region, flesh of my flesh,
I have kept silence.

Time was far too vast
in large event for me to fumble with rimes
or else I had lost something with the years,
the true response of the senses attentive
to the gay leaves and the grey garrulous stones,
a language spoken once but with disuse
left as a tatter of sounds, the playing threads
still cloth of gold to no eyes but my own.

Death in Summer

The summer sobs. The rough unready wind
flings the green chestnuts down, too raw to split,
and gold, my colour, takes the ebbing leaf.
Too many wasted summers have conspired
to burden my heart with grief for me to move
eager, as once, snatching the proffered apple
and drenching my lips with joy at life's delight.

And now this season that of late has been
my saddest passage into the narrowed years
reaches its peak of pity. For July,
once drunk with sun and swimming in the light,
is now my patient father's funeral hour.

28-7

When man lies down forever
and names his tombstones take
the mind may spell the reason
but still the heart will break

and its life signs its verdict
on every breast and thigh
the heart still cries its challenge
that grief itself must die.

Poems in September

61½ 61

"Rann"
July 1948

The gawky lad studies round the auction pen
swinging his ashplant, with a hushing noise
keeping the caged sheep circling, as the bids –
a knuckled finger or a jerky nod –
push the slow price by shillings towards the pound.
The auctioneer leans from his plinth and asks
"Are they in the market, Paddy?" The shambling lad
shakes a grave head, a grave self-conscious head,
flushing a little since his mountain lambs
look small and shabby to his own sad eyes.

Waterfoot Sheepfair

Cockendall

7 lk

The close
September mist-made sea and sky-a void
makes the
undated loveless as eternity
with no more season than
and anchored to no rock or hill or bay
with shape or name that fixes it in space.

Only a slow boat drifts
oared with lifted bow,
a tall man standing at the stern, his head
bent over, poised upon the rippled wake,
a slender fish-spear jutting from the gunwale

And as they drifted, the standing man and boat-
and boy with lazy oars, along with them
there checked and drifted on the water's face
the scarcely-stirred reflection, mirror-poised.
far

The silent watchers on the nameless shore
are were caught and held a moment, in each heart-
the clenched ecstatic wonder which accepts
the incommunicable symbol's truth.

Cornwall

Here at the tide's turn of the moving year
feeling and thought are poised like the stiff leaves
which wait the word to fall as so resume
the cycle-sequence which is more than they
~~containing all yet manifest in each~~
yet less
~~and with~~ no other meaning than they give.

The stacks are grey now in the clover green
where once the sweet hay under the wind's thumb
shewed changing map and texture of the light:
the oaten stubble flutters in the sun
as black rooks paw and peck the tufted stooks.

So I must wait as ripening berries wait,
as the crowded ranked shadows wait for the heavy moon,
as the hill waits for heather's grains of light
to give a colour to its written name,
for autumn on my tongue to give its speech

Cornbrash

10-9-45

The philosophers mumble their notes
the preachers preach all day
the bald men twist their telescopes
all over the dancing sky

The jockeys talk to their horses
the grey men flourish their cheques
the ladies embroider their cushions
with the snakes and ladders of sex

The soldiers lean from their lorries
to ask the way to the square
and out of the sheds in a million backyards
the pigeons take to the air

The jetties screw the propeller apart
the stokers climb slow up the stair
and behind the eyes of each woman and man

is a brief unspoken prayer

O Theorem O Santa Claus
O Absolute O God Above
Grant us Thy Safe Insurance from
the atomic bomb of Love.

12/9

Gannet

The gannet falls, bobs up to ride the waves
shaking his head
then easily wheels away with tilted wing
curves a tall arc climbing steadily
in the wind's face and flaps against the wind
surging and strong with effort hovering
with wide slow beating strokes. Again he falls
with narrowed wings a white hot meteor
to hovers dropping lower till he turns
back to the unmarked spot he circled from
like a fast bowler pacing out his run

The steep waves crowd into the narrow bay
the strong wind thrusts its solid stream of air
from the wide channel in between the hills
unchallenged elements involved
in their blind purposes. The gannet takes
account of these unconsciously as one

whose intuition guides the wrist and eye
and not as those who calculate and plot
the moments intersections when to strike.

Whatever land or mind or heart contains
the ocean and the storm, I pray that I
may have the gannet's skill to fall or turn
with the same easy undivested grace.

Carstensdottir

13·9

Let These Stones Speak

Let these stones speak as once
Jerusalem's cobble stones
might have spoken had not the crowd
been in a holiday mood . . .

Stone I wait your word
speak thro my fingertips
and whisper to the eye
that has learnt to read by lip

Grain and texture, vein
and flintedge, elbow, speak
what things you have learned since dawn
stone on the oozing muck

before the world took shape
and the rivers found the seas
and towns sought out the valleys' laps
and nesting rooks the trees.

Many of the things you tell
I already know, of sun
and sea and wind and all
their ceaseless goings-on

and how they mould and trim
the size and slant and style
for in my heart the same
gay artists shew their skill

But what I have not known
and urgently would learn
is by what means a stone
tells well of good from bum.

14/9

Sonnet

S.3

Shutting my heart on terror who have known
by ear and eye so little that I move
almost an infant cushioned by the love
of a small world where every thing's his own
and only things inanimate - like stone
of kerb or steel of needle ever prove
unfriendly, till the times wherein I throve
suddenly bared a mask of naked bone

shutting my heart on terror that my thought
scarce grappling with imagined as a dream
chaotic, mad, not wakened, to be borne
I turned my stride to peace in places sought
before with certainty, where by brown stream
up the steep glenside scythesmen reap the corn

Custendall

S.4

There in the wide Glen country where the sky
is never free of cloud or trees of smoke
I went among the slow faced peasant folk
sure of my need for their economy
of traditional use and gesture that tenely
I gain a style and a temper fit to clock
my faint heart from the hurricane that broke
the thought-woven fabric of philosophy

But when I went among them at the fair
where black faced mountain ponies were bought and sold
or cutting rushes on the boggy hill
I could not reach or touch them to declare
my anxious hunger, unavowed and still
with my clenched passion utterly untold.

