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Book XXVI

1066 35.
March 1955 — December 1958

Poems by John Hewitt.

Just Time's

17/18-III - 1-

Poet in Usher

This revised "A Good Poet"
became

I have peopled your roads with herds,
and stepped aside on the grass
to let the headlong chariots through
and the kings in their coaches pass. ✓

I have walked the ways of my kindred
where the fruit hanging trees swung low
and the rooks rose out of the furrows
and the whin blossomed out of the snow

I have followed your vines and stories
through a thousand looks - and more, ✓
and ^{looked} searched for the broken couplets
among the ^{scraws} straws on the floor

since there's no wage ^{this}
And ~~no, with no wage~~ for thy labour,
I stand where the four winds cross,
and my heart with the lonely heron
and the curlew high on the moss.

SI. 55

The Wages of Reality

I keep my own, my secret discipline,
 observe occasion, render my account,
 and draw my wages scrupulously, within
 a straw, a leaf's breadth of the due amount,
 for, by the laws I follow, I am vowed
 to use and service while my senses last,
 with this for surety, I am not allowed
 to ^{weave} ^{winnings} my earnings till the session's past.
 I must not say this task to which I give
 those moments when my skill is at its best -
 confers the right to live as freemen live
 and with unwilling wit's grudge out the rest -
 for that last-stint which bed and board supplies
 must seem to all my ^{single} only enterprise.

Each year in April I have stood to hear
 the curlew's gargling call - across the hill,
 the small important finches making clear
 assertion of their tangled tenancies,
 and after sunset, when all else is still
 the leatherbleat persist awhile, until
 the constellations - and the galaxies
 establish their dominion of peace.

How can a man by naming call to mind
 this Antrim landscape, yellow, harrowed, ploughed,
 the broken clods, the parallels defined
 by violet shadows on the warm red clay,
 the bright ~~light~~ ^{new-leaved} green of Hawthorn ringing loud
 with all the small birds of an April day?

The Spring Restored

First then to find the spring. It had been there,
 eight years ago that other summer's drought,
 where the hedge now keeps hay and corn apart;
 a careful ^{gluck} east of memory'd ^{luck} bring it out.
 So when mist lifted and the day grew fair
 I gripped my hook and thought to make a start.

Close by the hedge, among the meadowsweet,
 beyond the last grass that the reaper'd mow,
 with pollen-speckled wrist I cleared my way
 in easy stride deliberate and slow,
 watching the hay stems parting at my feet,
 and the dry ^{cracks} earth lay bare its face of clay.

Not far enough at first, and then, too far,
 I turned in toward the hedge to hit the gap
 they'd crammed with bushes when the sheep were ^{here} down
 and flex was in the upper field. The map
 my memory fumbled lacked its ^{lettered} ~~pointed~~ star,
 yet every sense insisted I was near.

6
The next essay I recognised the place
by the bent ash tree and its neighbour when,
hauled out the dry dead bushes bough by bough,
reached the green ditch and safely sheltered in.
The tangled bracken covered every trace
of the bright stream that trickled down below.

With random swing that jangled the steel on stone,
I tore the last grass off the upper side,
at once saw water dribble from a sod,
as though the spring had struggled hard to hide
but could not keep the secret long its own
when the ^{whole ground} ~~soft earth~~ was glutted where I trod.

Then groping round the pale roots on my knees,
my fingers found the wettest sod of all,
announcing that the spring was thrusting near
though some hid crevice in the deep chalk wall,
that, scraping back the muck, I should release
the narrow jet to spout and tumble clear.

As if to certify, where certitude

7
^{searched about}
required no other witness, I ~~drew out~~
^{as found}
a foot of ~~water~~ pipe, a dozen stones,
that once had been the spout or propped the spout,
and a black length of wet and rotting wood,
the floor that kept the bucket steady once.

Soon, with small labour, putting each in place,
shaping the soft mould round, and wedging in
the rusted metal, ^{nearly} ~~as was~~ as before,
I watched the baffled water then begin,
now it had come to the remembered place,
to gather strength and steadily to pour.

