8

Notebook 32.

Book XXIII

Poems by John Hewitt.

June 1949 – September 1950.

17. VI. 49

When Jung makes diagnosis of the German nation
it's a complete knockout, but not extermination.

From neither dream nor drunkenness
I draw the coloured shapes of thought
the archetypes amaze me less
than any marvel spider-wrought

The hushed adventure of each sense
so fully charged absolves my heart
from waiting for the evidence
which may not come or comes in part

If I may let the blessing rise
from hair or petal, stone or seed
and know these transitory skies
give all my grasping senses need

then I may lift my hand and know
a free man gestures this and this
the stellar archipelago
swings around and not because of us.

BBC

New Statesman May 1950

29.VI.49

The Ram's Horn

I have turned to the landscape because men disappoint me:
the trunk of a tree is proud; when the woodmen fell it
it still has a ~~remote~~ contained ionic solemnity;
it is a rounded epic, ~~but does not~~ without the need to tell it.

I have never been compelled to turn away from the dawn
because it carries treason behind its wakened face;
{ Even the horned ram glowering over the bog-hole
~~even the lusting bull rowling over the hedges~~
{ the symbol of evil, will step thro the blown grass with grace
~~will drop his teazle with an emergent grace~~.

Animal, plant or insect, stone or water,
are, every minute, themselves; they behave by law.
I am not required to shuffle through motives for them,
or strip my heart to forgive the rat in the straw.

I live my best in the landscape, being at ~~peace~~ ease there;
the only trouble I find I have brought in my hand.
See, I let it fall with a rustle of stems in the nettles
and never for a moment suppose that they understand.

Poems in July

Irish Times

6.VII.49

The Crossing

Following the white horse of the famous legend we shall cross
certainly with some, but no very considerable loss:
for it is shallow here or the foe would not defend this place;
upstream there are cataracts, below it is like a mill race.
This is the ford, the crossing; it is here or nowhere else
that we may approach the walled city with its bells.
See! the leader is up. He beckons. His horse leaps with eagerness.
Take your weapons only. There will be no time now to dress.

Do not worry about the leader. He is a symbol only.
He is a small man. His eminence keeps him lonely.
There is no richness in his character. That does not matter.
You will not need to learn the jargon of his whims in order to flatter.
He is himself a purpose. He does not exist outside it —
which is to mount the legendary horse and ride it
across the river to the bell-walled town, and that
latter part of his purpose is also ours. His hat
bobs up and down with feathers we need not salute.

It is well for our expedition that he does not travel on foot,
for he is, as I say, a small man and might be lost
in the scrimmage and scuffle before we had crossed,
and in the muddle without the pointing of his sword
some might mistake direction, some step without a word
into the pot-holes on either side. Already the bugle peals.
I shall proceed carefully, keeping clear of the neat-white heels.

—

6.VII.49

Seeks the bleak answer to the trumpets' summons,
the sleek, the weak the sub the super humans
all lying sensed carried unborn and moved:
the sighing maggots find the sockets cold.

/

Go again go again
let the pulse slow again
into the trance and the pit of the moon
Never an olive tree
greets a swallow. Three
turns of the heart and you waken too soon.

Let the tall cauliflower
or a less lofty flower
bloom in the turrets of west-topsham.
Only a skeleton
will not let well alone
jigging the bones of a jet-travelled man

/

6. VII
6

dear from the casement
and guess what the face meant
that peered from the shadows and mouthed its reproach.
A hand with six fingers
a brief instant lingers
over the edge of the door of the coach

—

6. VII

Truth is to be watched over the shoulder
with a quick sideways glance.
It is like the unseen blow we dodge
before its shadow falls

If a thing can be seen with both eyes
it is not true. It is
an appearance only. We live
by appearances.

10. VII. 49
7

Do not speak of deserving; do not speak
of duties and responsibilities.
The lance-leaf knit that sways on its long stalk
accepts the sun and wind with gracious ease,

Fulfilling to the limit of flower and seed
whatever self dictates the chlorophyll:
The damask tablecloth may serve a need
not to be reckoned in the knit-stalk's will.

—

11.VII.49

Here in the warm face of the afternoon
the whole world drowned in meadowsweet and clover
a field away - a clashing reaper whirs
a small bird chuckles in thick sycamore
and here and there - a yellow yorlin's call
ripples and drips against the constant screen
and ground beat of the droning air. The earth
holds out its patient leaves and blades for rain
still grateful for the sun and not yet vexed
with all the harsh anxieties of drought.

Fore Elder

For the first time I learned of that strange man,
my mother's grandfather, not even a ghost;
his surname certainly was Harrison,
a farmer, but his christian name is lost.

When nearly years ago on this harsh land
revival like a heat wave closed and all
knelt moaning for the shadow of His hand,
and felt the sweat drops of redemption fall,

that strange forgotten man whose qualities
must still think somewhere in my baffled heart -
sought everyway to win to lasting peace
and thought that God with praise, that peace might start.

But when he lifted up his merry voice
in hymns of mercy to direct his will
the new songs quavered and beyond his choice

old songs unbidden kept on flowing still,

old songs of love and pity, natural
as the trees bud, birds nest or rivers run..
I step to that same music after all,
and thank you for it, Farmer Harrison.

begun 5/6 - VI finished
1st week in July

The Bitter Stream

Warm with the long exertion of the slope
and thirsty for an hour now, but afraid
to kneel and cup the brown and frothy burn
because the black faced sheep and splay-foot heifers
continually fouled it as we passed,
we stepped out eager for the nearest house
- I have not yet accepted that old phrase
that three turns over a stone makes water pure.

At last we saw a house with white washed gable
turned to the road, and reached it down a lane
that ran wet grass between the brimming ruts.
Then six feet from the gable that dark stream
broader and shallow combed through stepping stones,
and on the other side a muddy yard
with drooket chickens peeking in the muck.

We paused disheartened; but you strode across

Your heel on rock brought someone to the door —
there seemed no dog to signify approach —
a limping woman over middle age,
with tatty hair and yellow dirt-scored face.
She hobbled out and grabbed you by the hand
& as asked your question. She withdrew and then
lurched back to hold a cup and indicate
that we could not escape that cursed stream.

You passed the cup across. We made the gesture
of scooping water mouth high. As we mimed
the woman held you in a state of talk,
we only heard the hurried mumble of it.
A child peeped round the door, unwashed snivelling brat,
someone reached out to seize her, she evaded
and ran to grab the talking woman's skirt,
as hand and arm and body came in view
of a young woman, twenty say or even
with a wide idiot grin, in flopping slippers.

The rinsed cup was returned, for clean now,
and, (and with thanks), we turned back up the lane
and as we picked our steps you told the story.

First the lame woman's husband lay there bedfast,
his old aunt over eighty now was blind
and also bedfast. There had been a son
who fell into the river near the town
on black november night. The coroner
had a new handrail put upon the bridge.
The other child, the daughter hadn't named.
yes that was she. The peeping child was hers.
And neighbours never called or stopped for barley
or offered help with things about the place
there was no man to win the hay as so
when she bought coal they left it at the gate.

When we stood safely on the metalled road
the cumulative tragedy swept down
in a great gust of horror. Every fact

from the child's face to that bare heap of coal
but added mounting horror to the theme.

So we stopped there, threw back our heads and laughed
It was too much to confess with our pity
beyond all reason, frightening, absolute.

BBC
Irish Red Cross
annual 1950

Belfast Telegraph
June 1953

began as a recasting of an
old poem. Stanzas 1 & 2
are fairly close to first version

The Ulster Names

I have given my heart to the Ulster names
each clean hard name like a weathered stone
Tyrella, Rostrevor are flickering flames
the names I mean are The Moy, Malone,
Strabane, Sheve Gullion and Portglenone

Even suppose that each name were freed
from legend's ivy and history's moss
there'd be music still in, say, Carrick a rede
that men forget as the rock across
the back of the salmon from Islay as Ross.

The names of a land shew the heart of the face;
they move on the tongue like the lilt of a song.
You say the name and I see the place;
Dundrum Loughbrickland, Annalong
barony, townland, you we cannot go wrong.

You say Armagh and I see the hill
with the two tall spires & the square low tower
The faith of Patrick is with us still
his blessing falls in a moonlit hour
when the apple orchards are all in flower.

You whisper Derry. Beyond the walls
and the creeping boom and the coiling smoke
I follow that freedom which beckons and calls
to Colmcille tall in his grove of oak
raising his voice for the coming folk.

County by county you number them over:
Tyrone, Fermanagh... I stand by a lake
and the bubbling curlew, the whistling plover
call over the whins in the chill day break
as the peat-brown waters the first light take.

Let Down be famous for corn-filled earth,
for the little green hills and the Lord every heaven

the rocky bed of the Lagan's birth
the white farms set in the August weeks.
There's one more county my pride still seeks

You give it the name and my quick thoughts run
thro' the narrow lanes with their wheels of trade
to Glenballyemon, Glenaan, Glendun,
over to Trostan and down to Knocklayde
I offered my heart and a pact was made

But you have as good a right as I
to praise your place and assert your claim
for over us all is the selfsame sky
the seasons school us and shape us the same.
~~and the fame of one place is our own folk's fame~~
~~There's little odds in the choice of a name.~~

So it's Legacurry, it's Crossnaglen
it's Newtownbutler, it's Tandragee,
it's Maghera mourne breeds the best of men.
I'll not deny it. But look for me
on the moss between Orra and Shievenamee.