Custendall

14/9

5.5

Why do I vex my wits to fit my rime
to this sick coil of fancies in my head?
For better let the notions lie unsaid
till they find tenderable shape in time
and bring their utterance with them. I have known
a thought to sleep at least its groping root-
unseen for years that suddenly has shown
an unpredicted, an unwaited fruit
out of the darkness lifted to the light
and with grace moved to other eyes than mine

Yet who'll deny for certain that they might
have choked as smothered in an airs ground
had not this tedious tillage line by line
marked out the secret passages they found?

27/9

I write for my own kind
I do not pitch my voice
that every phrase be heard
by those who have no choice

their quality of mind
must be withdrawn and still
as moth that answers moth
across a roaring hill.

2.X.45

/

Across the lock smoothed river you may see
three dabchicks with a wide and pleated wake
jerk towards the jerkin bank: the evening sky
a gently-graded luminous hope that ends
in a cool yellow backcloth for the trees
still kept enough to give a good silhouette:
the hollows in the wide fields brimmed with mist
obscure and aid the fading day to hide
the stooky stubble and the reaped bare earth.

Peace offers its hushed blessing to the heart
its coil of trouble renewed to strength
that wears the little stars like pearls of dew
webbed on a sheltered and unshaken whin:
an autumn sunset closes round the mind.

24.XI

X

Die with the autumn. Do not wait for spring
and its raw blades. These will be too coarse
for you to probe into the scuffled sheath.

Before the channels freeze in a hard glaze
that cracks its edges and drifts separate
dully reflecting with indifference ~~without sympathy~~
the trundling sky and the encroaching light.

Or lasting longer join the hills all bare
few friends to move with round the level path,
even the deaths grow scarce in the daily print.
The calves flaking into stupid shapes,
hopes once left stunted trunks. Accomplishment
raw in the harsh tall air. Nothing to hold
firmly the foamed liquor to the lips
but an old man's pulse that flutters like a bird.

Early November

Wang Li Hsi Once more

Today I have received a letter asking
if I have any manuscript poems of yours
among my papers.
I had thought that you were forgotten by now.

It is late autumn. The trees have only
a few brown wagging leaves. The sky is grey

By coincidence I have been these last days
preparing a talk on chinese art-
and thinking of you a great deal

There is report of war between the Communists
and Chiang Kai Shek. I have been thinking
of you a great deal.

It is late autumn. The trees have only
a few brown wagging leaves. The sky is grey.

I think also of another, a countrymen of mine,
who died a captive, taken at Singapore. Capt Robert McConkey
He is almost completely penciled, his
jokes his gestures his loud anxious gusto

I think of another, who died in Spain Capt Robert McConkey
hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Ben Murray
He is dead truly. But you still live International Brigade
in verses about the morne mountains
and in the future of your people.

I think of another, who lives for a dream Arthur Griffen
and died in the lap of it. He is buried at yalta. C.P.G.B.
Perhaps in this day's world only poems are real

It is late autumn. The trees are
tossing impatiently, eager for spring.

27.XI

Romantics were the optimists, the Pessimists were classical
in well poised postures of a wise resignation
not in the wry clinches of an extreme despair
or the rheumatic attitudes of a fantastic hope
thumping the hollow chest till bounding heart in throat
tears its rhapsodic stanzas and broken lines.

So for awhile let my words be warm enough to live
on grave lips smiling gently, and not flake away
like stucco perorations by the chance of weather
or turn like orator's sculpture into monsters.

2.XII

X

Sonnet

S.6

Nourish your heart this all the ports of sense
let sights caress compel them to come in
that furtive lurk in shadow. Let touch spin
her sagging dragging threads with diligence
no anchor cable, but a net to freight,
meshed close as flesh, from the reluctant tide
the veering atomies. Let the rest provide
all they can bundle into each closing gate.

See that you miss no offer. name and store
and set in order all. Let nothing be
a toy too small, a trophy overleat
the fingered tips that reckon less or more:
for all you know or I know, these must last
the wear and tear of slow eternity.

2 · XII

Emily Dickinson

When I, the easy one, was hurt
as never hurt before
I fumbled back the files of verse
for one who suffered more.

But all the poets' proverbs slept
as dry as my swept hair
save one alone who knew at once
my idiom of pain.

3 · XII

On reading an anthology of 1932

There is nothing grows
more quickly old-fashioned than the new.

Reading an anthology of new verse
published a dozen years ago, I found
that the man who used the most experimental forms
was precisely the writer who dated most.

Good poetry is always written in eternity
where there is no now or then.

3. XII

Fragment for long poem

In my best moments, feeling justly proud
I wait his gesture and approving nod
but suddenly I know he is not here
and have no faith that he is anywhere
and I must chalk the little victories
for art and life and the small decencies
as if on blackboard in a public place
for chance of sleeve or weather to efface
and never know him radically defined
in the bright lens of his translucent mind

New part of "Freehold"

4. XII

Never may the heart forget
the passion that evoked the seed
and all the layers of anxious love
before the first small cry:
for he and she who joined to make
a shape they might approve
and set a ship equipped and freed
to take the shifting sea
have still the right to wonder if why
their passion and their patience were
expended to provide a sky
with
for an erratic star.