With sweat-masked face and ankles cool in mud,
I straightened up to admire the spring restored,
my handiwork and memory ^{to approve} ~~daily pruned~~,
yet in my satisfaction found no word
that by its benediction might include
the living truth my act was symbol of.

8
Begin 23. II : worked over more than
usual

finished 26. VII

Shadow and Stone

New World Writing

There's little richness in the images

1 ^{harry} ~~thrust~~ ^{with} ~~at~~ time in my ~~own~~ mind's defence -
a gannet's plunge, all creatures' secretions,
bred of their single nature's innocence:

a spider's tangle on a broken pond;
the certain journey of the homing rook;
a blossomed thorn; a heron by a pond;
or silver thistles on the tilted stocks;

a lonely moorland boulder, lichen-stained;
the spark of sun on dripping icicles:
the substance - and its meaning both contained
in colour, shape and texture, nothing else.

All these are clean, spare, simple, native to
the small republic I have charted out -
as the same area where my sense is true,
beyond its limits shawl the sweep of doubt.

My lamp lights up the kettle on the stove
and throws its shadow on the whitewashed wall,
like some Assyrian profile with, above,
a snake-or-bird-prowed helmet, crested tall;

but this remains a shadow; when I shift
the lamp or move the kettle it is gone;
the meaning and the matter break adrift
that rightly should be chiseled in chiseled stone.

Probably February
 certainly 1857 or thereabouts.

War, after Ten Years

When world in vast event
 was rocked and wracked with flame
 courage and treason spent
 for a dishonoured name
 and hosts within the dust
 were drawn and ground to dust,

I stood a pace aside
 next but in little ways:
 The day a nation died,
 The ten long months and days
 when faceless raiders crossed
 our colour-banded coast;

The warning bulletin,
 The rumour in the street,
 remote as Saladin
 or Agamemnon's fleet —
 my wars were in my mind,
 personal in
 as of a private kind;

and I had learned enough
 from Munich and from Spain
 not to require more proof
 goodwill alone is vain,
 unbelieved by force
 from some new wakened source.

And from those savage years,
 when millions of my kind
 were drowned in their own tears,
 I call before my mind
 few instants when I found
 my wound the common wound

Once when the shrapnel struck
 the roadway hard and fast —
 and with beginner's luck
 we ducked and turned fast;
 surprise surmounting fear
 that death dare come so near.

And once again when Crete

was lost and Noel went
resourceful in defeat
to cliff-top bastionment:
from infancy we'd shared
a consoling regard.

And when the word came through
that Singapore was down
and Robert marched his few
survivors back to town
to die by slow disease
in the New Hebrides.

.....
I've heard old soldiers tell
of this or that campaign,
the dripping jungle hell,
the lorry-littered plain,
and left them conking
as I went to it, free,

yet with a spice of guilt
I could not share with them

these memories they had built
into a solid dream
that would be with them till
they crossed the grave's dark sill.

But somehow humbly proud
that what men label fate
had probably allowed
my steps to follow straight—
the track laid down for me
towards my destiny.

Far out of time the man who will not yield
 although disaster slopes against his gate
 and gazing out across the wasted field
 he draws the curtain, lifts his glass to take
 and the harsh rebel breaks the rusted lock,
 swings his tall staff and drives the dumb flock in
 to wade through grasses that had knelt on rocks
 and bids the bright and endless peace begin;
 for endlessly there too the shepherd king
 and the old monarch bidding glory go
 as one man lean above the gusting spring
 and watch the swift reflexions form and flow.

I have no skill for music. When I hear
 the sombre orchestration rise and fall
 I feel the hopeless need to cover all
 the moods and meanings with the flesh of fear,
 of joy exultant, till each sound appears
 chill as a pebble, warm as sunset well;
 since, for my spirits' service, I may call
 only on what to my dull sense lies near.

So, though I long for meaning, value, mood,
 stripped of the labour of experience,
 that I may know the good simply as good,
 the true as true forever, I am bound
 as any tree is bound, despite its immense
 ocean's round it, to its native ground.