Homestead
The House that Jack Built.

3/4 + 10 + 13. VII. 49
+ 14. VIII

18

Homestead

The Bell
April '52

~~The Habitation~~ (provisional title)

(a) It is time now for me to build a house
to be a shelter in the rough days
with a bare hearth where one could kindle a fire
and dry his duds and boil his little pot;
a house which, seen, will be recognised
as a dwelling, and yet an outcrop, part of the place
not obtrusive, wrong, abrupt or irrelevant;
yet no archaic jolly waiting for ivy
nor ruin asking scholars to stroke its face.
guess its age

I require such a fabric to house my troubles —
and not mine only but yours and the best of our age —
the girl in bright shorts lilting from tennis
the tired man pale in the sun, the skipping child
the artist pacing his mind, the young poet waiting
to be introduced over the ring of faces
to the stout assertive writer busy with faces
and the writer too, when he can be rid of the faces

the dark woman marking the clay with string
and the young boy heeling the mare home in the dusk.

When I number these the foolish image arises
of a blunt wallowing ark and a sloping plank
but the timbers stick up thro the snow on Ararat
and none visits it now to claim a snapshot

There will be no flood. I take my stand on that
Dirty weather for sure and the failing of light
and many exposed must die before the spring
but there are rocks which smash the raindrops
and score the glacier's bottom surviving as rocks
and they can be balanced together to do what I need.

(b) I thought at Easter climbing thro the whins
that out of the rising sun and the redolent earth
some knowledge might pass into the prone bones
with the skill and the will to start effective building:
the power of Christ seasonal only as nature

proposing heady spurts of activity
and long yawning sprawls of compelled idleness.

Oisin, I said, is my symbol, that shadowy man,
warrior and bard returning again and again
to find the Fenians forgotten and unforgotten
rising when bidden on the young men's lips
to face defeat and go down and sleep in their cave
Oisin who baffled Patric, his older faith
tougher than the parchment or the string of beads
Oisin after the Fenians.

Straight in my hand
the young priest thrust the words of the old dispute
of big Dan Lavery with Gillwirra McCartan
the flat foot red necked farmer the reed-voiced bard
the calloused knowledge of one, the poise of the other
the humble regard for the disciplines of sap and frost,
the proud step in tradition of handling words
~~of holding the relevant word for the apposite moment,~~
spoke to my cloven nature. The answer will come

for McCartan is Oisin also. Yeats was Oisin
The dinted symbols rust in the crumbling tower;
but Oisin is not there now. I saw Yeats carried
to the wailing of bagpipes through the wind-washed town
and watched Oisin elbow back through the holiday crowd,
going the opposite way as we followed the hearse.
I have seen him since, can tell you where he whispers
among the salleys and the blood bright holly:
but Lavery bids the musicians make work-simple songs
to haul his tractor out of the sucking bog,
using harsh words to blame all intricate music.

Yet it's Oisin also after Patric's legions
the vestments fray and tarnish, the crafty man
makes a show of genuflection, but in his heart
still rises to the rhythms his Fenians knew.

(c) Yet those familiar with business suggest instead
of brieding for myself and taking the risk
of not having finished in time for the breaking storm,

unable to afford first-quality stuff
and having to spend the rest of my fretted days
in minor repairs, in lurching from crisis to crisis
as the wall bulges, the chimney smokes, the snow
drifts under the slates and spreads in a nasty stain
on Juno's thighs the splintering boards aside
finding myself standing lonely, bankrupt, unroofed
they suggest instead I try to rent a corner
in some durable place. The Parthenon's fastness
beam from the glossy pages selling a cruise
battered it's true, but above ground: Sophocles, Plato
sediment, naos and volute — the orders endure
the tall chipped philosophy, the swinging hexameters —
I cannot explain that the former tenants died
of a surfeit-anaemia, that the Greeks were spivs
selling freedom in packets from under the counter,
the little erotic stones to the Roman contractors;
that those who lodged under the tiles and ikons came home
had nothing of worth to declare that I needed to hear
I have read the reports with care; there is nothing in them a

that speaks to our condition. We might as well
live a loin-cloth and hunker among the tombs
or paddle in the Ganges stepping over the corpses
or dangle our legs from the beams among the pigeons

Others say in the Empire State there are vacant rooms
high over the reaches of gas and the flashing traffic
a wise man there could be close to the naked stars
and keep his mind on austerities till it is lean
and leaping and eager to move among their orbits.
But the earth quivers at times, the plaster buckles
I'd rather have my heels on the friendly ground
and not be caught between floors in the elevator
when rumour of fear flings its bolts at my head.

Others said hearted remark why trouble? The house will fall
it is the nature of stone to fall and lie
the shrinking heart of the cinder will draw all in
this is the core and condition of existence
I in my day have seen many mansions perish

slowly with gifts and bequests with cobwebbed antlers
or opening to noise and flame like a marvellous flower
to smoulder in the heaped ash for a year
till the willowherb rejoicing claimed the scorched earth

I have seen men steps limping out of the rubble
and look round for the cool shadow of a spire
before they look up to see if there's one left standing
Another too pants over the arid land
in search of some other ecclesiastical shadow
when I saw him last he was slicing a stiff curved cactus

I have known a man take offers for a mirage
glinting while in the light with fountains and arbours
One fellow who bought it told me without humour
that the virtue of a mirage is in not having frontiers
It can be where you say it is. You can take it with you.

(d) No. There is nothing for it but to build right here
in rough cut stone and spread a roof of scraws

Maybe a coaltit will nest there, or a houseleek flower
or toadflax bind the stones with its little threads
or a fox trotting stop to sniff round the doorpost

There will be no conveniences. Only life

I shall leave space at the lane's end for a bus to turn
and a field for the city boys to camp in summer;
but for a long time yet not many will travel
from the paved ways. I shall always hang a cup
on the old thorn above the spirting pipe
for any thirsty passer too shy to knock,
or in a hurry to find a stance for his easel,
or aiming for the hills with his vasculum.

I shall often remember the Walden Pond,
and the old tenth century cells of the tonsured men
busy with the seasons and a quill
and talking to God across the assenting grass.

(e) And spitting in the ash, at the heel of the year
the latch will rattle and Oisin Macartan will enter
with his old familiar stories of passion and action
and when I've been there awhile its name will flourish
the young women and the young men will know its name
and gather to ceilidhe there in the winter evenings
Although their laughter'll be quick their words will be slow
their gestures as easy natural as breathing. Then one blessed night
Dan Lavery too will come having heard of the crack
to sit on a stone in the corner and puff his pipe
and maybe even join in the oldest chorus

The stonework will be simple honest and sturdy
not showy not even neat but built to last

I go today to the quarry to tryst the stones.

—

Lyric

I've known her swing from bitter phrase
to bring a smile upon her face
when someone comes by chance-event
to whom she is indifferent:

for only I am target of
the hard bombardment of her love,
and therefore none but I can tell
her hearts' hair-triggered miracle.

18.III + 14.VIII

I gape in wonder at the peopled sheet: -
so many hopes, so many policies
to wrest a truce or gain resounding peace,
so many nations that their restless feet
must pace and measure till their motions end;
and on what straws their heavy hearts depend:
and how so surely I am one with these.

—

12.VII
14 VIII

July

This is the ebb of birdsong. Only now
the yellow yorkin drips his ripples notes
and the unmated corncrake rasps the moon
where once there scarcely was a vacant bough
when in unnumbered leaves a thousand throats
were busy with necessities of June.

Rann (autumn 1950)

14 · VIII

Haymaking in the Low Meadow

The rain held off. They came to turn the lapse
to let the light wind dry them. Every year
when all the fields, one save this, are safely stacked
the weather breaks, and the lapsed hay will lie
in its dark bundles day by dismal day,
won only piecemeal by quick spurts of work
because the mounting tide of crowding ~~duty~~ Jobs —
pulling, ~~damming~~ dubbing, spreading the wet lint,
or cutting the ripe corn, or drawing hay
from the high moss home, fills every day
that's free of rain or only marred with showers.

Now before corn's ready and the lint
can wait a day or two, they take this chance.
It is a sunday. It is afternoon.
No loss of virtue risked. Earth's needs are prime,
and older than the mass they heard this morning.

Then on the tossed lapse they sprawl out at ease,
cup the small flame to light the half-burnt fag,
to loll and talk and watch the changing sky
as the grey cloud flows slowly down the Glen.

We join them now and slip into the talk
as cautious bathers just dip toe and foot
before they dare the stronger element.
Then the tall farmer with his keeping dogs,
heard just above the road busy with sheep,
strides over, stoops to handle the coiled hay,
and standing up, declares for instant action

We rise and take his orders. Lift the lapse
and drop them shaken in a circled heap;
then fork them up to him who slowly rises,
as slow he
tramping the while upon the growing rick.