10. XII.

1

Out of the terrible darkness I have come
alive, not maimed, not marked, save that my mind
carries the old hurt raw again that once
was flayed and eased with wonder .. that old hurt
the heart finds in the sheer avoiding sky
and in the proof of death, but flayes with
the jelly senses crystalline device
reflecting back the doom and drawing light
from mindless circuits to illuminate
the whispering shadows with reckoned purposes

2

The millions cough in rubble or lone crazed
haunt the shadows calling them by name.
I guide my pity past the empty sleeve
I, the unmaimed, the free, devise my thought
to measure with the steady shapes of growth
my instinct signs as hopeful; the death
of my good father by the right of time
or nearly so, lies thrust a deeper point
than all the splinters of a savaged world.
My thought still charts its policies which need
a wider ring of light than my lamps throw

[written in October]

Fragments for a long poem "Fieldes"

Now my October with the yellow leaf
spirits like the spring the sap flow of my grief
for by the calendar I overtake
my father's years. The orphaned minutes make
my slow thought graver, my ambitious mind
content with less, more tolerant and kind
the words and gestures that unchecked before
gave angle to my ravenous shadow. For
a purpose moulds me with patient shape
that I must reach and measure, not escape
along the random pastels of my youth,
a tempered channel renewed to the truth
of human love, of quality defined
by the proved limits of a mortal mind.

I went again where I had found delight
in dawn's conjecture, where the strokes of light
woke, out of cloud, the known familiar place
the fields the hills the river and the face
conditioned by them to a leisured grace.

Not I alone but also one within
whose voice and handclasp doubled all I see
one now more dear since fewer claim my love
and stemmed affection urgently to prove
its undiminished power seeks to give
a richer texture to the life we live
so shot with chance so perilously spent
on the flawed ice of mortal accident

We went to see again Hems took the rows
up the sleep glenside where the scythesman mows
and the boy poles the toppling grain aside
that it fall rightly in the binder's stride.
We sought him at the crowded shippens where
the muttered warning kept the bargain fair
and the gaunt lad drove back his black faced flock
to the brown slopes of tangled grass and rock
but we were lonely still, unskilled to reach
across the thorny hedge of thought and speech
to the slow wisdom of the older way
more sapers idling thro a holiday
irrelevant as hail of smoke that skews
to men afield that still the ocean's traffic flows.

Only the wild things Juscha saw and kept
admitted us to their companionship
and proved to questing eye and tongue anew
what bragging memory had claimed as true;
and the grave gannets in the choppy bay
gave their involved and rhythmical display
as if, proud actors, they enjoyed our awe
that not a wing beat limited that they saw.

The crowded gulls upon the spit of sand
black headed common herring, greater and
the lesser blackbacked, facing out to sea
stood round to be admired then leisurely
made demonstration gestures, taking off
circling and landing in the swaying trough
of storm torn water so behind the spit
where the smooth river's cut a lake to fit
its blunted course. Along the sleek dog sides
pied wag tails perked between the wrack marked tides

and stayed rooks rustled blacker in that light
like shining mid the treetop stairs of night.

But there was one we missed all the we looked
in every elbow of the river crooked
by bank of sand or bunker that framed one
the solemn heron always seen alone
stiff with conceit disdain, who once or twice provoked
yet even in his frightened motion cloaked
with a certain dignity as he went
in tall meltonic idiom, to prevent
our coming .. Now we looked for him in vain
and felt the towers lacking his disdain.

Once at the glenhead up by Orrc Lodge
a gutted shell now wéd the luck to dodge
the great black downpour that had threatened us
since an hour back we left McCormicks' House
the farm at Brockayle, with prophetic squalls
we stalked and hid from by the roofless walls
of an old cowshed, under a stone bridge
in spiked discomfort of the last thorn hedge,
beside a turfstack, till the last dry spell
lured us unsheltered cool and walking well
to the bare fenceless road. We scarce had time
to find the shepherds door shut and to climb
over the smashed porch slab into the dry
wrecked safety of the Lodge, when the black sky
came down upon us wiping out the world
as the mists groping fingers caught and curled
round beck and turfstack thrusting down the glen
The battered husk wore evidence of men

the hearth wrenched out, the boards prised up and gone
the roof bare slates and rafters, the walls bare stone,
and resting grateful on a tilted plank
we lapsed to silence - and the moment shrank
slow from my senses till I was no more
tayled in a world of
a timid creature smothered by a war
but a free man set out of time and space
for whom event was braked to walking pace
that thought could measure handle and assess
dismiss from blessing or restrain to bless.
follow by. 'And in that moments grasp'

[to precede "Glen Head"] 2.1.46

So ranging farther with a combing stride
we sought new paths to key our slackened pride,
traced on the map the promise of the ground,
and richer slopes, unlimited textures found.

Critic?

First then myself a mortal in his prime
addicted to the sophistic wine
who used no tool save lately now and then
the safety razor and the fountain pen
a man clothed figure on the standard side
proud in its posture with small cause for pride
skilled only in the tricks of word and wit
contented best to sleep and talk, or sit
and talk more freely of politics and art
husk like the house but without the heart-warm heart.

I had known death before, my grandfather
slipped out of life without a backward stare
into the full sun of a summer day
old wise and quiet going on his way
to where his grey friends had already gone
it seemed a thousand years since eighteen forty one.
I was not sad altho between us two
more ties than those of race his death withdrew
He gave me much, he made me know my race
fitted out the empty names of men and place
as the bright colours of a vivid eye
were painted over by rich memory
I moved among the people of his mind
his mother's parents openeyed and kind
to the small orphan with his mother dead
from fever that the little famine bred
his father Lookwood Mark who packed his wares
in saddlebags and hunted round the fairs
the broad brimmed elders grave with Yea and Nay

as the Rack coming day over Judgment Day
and the rash youngsters sick with poverty
who sought a better life beyond the sea
and scrawled their spiders letters once a year
from the raw fence posts of a new frontier
These were his people so he made them mine
by laying on of hands and right divine
a stubborn kinship that would recall
the famine's curse, the farm that was too small
and yet with faint protestant that denied
the hope of mercy to the Papist side.

The rest of "Freehold" was written
and the whole revised during January and February
this included the recasting of "Chapel in country
Town" and "Townland of Peace" in complete.