Macumba

We saw the savage dancers leap
 possessed by gods announced by drums
 and writhe and fall in mimic sleep
 and waken emptied of the power
 that magically goes and comes
 only in that ecstatic hour.

That night in our familiar bed
 when neither had the will to sleep
 you turned a sudden face and said
 "That was a new experience
 for us to have — for us to keep
 with all the rest — O what's the sense?"

And instantly I shared the mood:
 what baldest bears the newborn ghost?
 Damnation or beatitude?
 Relief, delight, despair, remorse?
 and when I think of mine, the most
 that I dare hope for is remorse

Tell — for some moments after this
 my mind revolted at the thought,
 and mustered poem, gesture, kiss,
 and bowed by these that this would be,
 when all was into balance brought
 a lunatic economy.

15. VIII

Now when my mind should be more sure,
 because the downward slopes ahead,
 of all the things I've heard or read
 or seen or touched or done or said,
 what elements might best endure,

I find, with something like surprise,
 That, summoned up from east and west
 the thing I thought I knew the best
 is this dark nation in my breast
 with all its statesmen, rebels, spies.

Oisín's Grave, on the Horned Cairn
 at Lubitavish, Co. Antrim.

We stood and mused beside the stones
 that hold ^{some} hint of ~~some~~ pattern still,
 the small ^{blunt arc} haffards, and slit by slit,
 the ^{hockels} ~~hockels~~ for the ^{Laurels} forgotten bones.

The legend says that Oisín lies
 beneath these stones upon the hill;
 this, stricter scholarship denies,
 asserting rather that the form,
^{shaped} ~~bed~~ under for Sardinian skies,
 was coasted round the capes of Spain
 and carried ^{here} through ~~the~~ ^{slimy} ~~rock~~ and storm
 to keep men's hearts in mind of home
 and its tall surging wave and worm
 across the leagues of whipping foam,
 against the ~~arrowheads~~ ^{twilight} of rain.

I cannot tell, would seek no proof;
 let either story stand for true

as heart, shell bird. It is enough
 that, our long meditation done,
 as we passed down the broken lane
 by the dark hillsides lolly trees
 a tall white horse ^{with lifted knees} ~~passed us~~ she ran,
 came stepping past us, as we knew
~~a young man mounted at his ease.~~
 his rider was no tinker's son.

The Population Question

We pass the house upon the hill
 and try to count the children there,
 Those now that at their play are still -
 for, strangers, we are wotk & store.

But all are small, all faces show
 the same black hair, the same dark eyes,
 that we have not the skill to know,
 but need to stop and catch a view.

The tallest child admits to ten
 and slowly names each gazing face:
 we think we have them sorted when
 another jostles into place,

and all's at odds: Teresa, Rose,
 or Angela - what matters it?
 we are outnumbered by our - foes;
 with better grace we should submit.

Yet there's a doubt, for in this glen
 I'll find you hosts of saying wellos
 where lonely women, lonely men
 are trysled for their funerals.

On the Recent-Acts of I.R.A. Terror

As we grew slowly into middle age
 it seemed no fantasy, the times did too:
 with so much learnt-it seemed the gusts of rage
 belonged to the past moods we'd weathered through.

The warning factors quietly withdrew,
 or if one here or there gave out again
 the better words, they showed themselves as words,
 no more the cries of elemental pain
 or the natural easy eloquence of birds,
 but like small children thumping on a tray
 out of sheer habit; merely for the noise
 and disregarding them we went our way
 or wishing them more profitable toys.

Though trained to live by points of difference
 whom to address and how and in what tone
 we seemed upon the brink of common sense
 well armoured on common nerve and bone.

But now our summer mood of Tolerance
 is darkened by a hand's breadth of new cloud:
 the friendly sun eludes our further plans;
 the coming thunder trundles clear and loud
 across the patient hills. Already now
 the old wounds stir and prick in the heart;
 the far, hurt memories twitch and sting and show
 the pit of guilt from which all treasons start.