The other man lives off with two or three
to start his own thick half a field away.

I stab and twist and hoist and carry high
and toss my burden in its wanted place,
and stab again until occasion comes
to turn the twister for the long grass rope
which binds the rocking stack. The other man
with better help has beaten us, and now
already has a new foundation laid.

There's little talk today. Not silence though,
for who can work with others tools and hold his tongue?
~~The weaver sings; a carpenter will hum;~~
~~the ploughman talks his horses round the field~~.
But not the slow full laden conversation
that on a dry day gives with every wisp
of hay or oats the ~~verbal apposite~~ word which must be said;
(~~the slow old stories and the anecdotes~~,)
the prickly proverbs plucked from ~~every~~ hedge and bush,
~~the right remark for each step of the work~~
~~the final capping jest for each tied rick~~.

This was the fourth time we had laboured here
in the same fields. I knew what to expect,
for there's but little change from field to field,
and hardly any change from year to year;
but I was wrong. The rain was far too close
to let the patient ritual continue:
already on my forearms and my brows
the small beads gathered finding each a hair.
When the fourth rick was bound it was the end;
and on the laps we passed to reach the gate
the bright rain glistened. They would have to wait.

— —

21·X·49

I thought when the grave was sodded
and the carriage came back to the door
and the sick man's bed was empty
I could endure no more.

But the heart is a tougher metal;
it can carry beyond belief
a wound and ancient excruciation
etched by the acid of grief.

4·XII

I wait for meaning in the coming words
sure as the earth of seasons, sure as a street
of the familiar tread of postmen's feet.
or as the winter tree is sure of birds;
for earth is what the seasons happen to,
and in the branch's crotch a tattered nest
still wisps in wind, and in the houses you
to whom the expected letter is addressed.

22

37

5. XII

O my tall angel once my father here
now wombed in, won from clay, arise in me:
as you have sloughed your flesh, slough off my fear
and bid me take my time with honesty.

Become in me, and let me too become
a steady flame whose light and warmth shall bless
the stretching hands and weary eyes that come
because your truth is also gentleness.

Irish Times
18. 2. 1950

29. XII. 49

38

The Gentle Bush

The gentle bush beside the well
of leaf and berry now is bare;
but you must let the neighbours tell,
with sceptic smile, of antics there —
but who can say, for so they heard —
it does not look an ancient tree;
most likely by some passing bird
the seed was dropped unwittingly —

The man who piped the overflow,
and stepped the stones, and fenced the well,
must know if any man may know,
but what he knows he does not tell.
Yet if you should, by lucky chance,
talk with him while your buckets fill,
observe his searching, anxious glance,
and with what quiet, jealous skill
he'll twine and weave the twigs in place

that none hang down to snap or break;
yet not a flicker on his face
admits it's for "the gentry's" sake.

I've shouted a branch when I'm alone
and asked my question of the bush,
but whether silent as a stone
or noisy as a startled thrush,
it's never slow in answering
or giving sign which serves as well,
which takes on my heart will sing,
clear my table by syllable.

And so when we have struggled free
from the coarse city's sin and sour
I always glance inquiringly
into the bucket at the door,
and when I may, contrive to see
to keep it at the overflow.

unpublished

Somehow, because I dramatise my thoughts
and follow two lives parallel at once —
the bustling fellow, urgent on committees
cramming the time with broadcasts and reviews,
—prodding a lumbering and ingracious age
along the road his wits insist it take;
and, side by side, as jogging at his heels,
the second self too seldom given scope,
and only now and then on the agenda
allowed to make, never minuted
save in the scraps and notes we hide away:
this second self, the slow and brooding poet
whose words are symbols, and whose ritual
lifts a grave head in passing, reading peace
to a distracted world; I often think
he is the one to watch, time's on his side,
verse may survive, even at low temperature,
while nothing is so dead as last year's minutes:

he could achieve far more if the loud man
would sit at home and listen. Even he
learning from silence, might be far more use
on his committees, if committees are
the proper tools this age requires for progress

Sonnet

My father dead, the dearest of my dead, 13·XI
has never come again, except in dream
unless the thought that jangles in my head
reminding me, advising me 's from him:
never his palpable prescence or his face
his ink-ringed knuckle, the round curve of his thumb —
Yet when I've since stood in a famous place
I've always thought I'll tell him he must come
It never was his wish to play planchette
or tilt a table Once I asked him why
and I remember his assured reply,
and so I have not sought ~~him~~ I'd rather let
my pulses learn the quiet discipline,
that if he haunts, he haunts me from within.

From the first light when in the upper field
the tractor roared beyond the tall black trees
turning the bleached grass to a pool of clay
till in the dusk that robin sang, concealed,
and the young moon ran headlong in the breeze
this winter day has been a happy day.

29. XII

From the landscape bare and resting, save for the upland grazing
where thick-fleeced rams turned nervous at our tread,
down into a glen of brightness, unvext by winter ploughing,
with wind-tossed rooks like tea-leaves overhead,

we followed every curving of the long road from the mountain
past lonely farm and heat-sleek, blossomed whin,
grey sallows bluntly budded, and hillside gashed with quarry,
and crooked burns that stumbled out and in;

and the road was like a river, every rut was full of silver,
for above the clouds that dogged the afternoon
coloured chill as lead or pewter, from the windy sky in patches
showed the amber of a young first-quarter moon.

Stepping briskly in the gloaming as the landscape ebbed before us
we were glad the slopes were with us going down;
till at the bridge we halted, you to seek the darkened cottage,
and I to pace my echo through the town.

44

O such a day in town would seem
a windy cold december day
when through the rags of self-esteem
the bitter weather made its way.

But here upon the mountain road
with not another face to greet
save ewes that with fleece heavy load
ran from our path with stuttering feet

and mist that driven by the wind
climbed up the hill and flowed across
or hesitated, half-inclined
to shelter back into the moss.

My step was light, my luck was in
a state of grace beyond all reason,
for kissing like the blossomed whin
is truly never out of season.

30-XII

This hillside cottage is a tent-
wherefrom we order our forays
across a stranger continent
of alien people, foreign ways . . .

We learn a tribal custom here
we snatch a shred or two of lore
by using these we may appear
to be less strange than heretofore.

We spell the names of birds and trees
that clues may later be revealed
admitting us to greater ease
when we have reached the upland field

When dark comes down we rest in camp
beside a warm log-laden fire
and in the circle of a lamp

jot down the knowledge we acquire.

The dresser in the corner there
made locally of native wood
is but a grotto shining fair
with symbols of beatitude.

28

Tribune May 1950
47 Irish Times 1952

30.XII

This shuffling fellow, old John ~~MacIntier~~ William Greer
was in his prime a roaring engineer
who drove his ship through gale and hurricane
to the world's sleety ends and back again
when she was docked and he had drawn his pay
with drink and women he made holiday
Now over eighty in his tin-roofed shack
high in the hills behind the ocean's back
he still must cackle seeing in the fire
the dancing antics of his old desire
So if you meet him on the mountain road
slow with his oil can or somewhere load
forgive him if his fingers grip your arm
his winks and nods will do you little harm
Too few of us this side of death's stream
have followed an unprofitable dream
with such devotion such abandonment
Perhaps to have lost this that he was sent.

31.XII

48

Saturday Night.

The farmer's second son, my ploughman friend,
in the assurance of his fifteen years,
sits at my hearth and smokes his crude Ameers
before he to the village shall descend
where all the lighted windows will attend
his inquisition, when with ploughboy peers
he'll give and gather in the week's arrears
of country talk, and his white shillings spend
on a new packet and the latest flick
some two years on its rounds from Leicester Square . .
a knowing fellow not to be beguiled
by crude sophistication's lewdest trick ....
But as he rises gravely from his chair,
young innocence shines round the lamplit child.

45

31·XII

Tomorrow he shall come to town with us
and like a startled pony see the first
bright traffic signals on his jersey burst
with clanging tram and droning trolley-bus.
Between the roaring buildings populous
with sudden faces no familiar tread
will ease his ears, and in his first strange bed
who knows what dreams will muster fabulous?

Lord when he sleeps, be gentle with him now
for Nazareth, for's sake, that was a little place
let not a shadow cross this shining brow
save for the leaves upon the mountain grass
the young mare not yet broken to the plough
the old excitement of the midnight mass.