No other verse was written until Easter 1946
when the following items emerged: —

25.4.46

Sonnet

After a tedious winter once again
cancelled in service that in retrospect
seems so loose anchored easily to be wrecked
by whim or frenzy of fanatic men
I seek the place where I'm an alien
in word and thought and from communion checkt
by blood's dark memories of flag and sect
the benedictions proffered now as then.

For here my aching mind has never failed
to grasp the comfort of enduring things
the careless give and take of sand and sea
the coarse stones by the rocking tides assailed
the leaves repeated on remembered tree
the punctual birdsong the returning wings.

Cushendall

The hills remained; each shape identified
by its predicted altitude, the blunt-
long narrow table top of Lurigedan,
Trevebraigh's maiden paps sharp nipped still
the wall of Garron shutting out the sunlit
the white tight rounded cone of Tiveragh
and Trostan holding up the sagging cloud

These heights remained and by their rock based marks
held firm the wide vet of the tossing fields
the some are ploughed to brown that had been grass
mowed into stooks or left for grazing then.
Yet there was something needed bringing
the nest of feelings I remember with.
Well, road and tree, the press of huddled roofs
the slowly climbing smoke among the rooks
the same old ocean narrowed to a bay
that lipped the restless tides; I measured all
and the equation limping unresolved

Then aiming my content at lesser point
as one returning where the priests gone
used a stricter language, trimmed to miss
the bitter gap, I secured my scanted thought
into the same motions as the place expects.

But in a sudden brightness, vacantly,
leaning on sheltered grass above the bay
(the verse extended and the spent mind raw)
waiting for blessing, out of the clean sky
the flashing gannet turning in the sun
struck the bright water and the ripples shocked
the world to wonder, the equation clinched.

Cushendall

Off the rough cliff and into the smooth air
beneath, the ravens ~~swoon~~ lurched and swum with ease.
There was no lack or halt to pause and stare
on the steep camber of the slipping screes

but from safe leather seat I could assess
the weaving lines of life above my skill
yet with long awe that life grew something less
and more the stubborn wonder of the hill.

Cushendall

I write this verse and none shall hear
unless I read it out aloud
So there is little cause to fear
either the critic or the crowd.

And yet and yet while still the word
is rocking on the pencil tip
the whispered judgements overheard
of many a grave and bearded lip

whose wisdom lives within my heart
so long as I have wit to hear
the canons of the versemaniac art
are not the fashions of a year.

Though here it seemed there was a timelessness
nor hedge nor furrow to remark the date
only the bare rock face above the moor
the rusted heather and the desolate

cloud heavy sky, the drenched and sapless grass
that told of a dead world unmanned, unblest
yet even here the exuberant curlews' call
and the harsh raven's dropping to his nest

[insist the season surely as the blunt
wheat budded chestnut on suburban lane
reminds the blackbird to remind the town
that footloose spring is at the gate again.]
insist the season surely as the white
swarming the lower heights, the leaping boughs
where this bronze ribbon crumpled over stones
drifts slow and sober past the grazing cows.

Cushendall

26·4

For Robert

I saw the hiker pouring o'er his map
and offered him my knowledge of the roads.
He fell to talk. And with an English tongue
he told me of his long hard down the glen
and where he planned to sleep tonight, and there
he headed for beyond that. Then I spoke
of the bare moors that lay between, with pride
he fumbled out his compass. I admired
its neatness and compactness. Then I asked
what trouble him here to Ireland. He replied
I want to see them all. I did not speak
remembering in a flash how many lads
of his gay generation had gone out
to see so many countries; and I thought
of one who rots now in an island grave
where the warm breezes stir the drooping palms
and will not come again to this cold shore.

Hamill's Café, Custendall

Irish Bookman
June '47 X

April Awake

Lark-bright the air; the light
from leaping ledge and willow
was jacketed with white
of black-thorn and thin-yellow.

The climbing sun made light
of purple shadowed furrow:
white was the line and white
the horse that dragged the harrow.

From Tierragh, Custendall

Irish Bookman 27.4
Page 47

Sonnet

Up the steep brae the ill-matched horses climb
Him at the furrows' end, in shadow stand,
Before the stack rein loose within the band
Are hitched, and they go down another time
From fronting hill I watch the pantomime
And catch, at winds's whim, the abrupt command
That guides the stumble down the slipping land
Intent to twist the symbol into mine.

This man will later sow, and, lucky, reap,
Talk crops and horses, drinking at the fair,
Will build a skill from weather soil and spade.
Like him I too, shall rise and eat and sleep:
May neither ever join the earth less fair,
Nor wish we had been taught another trade.

Cashendall

Sonnet

The whistling chiffchaff and the grating rook
Fall silent for an instant in the trees
And on the vapid air the sounding sea's
Deep bass is counterpointed by the brook.
Here stark the context. Birds again begin,
Finch thrush and robin each contributing
The certain phrase that only he can sing
To this rich theme that needs no violin
For there's no pity here, no thought involved
In transience and chill mortality,
No knotted problem that to be resolved
Requires more courage than the heart can give.
This is the spring: these creatures glad to live
Announce their joy and business equally.

Cashendall

5.6.46

I have thought a great deal
of life and death
but my thought has been too amorphous
to fit the shape of a poem

I have had singular ideas
that at the moment-
amazed me with their Truth

But none of these has come
as a visual image
to mine and gesture forever relevant-

So although in some indefinable way
I feel wiser and more mature
I have nothing to offer as proof —
not even a note
jotted on the back of an envelope.

[Derby Day]

What possible interest can the millions have
who waited for their luck this afternoon
in my slow moralisings, slow and grave
on the spent blossoms of a falling June?

and would they listen even if I plucked
a brace of symbols from their narrow skies
and not regard my easy usufruct
with the same mocking unresponsive eyes?