S.S. 55

Sonnet

The first rain after seven weeks of drought
 was a mere token of the sky's regard
 for the tired earth that carried hot and hard
 the burden of the season still in doubt:

The hay well sowed whatever chance may come;
 the lint pulled ^{needing} ~~ready~~ and dubbed and dried,
 a good strong crop; the turf drawn down beside
 the mountain roads for ready carting home.

Mark these as gain and thank the kindly sun,
 but keep your blessing till the corn is in,
 light on the pale stalk now and short and thin,
 and the potatoes lifted - in the month
 so much may happen cannot be foretold,
 and till all's out the harvest is not done.

18. VIII

Under the high bright stars the earth is dark
 as though naught else were worthy of the sight:
 from glen and further glen the quick dogs bark
 as the far sea calls endless through the night.

20. VIII

The Rope

I helped a man to make a rope
 the best wire turning in my hands;
 a man I came on thatching pikes
 and binding all with twisted bands.

This ropes ran short. He begged my aid,
 in easy task that asked no skill.
 He stooped and fed the lengthening strands;
 I turned the wire with ready will.

By weather's fortune, call of friends,
 chance had not let me share the lay;
 the season had already seemed
 a mitching schoolboy's stolen play.

Though rich in gifts of altered time,
 I'd felt the timidity of heart;
 field after field of well-saved hay
 in which my hand had had no part.

But through this simple act or rite
 there came the joy that comes by grace;
 somehow ^{absolved} ~~absolved~~, my heart stood up
 to look the season in the face.

I jilted my bucket - at the spring
 and raised it carefully,
 and, as I did, I thought I saw
 with the corner of my eye
 a man upon the bank above,
 no more than two feet high.

~~It may have been a tift of weeds
 it may have been that one
 who guided me to clear the spring
 and let the waters run.~~

It may have been a tift of weeds
 caught in the fitful sun;
 it may have been a ^{trick of light} ~~noisy~~ band
 it may have been that one
 who guided me to clear the spring
 and let the waters run.

20/21 - VIII

The sleeping dog before the stove
whimpered and twitched as in distress,
then eased back to a deeper dream.

In the next room the two girls slept,
the diaries of a busy day
of hills and sheep and barking waves
large-lettered with laconic care:

Some moments after the dog's yell
the younger girl tossed restlessly

and whistled ^{two or three snags} ~~a few straggling notes~~;

and I, who have known mind to mind
signal without the flags of speech

and took ^{that} as an added grace -
affection grants to sympathy,

stood suddenly upon the coast
of a new content of sense

that's mapped beneath our coarser world,
where, not in the tormented throes
in which each lonely spirit strives

with broken splinters of the self,
being like water finds its shape
no longer bottled into selves,
but flowing, tidal, out of time,
and vast as ocean's unity

Ulidia

It is a small country,
a round cape; where its shores end
an enemy comforts it
who remembers lost altars
and the invading strangers,
yet it is famous for fine linen
and the building of ships.

Has it temples then, and heroes,
and statesmen subtle in judgment,
or powerful allies oversea?
Its temples are tabernacles
of small unsociable sects;
its statesmen have only state words,
its powerful ally grows drowsy.

What then maintains that country?
Every summer its men march
with drums and banners flying
to renew their oath together.

This and the fact that the strangers
are strangers no longer,
Leaving buried here ten generations.

13. IX

The weaver has no song now
who once at his cottage loom
made his own song.

The loontimbers are wormeaten,
the threads dusty and broken;
the songs in small tattered books
rot in the attic-rafters:
if men sing it is not
their own now but another's.

A hard, wheel-clattering city, planted by strangers,
but taking something from the cattle in the street
and the coloured hills at the end of the street,
which makes it indigenous and brakes its speed.

Already the fashionable gadgets intrude;
its people can afford to indulge their lack of taste;
its roads spurt out the Sunday motorists;
its hoardings roar with metropolitan masks.

But, listen, at midnight in a dark alley
a drunken voice jumbles with an old heart-broken song,
and in high ebb up long worn dusty stairs
small groups of young people tread traditional measures.