30·XII·49
5·I·50

Revised and extended 6.1.50 see P →

My planter-settlers came surveyed the land
and seized the native village, felled the trees
selling them off the foothills at a stroke
making quick profits clearing out the nests
of the barbaric tribesmen clan by clan.
who hunkered in their blankets biding chance
till, unobserved, they slither down to run
with torch and blade among the frontier huts
when guards were nodding, or at quilts of corn
bade swordlands reach for sickle. There was once
a terrible year when huddled on our towns
my people trembled as the beacons ran
from hill to hill across the countryside
calling the dispossessed to lift their banners
That terror dogs us: back of all our thought
the dream behind the dream, those beacons flare
and we run headlong screaming in our quiet
for we began the plunder. It was theirs
this patient land, the slow, indifferent,

crop yielding, sodden, quickly in neglect
turning to ~~whin~~ nettle and bracken. We took it from them,
we laboured hard, drained bog and planted well
till half the country took its shape from us
~~left pockets of the natives in the hills~~
or on the rougher places where the whin
still thrust from limestone with its cracking pods.
They multiplied and came with open hands
begging a crust because their land was poor
and they were many, settled at our gates
till our towns grew and threw them hovelled streets
which they inhabit still. You may distinguish
if you were schooled with us, by pigmentation,
by cast of features, or by turn of phrase,
or by the names they carry which are they
among the people moving in the streets
They worship ~~God idolatrous~~ Heaven strangely, ~~have~~ having rights
we snigger at, are known as superstitious
cunning by nature, never to be trusted,
given to dancing and a kind of song

~~lascivious~~ seductive to the ears, a whining sorrow.
Also they breed like flies. The danger's there.
Some of us think our leases have run out
but dig their heels in, keep ~~their powder dry~~ the roads repaired X
and one or two would bring the ~~patch~~ wrack cap back
demand the yellow patch, the curfewed ghetto.
Most try to ignore the problem going their ways
glad to be living, sure that Caesar's word
is Caesar's bond for legions in our need
But ~~One~~ or two beguiled by their sad music ~~and the songs~~
make common cause with the natives, in their hearts
hoping to win a truce when the tribes assert
their ancient right and take back what was theirs
~~and~~ already from other lands the legions ~~ships~~ withdraw
and ~~Rome~~ Caesar no longer has ~~Rome's~~ Caesar's authority X

Alone I have a harder row to hoe.
I think these natives human, think their code
though strange to us, and farther from the truth
only a little, still remediable

if they themselves rise up against its spells.
I find their symbols good as such for me
but gently, lest I be misunderstood
I know no vices they monopolise
if we allow the shapes by hunger bred
the sores of old oppression, the ~~evasive acts~~ deep skill,
in all evasive acts, the swaddled minds ...
admit our load of guilt, would make amends
by fraternising, by small friendly gestures,
hoping by patient words I may convince
my people and the natives we are changed
from the raw levies which usurped the land
if not to kin, then co-inhabitants
with certain rights drawn from the soil and sky:
~~the deep graves on the slopes~~ the use, the pace, the patient years of labour
the earth about the bones have altered us:
this also is our country, nowhere else;
and I will not be outcast on the world.

Dublin Magazine April/June 1950

New Poems 1953

31.XII.49
1.~~XII~~I.50

Concord of Harbs anthology '52

O Country People

O country people, you of the hill farms
huddled so in darkness I cannot tell
whether the light across the glen is a star
or the bright lamp spilling over the sill.
or the stationary headlights of a car
I would be neighbourly, would come to terms
with your existence, but you are so far;
there is a wide bog between us, ~~and~~ a high wall.
I've tried to learn the smaller parts of speech
in your slow language, but my thoughts need more
flexible shapes to move in, if I am to reach
into the hearth's red heart across the half-door.

You are coarse to my senses, to my washed skin;
I shall maybe learn to wear dung on my heel;
but the slow assurance, the unconscious discipline
informing your vocabulary of skill
is beyond ~~my~~ our mastery, who have followed a trade
three generations now, at counter and desk;

hand me a rake and I, at once, betrayed,
will shed more sweat than is needed for the task.

If I could gear my mind to the year's round,
take season into season without a break
instead of feeling my heart bound and rebound
because of the full moon or the first snowflake
I should have gained something. Your secret is space.
Already in your company I can keep step,
but alone, involved in a headlong race,
I never know the moment when to stop.

I know the level you accept me on
like a strange bird observed about the house,
or sometimes seen out flying on the moss
that may tomorrow or next week be gone,
liable to return without warning
on a May afternoon and away in the morning.
[omitted in Dublin magazine
I have no lease on your affections yet

The children report the first smoke of our fire,
and you are glad to see us in the lane,
and halt us in our step till you enquire
if all goes well with us and ours, and let
us find, by kindly gossip, our feet again.]

But we are no part of your world, your way,
as a field, or a tree is, or a spring well.
We are not held by you by the mesh of kin:
we must always take a step back to begin;
and there are many things you never tell
because we would not know the things you say.

I recognise the limits I can stretch;
even a lifetime away you should leave me strange,
for I could not change enough and you will not change;
there'd still be shreds neither'd even reach.
And so I cannot even hope to become,
for all my goodwill toward you, yours tone,
even a phrase or a story which will be come

that is the tongue, part of the tapestry
of apt response, at the appropriate time,
like a wise saw, a joke, an ancient rime,
used when the last stack's topped at the day's end,
or when the last limb's carted round the bend.

5.I.1950

Man Fish and Bird

Bird fish and man
I cannot fly into the sun
but I can carry the sun in my head
I cannot dive cavorting
over and round the submerged rocks and in the water
but the circumambience of space
whether full of water, air or particles of sand
I can contain
I can also contain it empty

I cannot sit in that chair
when the man is sitting there
but I can contain the chair, the man sitting
and my sitting where the man is sitting therefore
I am man fish and bird and the circumambience

This is the first day.

I can carry man fish and bird to the mountain top
I can lie in a dark place and be full of light
I can say to the man be fish and he fins among the fins
I can say to the fish be bird
and it will build a nest beside a crab

This is the second day.

I can take words to cover
the man, fish and bird
I can write the words, writing
Green Man, Yellow Fish, Red Bird:
and the green man is spring
pushing fingers, then his whole hands and wrists
through the wet mould;
and the yellow fish leaps out of the waters
and the darkness becomes dawn;
and the red bird calls the yellow fish back to the sea
and darkness resumes
but the red bird is also my heart crying against the darkness

and may also break out of the rocks with dawn in its call

This is the third day.

I can tell the green man I understand him
and ask him to answer my questions
I can feed the yellow fish with the ants eggs of my affection
letting it lip my palm and vanish away with a swift curve
I can tell the red bird every dawn in lonely places
and I can stand lonely and inhabited at the same time
in doubt and in understanding

This is the fourth day

When my mind is clenched
I can bid these creatures inhabit the circumambience
but when I sleep entering the darkness
that darkness becomes their circumambience at their liberty
and the green man is my father
and the yellow fish fin back to my generations

and the red bird is a moment I had forgotten
a moment of grief or humiliation

and this is the fifth day.

I can come down from the mountain and ask the people:
Have you heard the answers of the Green man
Have you seen the Yellow fish pass this way
Did you feed it and speed it on its journey
Did the Red Bird cry to you in your loneliness

And many will say No we saw or heard nothing

and others will say The Man who answered was White
and the fish you call Yellow was not yellow: it was
the colour of this tablecloth or this flag
and the Bird was most certainly not Red.
A red bird is a monster. The Bird
was yellow. Not the fish. Indeed
it was not a bird at all it was

-a feathered serpent or a cockatrice

And some will say Yes we heard the answers
the Green Man made but fail to understand them
and the Yellow fish passed so quickly we caught only a glimpse
and the Red Bird cried yesterday but across the frontier
Tomorrow it may cry nearer

And God will say Yes we heard the Green Man
answering the Green man's questions
but the Yellow fish gave no hint of his intentions
and the Red Bird flew down at a piece of Chinese needlework

And we will say Hallo Green Man
and, Yellow fish, you have returned already.
and Red Bird I bid you welcome. You are needed
to cry light against the shadow here

This is the sixth day

When my mind can no longer, because of age
or mishap, clench within itself the circumambience
and the men and the fish and the bird
I shall lie down in shadow which will deepen into darkness
and the men will sit in his chair
and I shall sit in his chair and be in his mind
the green man of the split sod
and the yellow fish will turn and turn in swift curves
in the globe of his skull
peering out of his eyes in passing
and the red bird will fly shouting out of his mouth

This is the seventh day
Men Fish and Bird.

This poem was given birth to in a more immediate sense than any since my surrealist experiments of years ago: even then, I believe, one more consciously composed than this. Apart from one slight alteration in the days' order the intelligence intruded very little.

6.1.50

You spoke: "Come out and look at the pale woods."
The rising sun seemed touching the bare trees
to the naked essence of tree. The branches, the grass,
sapless and withered, hardly stained with colour,
with no wind yet to waken the faint shadows
stood submissive to the quiet light.

There was no frost in that world to etch an edge
or bite a black line round visibility;
no texture's harshness vexed the open sense
save as a moth may trouble, or thistledown
brushing the hand's back on a drift of air.

The Bell (May 1953)

The Colony. Revised Draft 6.1.50

First came the legions, then the colonists,
provincials, landless citizens, and some
camp-followers of restless generals
content now only with the least of wars.
Among this rabble some to feel more free
beyond the easy whim of Caesar's fist;
for 'conscience' sake the best of these, but others
because their debts had tongues, one reckless man,
a tax collector with a sack of ~~gold~~ coin —
~~was left his name upon~~
~~From north and south in companies, but most~~
~~speaking a Latin tinct with Pictish phrase.~~

With these, officials skilled with chart and stylus,
their boxes crammed with lease-scrolls duly filled
with distances and names; to be defined
when all was mapped.