I watched a cattle fair the other day:
the stupid frightened calves, the fat proud mares,
the cheapjack hustlers with too much to say,
the redfaced dealers of a hundred fairs;

and though my roving eye, well trained to gauge,
not merely form and colour but to relate
the social pattern to the printed page,

the style of building and the likely date,

missed nothing from the clabber on the boots
to the inflections of the dialect
the freckled knuckles and the blue serge suits
the shuffling bargain and the bird direct.

I still was alien, uninvolved, without
a thread to hold me there, not even a ghost,
for he, at least, has the right to claim a thought
or to gibber if all thought of him is lost.

As I moved round among them, thistledown
blown through tall grassblades as the wind demands:
out of the muck and shit a symbol spun
and thrust itself into my groping hands —

a rocky joiner hardly five foot high,
in overalls with sawdust in each crease
suddenly lurched in view and caught my eye

his shoulders burden bent him at the knees,

a six foot bundle of thin springing lath
balanced and lively, so unhurriedly
he and his timber drove an arrow's path
straight through the jostling crowd, like fish through sea

not looked by glance or baited with a phrase.
Though men might loiter, he knew where to go:
an undiverted purpose charged his gaze;
he had his own peculiar job to do.

This occurred at Bally castle.

13-6-46

Friends and Neighbours.

From ~~tern~~ yesterday the gannet and the tern,
gannet more close than ever held before
as we sat on the thrifty turf above
the choppy water where the fishing's best
and tern that hovered over the waves' edge
with close black cap and beak obliquely poised

Today the cool grey heron and the lark
heron in plummet beating through the reeds
close to the ledge when we'd surprised his mood
lark where eyes hurt against the brilliant sky
song's highest point maintained when sight's withdrawn
close-plummeting to feather to be lost
among the coloured finches in the whins.

These all are positive, securely seated
against the heart's drought in the clanging street.
But now tonight the well is overbrimmed;

talk at the bar disclosed a badger once
that crossed this lane beside this very house,
glimpsed on a midnight walk, most likely come
from Tieveragh our little neighbour hill
and heading for the farm behind the woods.

Written at Convent Lodge
Tuneragh

13.6.46

Come in a motorbus come in an austin
squat on tubemetal and order your ice
your hopes and your values may both remain constant
yet you never need stop at the same place twice

Park the cars close in front of the café
or space them more spaciously along the salt-turf
turn on the radio wind up the gramaphone
music sounds better with background of surf

But the more daring will bring out the primuses
fill kettle from flask if there's doubt of the spring
spread rugs on the grass, unfold sunday newspapers
and sigh for the tins they omitted to bring

for all know the seashore's the right place for sunday
man is much closer to God by the sea
large elemental beneficent primitive
{a man in one place is no more than a tree.
{too long in one place will grow roots like a tree

Convent Lodge, Clonmel

13.6

Here at the wood's edge in the small square house
with the sharp windows and the thick stone walls
you'd think it was a monk's cell shut from time
yet while the light lasts there's a chaffinch calls
utters
not merely his brief note but the full phrase
over and over to be answered with
two or
three chuckling blackbirds, and a robin comes
to sit on fenceposts in the afternoon
and in the evening beyond the trees
the lordly cuckoo sounding leisurely
his name in the long fields of sunlit oats
is countered by that kendin, Larsden cry
the corncrake winding up his tireless watch
when
and in the dark, the full moon is smeared
is smudged
the curlew's babbling whistle's close enough
for anyone who feels that men are mad.

Convent Lodge,
Clonmel, Castledall

14.6.46

V. The Barleys.

Crackling on burnt whin, springing over moss
stopping to search our memories for the names
of little unfamiliar flowers, we sought,
over the rough grassed hillside in the warmth
of a June morning, for the two early circles
the map showed for this lowland, Ballyrookey.
Once a brown mare left off her tall fawn foal
and grazing cattle lurched across our path,
larks singing in the light and sinister rooks
plotting in heather what to do in corn
and in one place a pause to chart our steps
(caravan) (out)
where the boy cotton stuck its warning lights -
Then suddenly we found our whin bright mounds,
small amphitheatres enclosed in rushes
where centuries ago the young folk came
to pasture their scraggy cattle all the summer
on lush warm slopes above the (swampy) arid village
where the old people bided their return
And as we stood together, gazing round

naming the landmarks of the stony glens
I thought and surely you thought, somehow these
laboriously piled, forgotten strips
were richer than the hedged walls of castles
held clearer memories than those of kings
and than blood-sodden tapestries of guilt,
and looked on pale hands with kind sunburnt hands.

—

Convent Lodge
Tiverragh
Castledall

(on last slope safe above the growing corn)

9/10-8-46

X

The Woodcutters

They are taking the best beeches in the wood:
close to the house for days they sawed and chopped
and let the fat
with a beast trees crack and tear and fall
with a harsh final sound.

We gathered the chips,
hard size to under for firing, without the shapes
of growth or art no good for anything else.
The heavy treetrees, trimmed and safely roped
on a long open truck, have come down the drive
and down the road and out of sight forever.
The sawed-off heads, lopped of their thicker branches,
lie in red pools of leaves; the grazing cows
take them for granted now.

The woodcutters,
red-necked and noisy, have gone up the slope
and only when the wind is from the northeast
is any sound of axe on timber heard.
The motor once a day still roars and stops

till the gate's opened.

Every evening
walking across the hill we note each fresh
grey ring of ash where cans were boiled that day
and that day's tally of the raw white stumps.

Weather and time do merciful things to stumps.