At the frontier the long train slows to a stop:
small men in uniform drift down the corridor,
thumb passports, or withdraw for consultation;
the customs officers check the bags and leave us to shut them.

We pass here into another allegiance,
expect new postage stamps, newspapers, manifestos,
and brace ourselves for the change. But the landscape does not alter;
we had already entered these mountains an hour ago.

O who knows where the glory went
that billowed round this town awhile
and coloured poem and event
with the perfection of a style

Now Connolly and Skeffington
are with Cuchullain, Yeats and Synge
and Boland's Mill and Stephen's Green
are one with Tara's lathiced spring

But those who crowd the sounding sheet
on tangle in the halls of state
are packed and empty of the grace
that flooded in too vast a space

and spent the courage and the face
which, spread now evenly in time,
has nurtured up a commonwealth
on truckled back in luffing shins

When the men march with bands and banners
on the stated days
and the pipes cry in the wind
I stand by the kerb and watch them pass,
noting the legends on the billowing silks
identifying the tunes
approaching, receding with the swaying poles.

I would march in step in any rank
but the legends are not those that I should choose,
the faces not those of my heroes,
and the tunes though lively or beguiling, do not call
for back among my generations;
and so, though I long for the sense of unity
and have the need for comrades as the sky darkens,
I stand by the kerb and let them go by,
with smarting eyes.

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Oct, Nov

Those Swans, Remember

S.4.55] The symbols jostle for their breathing space,
^{elbow} press on each other like a football crowd,
 whereas that crowd should split and offer place
 to let them enter singly down the track
 to where the green field awaits the play of grace,
^{uncommitted gestures} the courteous to end ^{of the} fro of proud with proud
 before the whistle launches pack on pack
 and the ^{high} stands ^{give tongue, responsive} rock exultant, anxious, loud.

There should be that slow stately ritual
^{courteous} when ^{gracious} gestures lob or toss the ball
^{genuflection to} in celebration of the earnest game
 which waits above the arena to descend,
 while those that watch may ^{still} give to each his name
 and the opposers speak as friend with friend.

+

But in ^{an} this instant that strained simile
 falls like a wicker fence before a flood;
 the shouting waves of image urgently
 thrust toward the shores of consciousness to be

identified, defined and understood.

Name them as they appear or disappear
 in this close huddle. Phoenix, Unicorn,
 the Tiger, Hawk, the Ram, the Bull, the Deer,
 the Hound and Hare miraculously born
 to be each other's shadow, Heron, Swan,
 Gannet and Badger, flickering Bat and Owl,
 the White Horse by the river, with its foal,
 the moon-raped lion.

Set the scene for Dawn,
 for Noon, for Sunset, for Eternity,
 whatever tint that takes when it shall come.
 Pluck harp, strike fiddle, beat the single drum,
 let bagpipes grieve, and bid the trilling fife
 left in the wind that fills the banners out:
 this is the stage and circus of my life,
 that's aimed at drama, that may end in rout.

The Tiger first, Blake's Tiger, which was led
 leashed in a dream, frowning, pleading pity,
 companioned by the lion, glaring red,

from the high rocks, upon the empty city;
 City of ruins, fallen columns, squares
 that nothing save the ant or lizard cross:
 Town with the foundered gables, where the stairs
 scale the cracked plaster and torn wallpaper;
 that Town intact, untenanted, where still
 the traffic lights propose, approve, deny,
 safe transit to the goggled messenger
 with gloved despatch of empty victory.

The first whelps Lambs - the paradox is clear -
 black-faced and crying in the lonely moss,
 the striding shepherd, searching, finds them here;
 Good Shepherd of the Print, Saint Christopher,
 knee-deep in glazes over the shut door;
 the staff, the crook, the crozier, the cross
 midmost of three, skull-rooted, that same tree
 which stood by Eden's streams.

Yet why should oak,
 elm
 or ash or beech, mean less than sycamore,
 than chestnut, or than alder, Hazel, Thorn,
 Hawthorn and Blackthorn both, though these with rhyme

are more song-laden ^{sadden} than the bee-thronged lime?