When they'd surveyed the land

they gave the richer tillage slice by slice
from the great captains ~~on~~ down to lesser men:
some of the sprawling rents to be retained
by Caesar's mistresses in their far villas.

We planted little towns to garrison
the heaving country, heaping walls of earth
and keeping all our cattle close at hand;
then pushing ~~to the hills~~ north and west, we felled the trees,
selling them off the foothills, at a stroke
making quick profits, clearing out the nests
of the barbarian tribesmen, clan by clan,
who hunkered in their blankets, biding chance
till, unobserved, they slither down and run
with torch and blade among the frontier huts
when guards were nodding, or fat quilts of corn
bade swordhand reach for sickle. There was once
a terrible year, when, huddled in our towns,
my people trembled as the beacons ran
from hill to hill across the countryside

calling the dispossessed to lift their standards.
There was great slaughter then, man, woman, child,
and fire and pillage of our wooden houses;
we had to build in stone forevermore ...
That terror dogs us: back of all our thought,
the dream behind the dream, those beacons flare,
and we run headlong screaming in our fear;
fear quickened by the memory of guilt
for we began the plunder — barbarians
still have their homeland gods and holy places,
and what a people loves it will defend.
We took their temples from them and forbade them
for many years to worship their strange gods.
We took the kindlier souls. It had been theirs,
this patient, temperate, slow, indifferent,
earth-yielding crop-denying, in neglect
quickly returning to the nettle and bracken,
sodden and friendly land. We took it from them.
We labored hard and stubborn, draining, planting,
till half the country took its shape from us.

Only among the hills will bare and restful
will you observe what once this land was like,
before we made it fast for human uses —
all but the forests, all but the tall trees —
I could invent a legend of those trees,
and how their creatures, dryads, ~~nereids~~ hamadryads,
fled from the corpses, hid in thorny bushes,
and grew a crooked ~~savage~~ and malignant ~~malevolent~~ folk,
plotting and waiting for a bitter revenge
on their despoilers. So our troubled thought
is from enchantments of the old tree magic
but I am not a sick and haunted man —

Some of the former natives we employed
to hew and draw, but did not call them slaves.
Some say this was our error. Others claim
we were too slow to make them citizens;
we might have made them Caesar's bravest legions.
This is a matter for historians
or old beards in the Senate to ~~discuss~~ wag over

not permanent bonds these many years.

But here and there, the land was poor and starved
which, though we mapped it, we did not occupy,
leaving the natives, out of Caesar's
in our demanding it, to hold unleased
the marshy quarters, fens, the broken hills,
and all the rougher places where the white
still thrust from limestone with its cracking heads.
They multiplied and came with open hands
begging a crust - because their land was poor
and they were many, squatting at our gates,
till our towns grew and threw them kennelled streets
which they inhabit still. You may distinguish,
if you were schooled with us, by pigmentation,
by cast of features, or by turn of phrase,
or by the clan-names on them, which are they
among the faces moving in the street.
They worship Heaven strangely, having rites
we snigger at, are known as superstitious,

cunning by nature, never to be trusted,
given to dancing and a kind of song,
seductive to the ear, a whining sorrow.
Also, they breed like flies. The danger's there;
when Caesar's daughters, old and lays his sceptre down
will be a little people, well outnumbered.

Some of us think our leases have run out
but dig their heels in, keep the roads repaired;
and one or two loud voices would restore
the wreck, the yellow patch, the engraved ghetto.
Most big to ignore the question, going their way,
glad to be living, sure that Caesar's word
is Caesar's bond for legions in our need.
among us some,
A few of us beguiled by their sad music,
make common cause with the natives, in their hearts
hoping to win a truce when the tribes assert
their ancient right and take what once was theirs.
Already from other lands the legions withdraw,
and Caesar no longer has Caesar's authority.

alone; I have a harder row to hoe.
I think these natives human, think them coded,
though strange hours, and farther from the truth
only a little so, to be redeemed
if they themselves rise up against the spells
and demons their enmeshments surround them with.
I find them symbols good, as such, for me
when I walk in dark places of the heart,
but name them not least I be misunderstood.

I know no rites they monopolize,
if we allow the forms by hunger bred,
the sores of old oppression, the cheap skill
in all evasive acts, the swaddled minds ..
admit our load of guilt; I mourn the trees
more than as symbol, and would make amends
by patronising, by small friendly gestures,
hoping by patient words I may convince
my people and the natives we are changed
from the raw levies which usurped the land,

if not to them, to co-inhabitants,
as goat and ~~cow~~ ox may graze in the same field;
for we have rights drawn from the soil and sky;
the use, the race, the latent years of labour,
the earth about the bones, have altered me:
we would be strangers in the capital;
this also is our country; nowhere else;
and I will not be outcast on the world.

15.1.50

In this bleak country where the ewes lamb late.
and not till april are the weak bleats heard
where the hard weather comes in the new year
and the sharp wind would silence any bird

we walked at noon along the shining roads
each cut a strip of sky, a stream of rain
as the dark rain clouds coming from the hills
narrowed the landscape to a hissing lane

or opening to let a gap of light
divide the hard bare mountains from the sky
allowed the spreading sun to re assume
on fresh ploughed land its boyfish serenity

announced by rainbow rocked deep in whin
and jamb stained across a russet wood
and like the gull that crested every gust
we felt that shower and sunshine both were good.

28.2.50 76

A shudder ran through heaven when Adam fell
the angels gathered whispering at corners
and as the news spread all the song died out
as the glum singers shuffled down the steps
into the light of glory. A shadow crossed
the high bright throne above the marble roofs:
the only sound that still rang undiminished,
louder indeed because of the great hush,
was from the fountain over the white stones.
Then Gabriel striding, tassels, his face set stern,
his fingers clenched around the golden trumpet-
held like a sword of judgment; one of two
broke from the mumblers, ran across his track,
but, stopping dared not speak to him. He strode
but, stopping dared not speak to him. He strode
but trod by trod up the tremendous stairs...

11.3.50

Ballyobrean, Co. Down.

High in the bright cold air the larks are loud
Though leaf and blossom tardy, sheep in safe,
The month's lambs frolic in the meadow's lap
while mothers ewes still remind sedate and proud.

Tomorrow's spring. What more is there to say?
The ritual is predestined and the mood
already humming in the eager blood
prepares its pace for the appointed day.

Only the black rook rocking in the fir
The white gull crying over weed-strewn sand
reminds the gay heart to remind the land
our expectations rest and not in her.

—

12.3.1950

For Janet Eithne Mayberry born today.

If life can have much value you should be
far more than most a deepening of worth,
for by the brave intention of your birth,
as far as man can order or can see,
your course is charted for reality.
The leaping body shall have leave to run
attended but unreined, and gaily free
your thought shall face the stars and pace the sun.

All this that I have said is certified
by what I know of those whose child you are:
your father since a youth, one yet a bride
your mother had the suffrage of our thought.
So though you have as yet no skill to care,
our blessing shall, around you, glow unsought.

—

11.3.50

My people knew their Bible. I remember
how my grandfather spoke of Mordecai
as real as General Gordon; Jericho
fell with a finality like lost Khartoum
till all my world was full of crashing towers
My father, never a fluent, easy man
would pin a name in my mind with one sharp phrase
so in their talk and prose it's never called such
there always was this solid quality
that somehow twinned the clear calligraphy

Now in a quick and busy world I find
to name the values I am nurtured by
I must remember how the words should go
and to what pattern that they may endure.

Swabbing my cut knees not to let me cry
my father used to tell me cheerfully
of the woodcutter's axe or of the stone
that brought the legendary giant down
or any other story I ~~was~~ desired
which had the happy ending both required.

And small upon the sofa I have heard
from my grandfather with his jingoed beard
how Sam O'Slanter's old mare lost her tail
that bit of mine was never known to fail
till growing wiser I was fit to learn
of greater heroes famous in their turn
and knew by seven I must never pardon
old Gladstone for the wrong he did to Gordon

27.3.50

Now having achieved a lively semaphor
I stand on a cliff and flap my flags about
and the little ships that pass within sight of the shore
will signal back beyond the reach of a shout.

But after the swopping of names & the naming of rocks
and the wishing of luck, there is no more I can say
yet lest a last lost shaggle limp after the urgent flocks
I dare not leave this cliff or fold these flags away.

4.4.1950

Sonnet

Another springtime with suburban plum
in sudden blossom; and against the wall
housepainters' ladders propped, with planks and all
their colored arsenal of can and drum:
the screaming evening swifts have not yet come,
but bustling sterlings mob the eaves and brawl
and waken the light-sleepers; tiller, tall,
the careful-careless daffodils are dumb.

And in a hundred years it will be spring
for bird and bird, but who dare speak of men?
already nested in great or lesser strife
the scarce can spare a thought of thanksgiving
that in obedience to unerring plan
the new mask covers up the skull of life.