Convent Lodge
Tiveragh
Castleisland

Turbine 19.50 17.8.46

X

City Morning

Sun on the city morning high on walls
drips down the awnings carpets flat the corners
flowersellers fill their tins at the public fountains
and dustmen empty bins in the hooded cart
shop doors have the blank just awakened look
the figures in the windows tilted stiff
as if surprised at their revel and ashamed
of the coarse glances that will harry them
but the bare streets are clean and ready for feet

The invisible elastic bands that scattered
the rocking buses eastnight to the suburbs
now twang them back to the centre, full of faces
that also drank of sleep and now are people
for a short while until by ten o'clock
an ordinary day contains their gestures
as a thick meadow the small and taller weeds

Trust Bookman
June 47

S. Will

It is a matter for the human will,
and will's the thing we have no answer for: —
the senses may go groping, or we may till
the stubborn clods of our nature and be sure
of some crop sprouting; and the open heart
can always snatch some wonder from the air
that for awhile may set our steps apart
from the swift jostling hurry to despair.

But will rocks idly like a tethered skiff
unoared or capstained, settling slowly down
which given the habit and the practised hand
could carry easily past the burnished cliff
between the washed reefs and the spray cowled stone
that safely we might come to our own land.

21/22·8

Subdued
to sullen patience by a lassitude
corollary of a pervasive mood
that's like the grey volcanic dust which lies
furred on each surface, though the roar is spent
the flame guttered back, the memories
of the sick tremors faintly to recall
(even the sun finds colours in the skies
that make his setting once magnificent
now drab and casual)
grown older in a gaps toothed world I wait
for the slow glacier edging of event
it needs an age to measure, obstinate
against green tips of hope that pierce the dust
preferring endure the heat and lust
and share the bitter climate of the time
then indulge myself in shocking faith
that this is not the sure decline to death

Autumn

Brighten the stars and earlier the dark,
the leaves remind me of the time of year –
and not these only, but the morning air,
sharp voice, and footfall clattering to work –
a friendly season's here.

Not now, as once, by summer satisfied
I take time's head with quickening of relief.
Summer's a fraud, with stalking horse of leaf
and showy blossom, insolent to ride
at full tilt of the tide.

But in despite of all its coloured bluff,
charade of scent and petal, nearly all
the cunning songbirds button up their call
even the noisy fellows who found rough
spring scales wide slept enough.

They wait, as I, the lonesky of frost;
the naked candour of the spendthrift tree,
the crisp leaf's bright salute to certainty,
the gift that makes no bones about the cost,
the gamble surely lost.

X

The House at Learmore

This fine house built, half burnt and raised built again,
here on the round breast of the stock-lined brae,
has roofed the schemes and dreams of many men
and watched far more than seasons go their way.

First Ken, the thrifty man who turned his coat
when the old faith seemed caught in tempest shock,
and in the Craigy woods across the Glen
the hunted priest served mass upon a rock;

and with the loyal living he displayed,
he found safe names to cut into the stone
that lies upon the Papist bones at Layde,
the details and the heraldry his own.

And the rough Gaels became fine gentlemen,
their place marked safely on the coaching chart,
the Lodge, the drive, the shape of the walled garden;

the change of name announced a change of heart.

Yet after the coarse centuries are over,
an old man, standing by his workshop door,
just answers Glenville, if you ask, then adds —
"In the old days the townland was Learmore".

This story's muddled, threading in and out
in no neat sequence, for his coiling wit
remembers brightest what is farthest off
and mixes gossip with the rest of it;

and his bare words have that strange quality
which makes you keep ahead of your slow guide,
till what he says and what you may have known
become a ~~mass~~ fleece too tangled to divide.

He can move back among his sixty years
to times the place changed hands, from whom to whom —
the city merchant's French carved screen, he hears,

is still the ornament of the drawing room.

He spent a fortune on it then, and sold it
to an admiral who wore a famous name;
it was a kinsman, in another cause,
whose rebel death gave all they have of fame.

The wheel spins quicker now: they come and go;
the Clydeside publican whose lucky bet
brought grooms and jockeys, till, with a sudden blow,
the money lenders
the bank directors seized it for his debt.

Some bought the house and renovated it,
planted more trees or had some cut away,
proved it too big, or inconvenient,
or found it ~~more than they could safely pay~~ cost far more than they could pay;

or, more ambitious, made the architect
build a sleek wall to match the other wing,
put up the tower and laid the tennis court,

but did not stay to see their second spring;

and then the fire that gutted the middle part
just when the painters and the plasterers
had made it neat and tidy for a bride,
as though it suffered something of a curse.

Then the gay years when what was once a home
became a new hotel with painted sign,
and tweedy golfers, noisy as their cars,
came roaring up the quiet lane to dine;

and the rooms added to their memories
snatches of jazz and chatter, out of key
with the shrewd Scots politic arguments
and the light Dublin-~~Castle~~ season repartee.

The church has taken it now. The lily pond
with the squat statues like a sculptor's play,
the gravelled path where stopped the jaunting-car

with news of Bunker's Hill or of Castlereagh,

are seldom crossed by any other shadow
than that of gentle nun with hooded face,
whose quiet voice and step and courtesy
give comfort to the change-tormented place.

Although the fabulous slab may still be found
in Layde's walled thicket of long grass and stone,
in the high house, a landmark miles around,
the old faith slippers back to claim its own.

Sonnet

Lonely at heart but avid for regard
eager for friendly hands but self-concerned
too much to yield to duties friendship earned
I sought the melley yet remained unscarred.
Did some cause beckon by its own reward
I lent my voice and thought, in service burned
my quick hours up yet from the strife returned
still from the blest Liard's consecration barred.

At worst an arrogant critic overlord
for the still values that without a voice
must get, in God's good time, inject the crowd.
At best an unaccountable ally
who pays no head to tunes for marching by,
and answers orders with an act of choice.

Sonnet

With this thrawn nature I might well have gone
from cause to cause and always in the right
parried my share of onset in the fight
and from defeat or victory stalked alone:
but from the blur of faces there was one
whose heart responded to the wayward light
I also sought for, whose best hours were bright
with wisdom older than the sunwarmed stone

And so together, though our horses rear
and plunge and pause and forward drive again;
with more than twice the mustered strength of each
when each rode singly, jostle through the breach
we press the line, assured a comrade's near
to aid, to warn, to urge, or to restrain.