Oak is for use, is for humanity,
 is of and for the English, even though
 Colmille loved his Derry long ago,
 is sawn and staved and curved and carved to meet
 the hand's demands. The chanting Druid folk,
 for all their spells, have left it but a tree,
 its nature yielded to its purposes,
 though these be wide as sprawl grimless seas,
 or strictly ordered as a one-way street.

The Hawthorn's dense with magic, twisted, thick,
 unlucky to the house, but worth a wish
 above the springwell spreading; sycamore,
 though ^{newly turned by latter 15} ~~turning~~ neatly in a simple dish,
 is the immortal nest of that small man
 who wished to see Christ plain above the press;
 the chestnut withered, like a harvardian
 shakes out the tatters of a tarnished dress;
 blackthorn is blackthorn winter, the black stick
 breaking in blossom; it may also be

the resurrection; but the merry Laws,
 laugh on spray, foretelling winter death,
 draped with dragged tufts of lint and varnished straw,
 declare that is The Man Above the earth
 is no more once-wound long which ^{tirelessly} endlessly
 must slot and mesh until the worn spring breaks;
 yet of the woody creatures Hazel wakes
 the oldest wonder, clear, unchristened, free
 of any burdened guilt or prick of treachery.

The nuts drop in the pool; the Salmon there
 is wisest of all creatures, old and wise,
 who equally can hope and fear outside
 with the cold focus of unblinking eyes:
 this, from the ancient legendry I share
 simply by breathing in the drifting air
 near the swift waters of an Antrim glen,
 and with it, knowledge also, of a kind
 that jingles in the pockets of the mind
 but has the smallest-currency with men.

The forked twigs twist for water rightly held,
 for water is its kin and answers it:
 it keeps its nature not as oak when felled
 that turns to timber eager for the tool;
 the little rods still are hazel, bent or split:
 but still proven by the mountain pool
 the Hazel leans, whose nuts all knowledge hold,
 all knowledge older than man's scribbling wit,
 and in due season drop out of the air
 into the water waiting, slow and cold
 the Salmon of All Knowledge waits to eat,
 its ancient nurture, each close kernel's meat.

The Salmon of All Knowledge is the same
 in neptun woven, scratched upon the sand
 and quickly smothered away with idle shoe;
 which is the signal for the Secret Name.
 When you are friendless in a heather land
 show this, and thou'lt be taken by the hand
 to where we meet together, we, the few,
 who know the fable and understand.

This was the Phoenix also, that which came
 westward from time, the self-engendered flame
 when the swept leaves are burnt, foreshadowing,
 though the coiled smoulder, the green fires of spring.
 This phoenix, by some mythologic twist,
 splits into Eagle rising from the smoke
 and the stung Scorpion scuttling from the blaze;
 yet each, in turn, the emblem of St. Luke,
 saint of my season, my evangelist
 of those that wrote Christ's story in four ways,
 and Scorpio, my sign, the jagged tongued
 who is himself the cause by which he's wrung;
 the wounding word flies quickest from the hurt;
 mistrusting life as flame, he breeds mistrust,
 and in the skin as coil sees all as dirt
 which, judged in raking light, in golden dust.

O my gay season of the skipping leaf,
 the harvest home, the mellow-misted air,
 the merry heart-can spare no time for grief
 so pleased by the spring it shall not share.

And in the autumn, swifts and swallows gone,
 there passes overhead the urgent swan
 to inland waters stretching neck and wing,
 till driven down the shoreward slope again
 by the first-bugles of returning spring.
 Those swans, remember, lacked the golden chain,
 yet-linked the dark Ocean to the Moyle,
 oaring the whistling winds and crossing slow
 the painted roof of Michelangelo,
 fast Tara's grass and the wrecked Trojan spoil.

Already the Three Rivers are conjoint
 that fount in springs upon the haunted hills
 their first-begetting: ledges, clefts as sills
 could not divert them from their meeting place,
 conjunction of their colours in one point
 as white, they say, the epitome of hues
 the rainbow signals to the stricken world,
 so webbed and shesed it has no time nor use
 for any truth so anciently unfurled.