5.4.50

The Young Ram at Lambing Time

In the high field the grazing sheep are still
only the two twinned yowes with lambs at heel
with sidelong glances lift their heads alert
and trot along the hedge feet with a spurt
and stop and sniff and with a worried bleat
sort out the jigging tails and toppled feet.
But mid the grazing flock one sheep begins
to butt his nose and thrust and bark his shins
and now and then leap straight into the air
with lamb's abandon or acute despair
It is the young ram muddled in his mind
jealous of these dwarf-creatures of his kind
or feeling in his blood his maleness drum
not to be vented till September come
not to be ripe and ready for his use
till after tenning close men turn him loose
to roam the heather and for weeping whins
find every yowe wait patiently for him.

11.4.50

The Easter Lambing

He'd timed the lambing, let the tups rams loose
so that the yowes would drop them early April:
he knew these mountains, set his wits against
the snowy January photograph
of the wide-smiling girl with both arms full;
and when I told him how a month ago
when we were driving south in Spain we saw
the stray lambs leaping in the bright cold air:
he merely said: That could be right for them.
They have no mountains and should have no loss.

Then March came on, cold, dry, with hours of sun
and a fresh wind that mopped the muddy roads
and crisped the deep ruts in the long steep lane.
His pipe laid on the mantelboard for Lent,
he walked the heather, slow and confident.

Then the first week of April the lambs began

singly, with maybe a dozen pairs of twins
all sucking lively with quick jigging tails:
these were the black-faced ram's, the Leicester's due
a week or ten days after. Easter Sunday
was a harsh day of sleet and hail and storm,
and he went out before the fire was roused
to come back home at intervals all day
with foundered lambs and weakly. Laid on sacks
before the blazing turf and dosed with spirits
some blinked dark eyes then shut them tight forever
some stilted up on shaky legs and lived.

It was a bitter lambing; though the snow
in early March four years ago was worse
closing the Glen for weeks and killing hundreds,
beyond on Orra ruining a man.

But as we sat among the sprawling legs
the large bed full of children flushed with measles
and the tired mother making cups of tea

he told me Jimmy'd paid eight hundred pounds
for a big lump of mountain, on Barrard,
the hip of Trostan where we footed turf,
a long four miles up Ballyemon Glen
and counting out the price per acre said
that Jimmy'd have no time to run the roads.

11/12 . 4 . 50

The Open Door

Up at Cloughglass in the long friendly house
eager to win the knowledge we had missed
for all the weeks we'd squandered in the city
and take again the footing that we'd had
when midnight mass wound up and launched the year
we asked or listened as the talk took shape
of stock and work, of this one or of that.

Then at the pause which followed a long story
how Johnny Pat that lived in the old mill
up by Glenaan was dead at last, and how
he made his ceilidhe every night in life
from ten till four, in half a dozen houses,
and how once stepping home late from a dance
in Knocknacarry schoolhouse years ago
they'd come upon him standing on the road
and searching round the darkness of a light
where someone still would be awake to listen

At the deep pause, after God rest his soul
was murmured, while my thoughts were wondering
at such a talker silent now forever
I switched them quick with: "How's John MacAteer?
His door is shut. We didnt see his smoke
when we were passing." This was a lone man
who lived in a poor ruin of a house
across a boggy field. His broken gate
hung slackly by an ash tree over a stream.
But he was always up or down the road
waiting for greeting, waiting for the girls
to banter or to nudge with greasy elbow.

Then Patrick answered swinging his slow thought
from the dead miller to the lonely man
"John MacAteer is poorly. He'll not see
another winter out. But if you go
and Mrs Hewitt stays he'll maybe try
the steep road to the lodge for one more crack."
We laughed a little hollowly, recalling

the randy reputation of his prime
that now had left a leering grimy husk
who once had been a proud ship's engineer
thrashing his turbines through the roughest seas
and brawling in the known ports of the world.

But yesterday as we came down the hill
passing John's broken gate in a shower of hail
we both remarked the door laid open wide
and two scared lambs, dryshod, were peering out
to watch the white hail batter the black hedge.
With snow on Troslan and a week of storm
old John had had the heart to bring them in.

—

At April's end when currant, blackthorn, whin
assert their colours, when the primroses
swarm all the ditches, and wood violet
coy in the fresh moss lurks, when stitchwort, vetch,
wood sorrel and groundivy state their worth,
and nesting birds brim day with flight and song,
the crazy weather that swung dry in March
now musters from northwest its chillest wind
and drives the rainclouds down the roaring glens
smearing all nature to a neutral tint
making the landmarks void, and drowning all
the lilts and whistles
the high lark, lost to reason, still insists
on his prerogative, and, now and then,
the bubbling curlew swerves into the heart.

23.4.

Walking in the warmest afternoon
this year has yielded yet, through slopes of white
that made the shadows luminous, and filled
the slow air with its fragrance, we went down
a narrow track, stone littered, under trees
that with new leaf and opening bud contrived
to offer a green commentary on light;
and as we wondered silent, stone by stone,
on lavish spring, a sudden volley broke,
a squealing terror ripped through twig and briar
as a small rabbit pawing at the air
and stilting quickly, thrust full into view,
clenched on its rump, a dark-eyed rat was riced,
shaped to its naked purpose to destroy.
We stopped. I stepped across. Before a stick
could fall in mercy, its lavish grip released,
the crouched rat vanished, and the rabbit ran
whimpering and yelping into the thick grass.

Something had happened to the afternoon:
the lavish generosity of spring
was shattered with that cast of violence;
and as we turned to follow the steep track,
it seemed no inconsistent cordial
that on the mud a broken shell shewed white
in equal speckled parts, and, on a stone,
like little yolk, a golden sixpence, lay,
a fallen sun in a wrecked universe.

23.4

Bluebonnets resting near, and chaffinches
on high beech branch above the mossy track,
and in the bushes where the willows stand
in flooded ditch, not fifty yards away,
the whistling curlew: each will give its call
when we have left- the cottage to its old
cool memories of other folk then us
who listened as we listen and were glad
that spring had wandered up the hill again.

28.V.1950

Now at May's end the white moon high at noon
riding the wind between the driven clouds
and all the tossing hawthorn branches heavy
with open blossom, hedge and single tree,
a surf of petals round each paddle's lip
and the green lime flowers moist with flush of chestnut
scattered along the ruts, it should be summer
by calendar and colour, but the west
still hears its roaring storm unending
over the landscape as when April's sleet-
smothered the primrose, brimmed the celandine
and smudged its momentary light along
the high ribs of the ploughed fields parallels,
and those sworn cries that ratify the season,
corncrake and cuckoo, cannot yet be heard
because of the air rushing, as if heard
then corncrake only rasping close at hand
in meadow yielding to the storm's abrupt tide
while every other birdsong's snatched and flung
in wisps and tatters through the flapping leaves

28. V. 50

May Allan

In every farmhouse through the Holm - white gloves
this is the season when the little girls
put on white dresses, veils and tinsel wreaths
and flock to confirmation. Three swift years
it is since Rose was mine and photographed
now her two younger sisters are received
into that faith and haven I seclude
but steer away from. In the smoky kitchen
the little hosies on the cupboards top
pale lady's smock and blowzy rhododendron
are set out neatly in the six glass jars
and in the midst there stands, of this May altar,
the chipped and battered statue of the virgin,
but my heart hankers for the hagen thorn
that none dare break a spray from as they go in.

28/29. V.

Climbing the steep brae in the heat of noon
we passed five sleek cows and a hobbled goat
grazing the fresh grass of the roadside ditch
and guessed that somewhere near we'd come upon
whoever herded them. I knew the goat
and named the cattle's owner from that fact...
Then round the corner sure enough we saw,
sprawling beneath a whin bush in the sun,
the whin gave last its best with tarnished husks,
Patrick the farmer's boy, his sunday tie
setting its seal upon his idleness.
We stopped and spoke about the handsome cattle
and how I knew them, from the hobbled goat,
and what the weather promised for our walk
and if he'd been to mass, and at what hour
last night he got back home. Then soon enough
continued up the road and out of sight
still wondering as we had wondered since
we saw him by the whin bush, what strange thoughts
were stirring in this lonely handsome mind.

29/31 · V

We heard a voice behind us that we thought
was one hill farmer's, but the bus was crammed
and so we could not see him where he sat
but in the village of our destination
we found him waiting for us in the street
and greeted him, explaining why it was
so long since we'd been here last. It was warm
and mellow with a morning in the sun
and glowing affability he urged
a glass of stout before we faced the hill.

So jauntily I fell into his stride,
let him suggest the house
let him suggest the place, and followed close
his tapping swagger through the swinging door.
There were two others in the bar besides
the long-faced barman widowed now a week
my farmer muttered hoarsely in my ear.
Then racing through, to fill the certain gaps

my absence left me wanting, dealt by death
he summarised the land's mortalities
beginning with the barmen's loss again
then the sea captain in the Hyde Street house
at eighty seven, and John Mullan's wife
dead also, died in chapel yesterday.
So having placed me whence I could proceed
as if not absent long, he flung his voice,
that rancorous voice so good for herding sheep,
to lend the total company in his talk
of all the skills men use to win the day.