1.9.46

Sonnet

Now when the shadowy hills are smeared with rain
and the heart knows that autumn is at hand
you will, I know, this town in silence stand
watching the white mist spilling down the glen
where we have come, when I shall come again
to our spare house of refuge in that land
thronged so with magic as might stand with stand
the lightspun web ties spidery thin to thin.

Now sundered at the season's laboured turn
when natural events at jeopardy
of unpredicted chance, we still are sure
that late or soon with frost's clean signature
the world will waken, warmer for shall burn
the heart-fire of our spell-ringed sanctuary.

We looked for splendour for our days
and snatched at coloured resonance,
the rich encrusted lessoned phrase
the measured tread of formal dance

for surely there equated best
with the high theme our thought-shaped scale
the destiny of man, the quest
of values that can never fail

But piece by piece the wrappings sag,
moth-shot and weakened, stained and torn
the faltering steps begin to drag,
the gilded sandals are outworn

yet those who gone in other
sought and the guise,
bright scalpelled, rubbergloved and clean,
or goggled round the weary eyes

and reeking of the hot machine

are bogged upon the lower slopes
so nearer to the mist his peak
Rain we with all our Tarnished hopes
for ~~and~~ all their functional technique

But far above us near the sun
there moves a figure striding bright
who, free in nakedness, has won
to the simplicity of light.

—

Gnatarin 2.9.46

What was a passionate man is now a page
in an illprinted old anthology
and yet the live words like a gale of rage
can rock me like a tree.

The Place of Hate

I should have room for mercy in my heart.
I should have patience. That most patient man,
my father, had time for mercy and charity,
though much provoked by event and private wrong:
and yet life took him and struck him like a rat,
bed captive ailing watching his day narrow,
and dropped him moaning into the gaping dark

He kept his patience well, and his charity;
but once in the last nights, in a delirium
bidded with pain, he muttered, pillow-deep,
"I have been badly alone", the rest of his talk
sentences telescoped ~~and~~ yet close to sense
~~and~~ but hardly worth the effort to explain.

I was beside him, and thought I understood
and carried his faint voice in my wounded mind
to add another pain to the pain of his loss.

Now I remember his words they are full of sense
than merely that thin voice calling out of the dark,
calling forlorn and forsaken because of the dark.

He went among people. His word was taken as truth.
He served the causes he chose without bitterness.
He wore respect like a ribbon on his coat
and somehow missed the dust of violence
and yet life took him and shook him in the end.

He should have hated and fought and been merciless
to drink the cup and face his charity;
for the dark creatures wander unappeased
and merely to chain them is to quicken their rage
and render them deadly when they come to strike.

So room in my heart for mercy must imply
room also kept for hate, as patience needs
its opposite to achieve and keep the balance:
then enemy and friend shall remain to the end
and even a ghost shall have things to say to ghosts.

Bell March '48

2.9.46

140

X The Frog a God

When I was small if chance should bring a priest
once in awhile along the quiet street,
I'd run beside him, pull my schoolcap off
and fling it on the ground and stamp on it

I've caught my enemy a message-boy
and gripped his jersey and admonished him
just to admit his fault and when he did
repeatedly to curse the Pope of Rome

This was when I was yelping with the pack
a skinny pup that loved the gutter best
for you could sail a boat there in the rain
or dam the grate with mud or in the frost

find little lanes of ice to skew the world
a dance of crooked lamp and reeling wall.
The frost was better than the dirty snow

which turned to slush the minute that it fell

and burned the fingers with its dripping flame
like petrol from a lighter. Years before
when I came in from play on Christmas Eve
my mother bathed me at the kitchen fire

and wrapped me in a blanket for the climb
up the long stairs to bed; we suddenly heard
the carolsingers somewhere in the dark
their voices sharper for the frost was hard

My mother carried me along the hall
into the parlour where the only light
upon the mantelpiece and furniture
was from the yellow lamp across the street.

And there looped round the lamp the singers stood
their faces lifted to the lively stars
singing a song I liked until I saw

my mother's lashes were all bright with tears.

Out of this mulch of ready sentiment
guilty with blades of plenty violence
I am the green shoot asking for the flower
soft as the feathers of the snow's cold swans.

Poetry Nelan Radio Eireann

Overture Regional.

Overture for Welsh Regionalism

~~The little cultures all are tuning up~~

Listen and you shall hear them above the storm
The new songs strengthen with the growing light
The Welsh have started well: the lyric story
Hedrick knows; others of the Welsh do read.
Can you distinguish between Gwyn and Glyn Jones?
The political poem reach to grasp their skulk

Scotland going a long time now with MacDiarmid
has room for Duncan's salty kilt and Young's
Polyglot gallimaufries on the pipes.

We've started ourselves a Lowe or two ago
but they have raced ahead. It will take us busy.

They have their advantages. Welsh is a language
the rocky chapels are older than our spires.

Scots is as old as English. I remember Dunbar
and Gaelic holds its ceilidhes in the islands.

But we - we are not Gaels. They have their ghettos
and will be later than we to join their mode
mode for translated thought, for the Gaeltacht shrinks

Our speech is a ragbag thing, the rags and remnants
of Tudor rogues and grim Scots Covenanters,
Cant soldiery despatches and puritan sermons
with a jag or two of glass from the tangled slough
the crossroads solo and the penny ballad

But even thus starved they will serve our purpose
if we're obedient to the shape of the land
to the shifty weather with its crazy logic
cold and dry in the spring, wet in the summer
dry again at the end of the Lammas floods

I believe we shall make something of it, something lean
and clean and honest as the basalt cliffs
patchy with colour like the coast in Italy
bold as Slieve Bernagh and the bald Mourne peaks

flat and reflecting as a Lough Neagh sunset
as nourishing as potatoes out of the clay
may be not more shapely than the potatoe

we are a fickle people but we will be heard
for we are lucky, can either grow or die
but the great have no alternative to dying.