Minerva's owl, harsh jowl of prophecy,

a ghost mid tree boles. Hawk and Gannet mine,
 more mine the plunging gannet than the hawk,
 who take that plummet as a secret sign,
 swift in intention, slowly in disdain
 wheeling upon the purpose. More than he
 the flapping heron rising from the pool
 or stilted on a stone beside the sea;
 I too obey an old and lonely rule.

The white horse now comes pounding down the slope
 to stop beside the black star-bubbled stream,
 a Saxon totter; last of Plato's trope;
 the Dutch King's charger: belled mayer's theme;
 True Thomas saddled. When the firm girth broke
 and Orsin tumbled in among his peers
 that like grey nettles waited for his fall,
 and Patrick mobbed him with his praying folk,
 the white horse whined as fled with twitching ears,
 and left the small man lonely, last of all
 the Fenians, Orsin, blinking through his tears;
 Orsin pursued by Patrick's nagging words,
 the old hawk levied by the croaking birds.

The Hawk Orsin and Colm the Angry Dove
 begin a flight which takes me high and far
 across grey waters under a bright star
 to where all skills may live in gnet-love;
 but as tides clash between the cliff and cape
 back through the thresh the salmon all return,
 pause at the vein and, in light's leaping shape,
 achieve the inland locks where they were born,
 so Orsin came as his heart bade him come
 to face the charge and challenge of his home.

The Hawk is drawn, clear, firm and angular,
 among the wings of angels on the page
 where the lines join in one unending band
 though interlaced and interwoven far
 beyond the skill and art of mortal hand,
 in stream's meander such as salmon trace;
 though tangles seem to knot in monster's rape,
 the whole's unscinded with cold and laboured grace.
 But, closer to the heart, the lithe white cat
 that rubbed its shoulder on the scribe's worn shoe,
 till he thrust by the missal he was at,

and yoked down those stanzas sharp and true,
 on cats and poets, moves across the page,
 clenched in intention, focussed on its aim,
 to let the paw's ten syllables engage
 upon its prey yet keep alive the game.

Lions there are, the Lion of St. Mark,
 proud-breasted with the standard in his paw;
 the leaping salmon; and a writhing hound
 that never tumbled out of Noah's Ark,
 that all men fear but no man ever saw;
 but not the twilight badger. He will stay
 till crack of turf or even whispered word
 send him down headlong to his tunnelled den,
 the swiftest comment on the race of men.

The deer alarmed will also start away,
 the deer so shy that were protective once
 when Patrick shone among them through the king's
 wide-scattered camp with his companions,
 invisible as if with seraph wings
 his passage had been masked, will start away,

leaping to cover; but the unicorn
 returns at certain times to dip his horn
 in the foul pool that it be rendered clean
 for those who drink hereafter. Therefore pray
 the unicorn, that white and gentle beast,
 that he come back again. Yet if he come,
 the horn still opposing must appear,
 with tilted crown, recruiting sergeant's drum.
 O white and gentle creature come not near,
 but through the shadows delicately pass
 between the dark pool and the moonlit grass.

That emblem's known: but where were ever found
 these brave supporters matched each side a shield?
 Should but the unicorn have him to face its bound
 the mortal laws of heraldry must yield
 to a new order; water then should burn,
 and oil of uncut fire and men grow young and gay,
 and the tumultuous ages backward turn
 to the first bridging of the primal day,
 the Tiger and the Lamb together play

The Whisper: For M. J. M.

D'you know the man that's come to live at Layde?
You'll see him stepping this road after Mass.

He always stops where other folk would pass,
because he follows a peculiar trade:

He's after stories that the old ones made
of ^{fairy} ~~holy~~ wells and fairs and hungry-grass.

He turns all talk, the quiet way he has,
to frolics and gurgles and the whole brigade
of fancies that once gathered round the hearth
when old men talked in winter, ^{James} and are now
gone ~~back~~ with nothing bones back into the earth,
or lie like ^{dry} withered leaves within the mind
until his whisper stirs them - and you find
a phrase that brings a brightness to his brow.