30. V.

Dove of Peace

Walking up the market street
I met a man with three in tow
I was with John MacAlister.
The wee man gave a right-hullo

He was a dealing man I bought
a wheen of pigs from now and then
He said Come in and have a drink
with these three decent Braidside men

For Pat you are a decent man
we always parted well content
as good a man as mind the Glens
as sober as the Pope in Lent

I missed you at the April Fair
and when I seen you in the street
I said to these three Braidside men

Here is a Glensman I must treat.

And bring the cart along with you
for he's a Glensman by his cut.
Hereo Brady's over by the bridge
you'll hardly need to skin a foot.

So he conveyed me to the house
and called a round for one and all
I called the next and turn by turn
the three men with him gave the call.

And we discoursed for hours on end
on weather crops and stock and trade
till we got on before we knew
to set the Glens against the Braid.

The pigman would have none of it
He said I'll say it all again
You are a decent man yourself
You are a decent man

... and these are decent Braidside men.

So Lave another glass of stout
and drink to Ireland's blessed ground "
but I'd Lave Laidly make the fuss
if I'd Lave Led another round.

9.VI.1950

As sturdy as a log of wood
as gentle as a stitchwort stem
I caught the words I understood
and made a poem out of them.

I saw the first swallow lying in the sun
the evening sunlight brimmed with all the birds
and turned to search as I have always done
for the precise equivalence of words

yet- kept the moment clenched within my heart-
as let each crowding image rise and pass
for who at life's speed sure can tell apart-
the bleaching thistle or the meadow grass?

I press these aging thighs against the wind
that later will be shrunk and jaln apart
in a cheap box, the custom of my kind,
some feet deep in a rented plot of earth
and clear in stone the names, the dates of birth
and death before weather and lichen start.

which long have moved, white, columnar and strong
to prop the fountain of this body up
that left a crisp precipitate of song
on certain objects as I passed them by:
with clay-torn roots held harsh against the sky
I have seen a fatten tree bud at the top.

New Statesman New Poems 1952

The Watchers

We crouched and waited as the day ebbed off
and the close birdsong dwindled point by point
not daring the indulgence of a cough
or the jerked protest of a weary joint
and when our sixty minutes had run by
and lost themselves in the declining light
we heard the warning snuffle and the sky
scuffle of mould and instantly the white
long head thrust through the sighing undergrowth
and the grey badger scrambled into view
longing to frolic carelessly yet loth
to trust the air his greedy nostrils drew
awhile debated with each distant sound
then settling into confidence began
to scratch his tough haired side, to sniff the ground
without the threat of that old monster, man.

And as we watched him, gripped in our surprise,

the moment suddenly began to mean
more than a badger and a row of eyes,
a stony brook, a leafy ditch between.
Somehow tone at least it seemed as though
two peoples met, two planets swung in reach
the cruel eyes instantly withdrew
and left us naked with no need of speech

23.XI.50

It was as if another nature came
close to my knowledge, but could not be known.
Yet if I tried to call it by its name
would start, alarmed, and instantly be gone

The Garden.

I Sonnet

For you I weave this litany of flowers,
whose hands assembled these for our delight;
for they are like your nature, wayward, bright,
submissive to the chance of passing showers,
and every season's fluctuating powers;
of colour full at noon and yet by night
rich to the senses still, though, to the sight
mere clumps of shadows, save in moon-blanched hours.

I cannot press this yielding metaphor;
for you are far more various than these,
yet have what they have not, a glowing core
that unifies the rare complexities,
and shall survive the accidents of breath
beyond the limits of hot winter, death.

II

There is a garden, if you'd yield that honour
to such a small space wincently planned;
a tended strip, that year by year, contests –
like anxious bridge-head the assertive tribes –
rough weedy tufts of nettle dock and grass,
and from the pillared gate towards the porch
a growth-crammed angle, stone-rimmed east and north,
the west wind sifted by a tangled hedge
of fuchsia, bramble, thorn, veronica,
clipped to a square green wall, unless, at times,
those gay flounced blossoms or the hawthorn's flowers,
forbid the insistent scissors. Lichened rock,
old stones from tumbled walls, or from the stream,
scattered between the hedge-roots and the kerb
give crutch and crevice to the thrusting stems,
or let the creeping threads brim up and spill
into green pools of leaves, of clustered leaves,
and small jet-budded plants I cannot name.

And here, in spring, the rough leafed primroses,
the brass-bright-petalled celandine are gay,
as on the lush banks where they grew before;
and daffodils, less careful of their poise
and bare decorum of suburban vase,
toss in the wind, gone back a little way
to their ancestral wildness: narcissus,
less frequent now, not friendly to this soil,
hold up their small heraldic suns, till bleached
and threaded, every ray is stripped and lost.

But in the summer, urgently to prime
the whole place prospers: tall valerian
lifting its flowers above its slower neighbour,
the dark-veined balsam with the trigger pods
that set their snares in autumn; columbine
too pretty and sophisticated here,
and snow-in-summer flooding where it can,
and rosemary – and cotton-lavender
remember older gardens, gentler skies,

and one lost sprig of holly, always found
with sudden pleasure to be lost again,
true to its nature as the widest bush
on Lubitavish slope at Christmas time.

Across the grassy path no rock plants swarm:
the ground is given over, as the grass
is driven, sod by sod, back to the field,
to feather-fronded bracken, to a shoot
of flowering currants guarded by a stake,
while London-Pride spreads a pink veil of mist
over the solid ground-bass of its leaves:
and blossomed strawberries with ripening fruit
that lean the pale cheek to the kindly mould,
and broad nasturtium fans that tilt with beads
of silver light, as raindrops swell and break
and fall across the tiny speedwell-skies
outlasting the hail-bruised wood-violet
that with the primrose, spring by spring, returns;
but, here and there, more than the eye salutes

the shaken foxglove hoisting up its peal,
called fairies' thimbles by the people round,
correcting the false spelling in the books.

So this small garden as a phial holds
the essence both of colour and of scent,
as if all nature, concentrating here,
achieves the ultimate lyric of its skill:
and yet this is the work of human hands
and human love that summed the wonder up,
petal by petal, leaf by cherished leaf,
in something pure and momentary as song.

Give thanks then for this garden, thanks to her
whose patient service wrought it out of love,
and let this jumbled rosary of words
both dedicate this garden and my thought.

—

21. VI.

On Visiting the North Antrim Coast

Too long familiar with the friendly Glens
where every tree's remembered, every lane
goes where we know, and every single face
has shouldered through some crowd at fair or mass,
this new bare country found me unprepared.

The scale was larger; for by use I keep
high hills or rocky headlands for the walls
of my small kingdom, take their size on trust
and need not pace them save for once a year
or far less frequent I ~~must~~ may beat the bounds.

But here the scope of cape, of spreading plain
the long blunt island and the flat-topped rock
that lifts its little acre on a plinth
described a bolder rhythm than I can draw
with my minute and nervous fingering.

Irish Times 12-4-82

Dichotomy.

With a crisp leaf or with a lichened strip
of rotten bark I fill my brooding mind
with little hills and great hills to the west
ploughed land and brairded corn and corn in stooks
and all the ~~labour~~ traffic of the striding year
with those that labour in it ~~all their days~~ through the light
the bell at noon the gilt cup lifted up
and the slow stories webbing stone to stone
but half my life sprawls imageless and bare
I have no symbol for this clay red town
its painted gables and its marching feet
and ~~all~~ the thronged anxious lives its walls contain
yet till I name it I must never speak
the full truth that my heart is eager with.

Irish Times

30.8.50

High on our hill a vast cloud laps us round,
pours down the glens and masks the roaring sea;
a light wind shakes the branch with pattering sound,
and close at hand the brook runs endlessly.

The fine rain falls or ceases, but the day
lies like a nation all its will subdued:
the glittering berries on the hawthorn spray,
the pale leaves drifting through the dripping wood
are autumn's parody;

for never again
shall the live seasons move in ritual;
time is consumed and over: joy and pain
clenched and compounded in the curlew's call.

S4 · 1950

30.8.50

Sonnet

After a summer all unparallelled
for cloud and downpour, for bleak sunless days,
expectantly we strode familiar ways
holding in leash the hearts that had rebelled,
with promise of our starkest fears dispelled;
the tented cornsheaves marshalling our gage
and the blunt stubble in which the slanting rays
of the bland sun will be forever held.

But here, where we had pledged us to expect
the harvest's image endlessly renewed,
bright as the berries on the bird-rife thorn,
through rotting swathes the thistles of neglect
thrust ragged spikes, or purple-crested stood
in the pale acres of unripened corn.