Many cosseted with luck have avoided death
in its varieties of place and manner:
of these too, some have kept their emotions unaligned
walked fast or sulked as free men making a choice:
but there's not a single mind that has not been bruised;
intact contagion injection: the tablecloth
shews the fat specks of soot even in the locked room.

There is a point where sickness becomes a climate
and an epoch may wear a stench and a colour
that because all share it goes unrecognised.
Such an age this: the old men once had masks
and, even tho' unredeemed ~~unashamed~~ as now, the set grace
because it was a discipline had value:
now they are unashamed and proud of their bare faces;
the young men, all the charity may remember their time
and adjust the sentence, will be old before they recover,
their voices tuneless, their remarks not memorable

8/11 9.46

✓ The Student Lily

Once in an age we feel we are a people
but that identity is hard to keep:
we lose it reading a leading article,
or seeing a strange name painted over a shop.

The Gaels among us inhabit their own world;
they stand on the far side of the football ground:
we may talk in trams or queues, but a sudden word
stretches a cold hand to draw down the blind.

A leading Saxon may speak of his loyalties,
a local landlord rise to second his stance;
but the overtones that haunt the echoed phrase
make nonsense of the asserted commonsense.

We may try by shouting louder to convince
or even march to the beat of a foreign song,
but the rhetoric explodes in irrelevance

when the shoe pinches and the shares go down.

We feel it when a boxer wins a fight
and leathers the pick of Gorbals or Mile End,
but by the second year, in a shiny coat,
you'll see him selling programmes in the stand.

A famous marshal may nod to the roaring crowd;
in spite of the posters he is not of our kin:
his voice belongs to another neighbourhood,
his jokes and gestures those of another class.

Again, we feel it in a foreign town
a flower of pride bursts out of loneliness
we fix it with a sharp and bleeding pin
and thrust it in the swaying native's nose

but pluck its petals facing down the dock
that carries us between familiar hills
returning.
or fling it to the flotsam in the dock
to mock the hungry avalanche of gulls

Then walking on a summer holiday
we meet an old man turning in a gate
who stops to talk about the weather's way,
and suddenly we catch a whiff of it;

and there it's growing in the deep green ditch
and on the white bush, and the nearest tree
is full of twittered words that sound as if it
were no mere blossom but had things to say.

Last night the little house was full of stir
when, unpredicted, eight sat round the fire
my friend the father talked of Irish novels
his little daughter danced her Irish reels
Fergus and Finbar, mine and Joe, the sons
whispered together: and the Scotsman raged
an old man, Glasgow-Irish, against the Jamaica
remembering his father's long-ago stories
as I remembered God, my grandfather's . . . .

This small house, older than the Jamaica years
seemed somehow to cock its ear and nod assent,
a soft amen to all we said and were.

Today we left it in September sunshine
not lonely though alone among the trees
like a white hen a wise old clucking hen
heavy with life, broody with memories.

9.9.46

The Wind that Shakes the Barley

The wind that shakes the barley rules the world:
no man moves singly, every grassblade joins
in general shadow as colour drips away
when the earth turns; and when men turn the hay
after a showery week or scythe the corn
tangled and flattened on the lower fields,
sun glows on golden butter precious now
because the wind's still west; this slice of bread
crumbs into flooded acres and empty barns.
The wind that shakes the barley rules the world.
The Nagasaki dust lies on my shroud.

Symbols

Look sharp, impersonal
I grope for symbols that my thought may move
which if a man who knows me not may spell
down the accustomed nerve-way vein or groove
the thought I offer as his own slow thought
to the last junction of the common heart
but I am cheated by the changing light,
but every image cheats me from the start.;

My swan is not the white collective swan
but that arched creature proudly floating on
the flour-mill dam; the legendary goose,
if white, is one of ten which live to graze
on the green fair Hill, where the tinkers camp
once in a while, when you have scaled the hump
of the straight High Street past the Curfew Tower
whence the old bell tolls out the random hour;
random arm jerks out to tell the hour
but if the goose ~~come~~ is grey, it's region's Canna
that clachan on the hill where our road turns
on its quick narrowed stride to Tieveragh
and the white wall-eared Lodge; and if I draw
or farmer craftsman or on fisherman
nothing
be the my symbols to a human plane

153

Pat
it's ~~Mick~~ O'Donnell, Pat O Loan, or John
or old Tom McElroy who rises up
to give the ~~blank~~ bare word attitude and shape,
and the warm meanings which depend on sense
not the starved short-hand of intelligence.

So I am held, irrevocably bound
to faces known and foot-familiar ground
and need to measure life by proven norms
face and
by the text book
rather than ~~untranslated~~ diagram.

3 stanzas added August 4/

Then by degrees of breeding and of care
the new day beckons, old clan shadows lift
the first-tall master frowns in parliament
or Lays his wit against the wit of Swift.
Counts

His elder son succeeds him free of debt
reads out his brothers' letters from Madras
or signs the warrant {writes} or attests the lease
or watches his sleek mares stalk out to grass.

and sees his daughters married into names
and trees and parks and artificial lakes
this is the Roman peace; the Law is noon:
the game is child's play now with certain stakes

Total for 1944 105 — 1835

Dec. 1944 — 23 — 420

1945			1946	
Jan.				Freed
Mar.	1	— 9		
April	8	101	11	145
May	—		—	—
June	8	249	6	134
July	3	32	—	—
Aug	—		8 — 2 = 11	189 — 3 = 186
Sept	10	164	8	189
Oct	9	153	1	
Nov.	3	53		
Dec	(15)	(213)		
	42	761		