30.8.50

High on the moss the cut-turf in the rain
lies sodden and unready, and the hay
heats in the tilted stacks or sprawled in swathes
rots into loss: the corn, not ripe enough
to cut, leans with the wet wind, and the docks
brimmed with green lint-lips over the red seeds
and trickle to the sheughs. The land's a maze
of headlong waters chattering all day:
though birdsong is dispersed, the curlews pass
talking above on leads of rain tomorrow,
and the full moon's wide rip involves the sky
with similar promise. And my plodding thought
imagines epochs falling slowly back
to the green splashing world of savannas:
or is it that the sick mood of the time,
the chill atomic guilt, the threat of war
once packed and compact in each suffering heart
now spreads pervasive, not to be contained,
from heart to heart across the earth between,
projecting our disguise over all?

31.8.50

Lost in a net of lonely corridors
anonymous as a hospital, innocent
of name, direction; windowless, without
season or hour, I shuffled under bulbs
of harsh unshaded light. What people passed
were deaf and quiet, and in uniforms
which bore no rank or number. When I spoke
or thrust a hand out to them it was space
my words or fingers fell through, feather-light.
I wandered on and stopped at several doors,
but these were blank and featureless. My fist
lifted to knock, was met by skeleton
knuckles that took the life as blotting paper
takes the blurred letters. When I rose awhile
it seemed the same anonymous corridor
that I returned to. So I stopped to listen
for any elevator's whirr and grind,
but all was silence. Then where three ways forked
I paused to hear my heart make up its mind,

and as I took the lefthand corridor
a slow door opened, and I saw the king,
the dead, the bearded king, not king today, —
I'd heard he was a gruff but kindly man,
so I approached him. But when face to face
it was the little bald prime minister
who smiled at me. I offered him my hand
and watched the hand that answered, knew the thumb
the curved thumb, and the finger ring-tattooed,
and knew at once what face was on those shoulders,
and so I met my father, dead for years . . .

Bell Jan 51

1.9.50

Fame

We gathered in the joiner's rock-floored shop
when the sun dew falling setting gave us leave to stop
our tedious struggle with the meadow hay,
for it was halfroads home and anyway
~~and~~ old Pat ~~himself~~ was glad to take a ~~rest~~ holiday
from his slow careful labour at a barrow
that well could wait for finishing tomorrow.

So talk began about the weather's way,
the law on catch-dams, and the ~~force~~ cost of hay;
but travelled headlong like a roaring burn
~~that~~ which finds a salley-branch excuse to turn
to left or right that it enjoy its course
a little longer. So the joiner spoke
of certain ancient glensmen, ~~known in youth~~ hardy folk,
~~the country~~ does not breeds ~~not now such hardy folk~~,
~~and he could swear it all as gospel truth~~ —
whose skill in mountain tracks could leave a horse
tied to the twisting road an hour behind,
and never need to halt for second wind.

And there was one who travelled every day
from here to Caryan twelve long miles away,
yet never gave the foreman any chance
to call him late or idle: And one night
went back again to Caryan for a dance,
for old time dances were his chief delight.

Then the hill-farmer told of tramps and lords
who sat across the moss as light as birds
× and won their wagers, drinks for all the house,
a bright half sovereign or a brimming glass
× ~~that always ended in a wild carouse~~.

Most of these names and deeds were strange to me
who have no lease to this folk-memory,
so searching through my thoughts that I might find
some phrase or word alive in either mind
which, kindled, might well draw my night to here
in the warm kinship of this legendary air
I tried the poem given me today
by a kind woman who had written out copied.

eleven stanzas that her uncle wrote,
a famous poet, equal, in his trade
of village-butcher, to the very best
that ever killed a beast and skinned and dressed
a carcase for the table, cow or sheep.
Though seldom printed, many verses keep
his name and wit remembered miles around:
this that I spoke of praised the storied Glen
in phrases apt enough for better pens.

My friends responded, and my hope was crowned
with lively recognition, for my bard,
I was to learn, was something of a card,
a notable drinker wakening on straw
and necking fifty pounds before the night;
not always keeping quite within the law
× ~~but never letting it get out of sight.~~
In Castletown, one fair day, on the strand,
they'd seen him rolling, full, upon the sand,
so full, 'the tide was in among his feet.'

or when, accosted for a small deceit,
he 'hung a long face on him' and denied
the accusation till he nearly cried.

This being someway off familiar ground
~~But this was still outside my element~~:
I sought to bring the conversation round
~~by books and inclination I am bent~~
to topics more amenable to me
~~more on assessing literary worth~~
~~than these untimely accidents of birth~~,
~~of breeding or of opportunity~~,
so I kept harping on the poetry,
till the hill-farmer eagerly began
to set another bard against my man,
better than Dan MacGonnell, Stoddard Moore,
once celebrated as the rhyming tramp
who took as invitation any lamp
from hill farm window or across half-door
to call or ceilidhe, paying for his keep
with endless verses till the household dropped asleep.
~~The joiner then recalled the distant year~~
~~the poet almost took a cottage near~~,

~~then we'd have had a poet in Cushkit~~.'
But the hill-farmer held beyond dispute,
beyond the reach of reason to refute,
his man the first. MacGonnell never could,
with all his wits, make anything as good
as the ballad of 'The Smith of Tieveragh';
that was a poem for you. 'Henry Pat',
MacGonnell's best, was not the beat of that,
though with its points, for every hit was clear,—
still, all the parties he was tilling at
~~but the Blacksmith will live forever here~~;
were dead and gone this many a long year
~~but~~ you's the smiddy, you the very place
the ~~led the raging~~ blacksmith led the Yeos their useless race chase;
and where John Kane's land marches with Leamore,—
this is a thing ye didn't know before—
a gate the blacksmith made is swinging yet.
Aye ~~that's a ballad no one should forget~~.

Then sudden fooled by my own self-regard
who am a more sophisticated bard
than either Dan MacGonnell or old Moore

I thought to lure them into realising
the higher altitude, the deeper note,
when schooled and printed poets such as I sing,
compared to these that rimed and chimed by rote.

So cutting in across an anecdote
'Moira Oneill ~~was surely far the best~~ is better known I said
than any other poet of the Glens
~~of all the poets of the Antrim Glens.~~
Her verse is quoted and what's more, it's read
~~Though nearly sixty years have vanished since~~
she sell her thousands where we're glad of tens
× ~~she wrote, her book still keeps its interest.~~'
I tried a ~~brief quotation~~ recitation just to shew
they'd other poets that they ought to know

'O aye ye mean Miss ~~Florrie~~ Agnes Norah Higginson
who lived with the MacNeills at Cushendun.
She was a decent girl. I seen her when
they had the first big Feis here, in the Glen.
I heard that she writ poems, now and then ...'

Dublin Magazine proof V.51 1/2.9.50

Sunset over Glenaan

As
~~When~~ the vague sun that wrapped the mellow day
in a grey haze, hangs red, about to drop
behind the western mountain-rim, I stop
to name the peaks along their dark array,
for these are more than mountains shouldered clear
into the sharp star-pointed atmosphere,
into the sunset. They mark out and bound
the utmost limits of my chosen ground;
beyond them, and beyond the heather and moss
that only lonely roads and shepherds cross,
lie the fat valleys of another folk
who swarmed and settled, when the clansmen broke
and limped, defeated, to the woody glens.
These inland planter folk are skilled in toil;
their hearths and holdings so well husbanded,
economy has drilled the very soil
into ~~to~~ a dull prosperity that year
by reckoned year continues so; but here

the people have such history of wars
that every hill-top wears its cairn of dead
and ancient memories of turbulence,
clan names persisting in each battle rocky stead;
they take life easier on their hill-side farms
with time to pause for talk, remembering
they'll be outlasted by the marching stars,
and, though there may be virtue still in charms,
no man dare be too sure of anything.

My breed is planter also. I can show
the grey and crooked crosses headstones row on row,
in a rich county mastered long ago
by stubborn farmers from across the sea,
whose minds and hands were wise in husbandry,
and who, when their slow blood was running thin,
crowded in towns for warmth, and bred me in
their clay red city with streets, the white house on the wall,
the jangling steeples and the lecture-hall.
Inheritor of these, I also share

the nature of this legendary air,
reaching a peace and speech I do not find
familiarly among my kin and kind.

Maybe, at some dark level, grown aware
of an old load of guilt, I shrink afraid,
and seek the false truce of a renegade:
or is it that the unchristened heart of man
still hankers for the little friendly clan
that lives as native as the lark or hare?

And, though it keeps my brain and body alive,
I need the honey of the city hive,
I also need, for nurture of my heart,
the rowan berries and the painted cart-,
the bell at noon, the scythesman in the corn,
the cross of rushes and the fairy thorn.

5.9.1950

I spent the forenoon tossing out the cops.
The wind was lively and the sun was strong
and every stab and lift of the long fork
ran through my arms like a lilting song

I'd hoist a bundle on the narrow prongs
and as I'd shake it out against the sky
the gusty wind would tear its lights and shaws
and fling them headlong drifting helplessly.

And as I laboured happy at the work
war and the threat of war seemed far away
and power and policy seemed foolish things
compared to free men neighbouring at hay.

And yet because some men are crazed with power
were tossed and shaken out like wisps of grass.
Tonight I write this slowly by the lamp,
as the last moth flits round the scorching glass.

1949	31	[on 7.6.49]	660
1950	38	[to 5.9.50]	1089