I

Judge everything in the ordinary light of death:
for even this light about us, this brief December light
with signals of rain grown dark, brightening quickly
as the cloud thins, is that of the day after someone's death.

There will be little difference. I have given up hoping
for the great difference in life: it would be foolish to expect it
in death. Life which contains all lives will persist for a long time yet.
It is more reasonable therefore not to expect great change.

Yet because of this continuity, it were also reasonable
not to remember vividly the bruises and the hurt-heart,
to let them skin over as a cut on the finger, to let
the pain wither, and the memory of the pain wither with it.

We shall not die of these. We shall die of death,
which is precise and absolute for each, yet general for all.
We would like to be remembered, if any remember,
by our best moments, let us help each other.

Having consciously dispensed with the convention —
 it never was more than that for my generation —
 I begin in these dwindling years to be convinced at last
 of the existence and the reality of God,
 not by the leaping heart and the revelation,
 nor by the marvellous stars and the cunning spiders,
 but simply by my failure to achieve, or achieving, maintain
 attitudes of balance and rhythm which have been proved valid
 for poems or paintings or other works of art.

I have known an angry poem, a pathetic picture,
 but never a guilty statue, a humiliated jar,
 for even a shard will retain both texture and glaze.

Yet there is nothing new in my attitude, except for me.
 When the first poets imagined their first ancestor
 they imagined Adam in Eden, but the evidence
 of their own condition prompted the thought of the Fall
 and a merciful God to make any sense of it all.

Poems in 1956

The Sheep Skull

3.11.

As we came up the steep familiar lane,
 famous for berries, brummed with meadowsweet,
 bright with rosehips in season, every rut
 was stiff with frost and rigid as a bone;
 and in the dead red bracken at one side
 a sheep skull lay exposed, as though the year
 had yielded all, had nothing left to hide,
 and shaped this symbol to make all things clear.

We stopped. You poked your stick into the hole
 the spine once entered, raised the sculpture up;
 my left hand took it in a steady grip,
 my right drew off the horn with easy pull;
 then with more labour we dislodged its twin
 and dropped the white mask back into the grass;
 one horn for powder when our faces draw in
 and one to loost each dagger as we pass.

3. 11. 56

Black is no colour; the empty branches
swing and toss in the sky's dull grey
a moment, this morning, the ragged sunrise
gave enough colour for any day

5. 11

Always I preferred enduring things
seasons and landscapes, creatures, commonplace
reportage as of how a chaffinch sings
or how the years play havoc with a face.

In this I work against the modish grain,
that takes the latest image for the true;
the pylons ^{have} come first, the aeroplane,
the ~~air~~ ^{sputnik} ~~edges~~ ^{swishes} briskly into view

Once through a skate of words thrust something odd;
into my pastoral calm with clang and roar,
a train came regiméed, and now, by God,
it's out-of-date as any dinosaur!

A Tree may fall but there are other trees.

At certain times we brace ourselves to face
the nature of necessity, of change,
most pertinent in death of kinsmen, friends
of public persons, steady prop of line,
mortality's approach in our own flesh
the grey hairs on the temples, the lined eyes,
with too much thought of this we should despair
and so for comfort seize the handy solace
of any faith you know, the nearest serves —
the hymn remembered and the polished pulpit
a bridge on which the captain rode the storm
as the gale lashed the wellworn penitents:
these out of childhood flapping like a sail,
but further back the carols in the frost
and layered on these the slowly stepping round
the baroque altars, the confessionals
contained in cotton, with the kneeling boy,
the young man bearded raising the response
as you gave a landscape to his voice
Or else, less simple, think mortality.

as of a pattern part- Adjourn to seasons,
 for their recurrence helps the stumbling, with:
 a tree may fall but there are other trees;
 the bird that sings this morning is the bird
 will sing tomorrow or return next year,
 for bird and song, the shape that owns the song
 is more than the bright wings that flit through it.

When of the seasons we have marked our terms
 and stude an autumn stack with niggard sheaves
 and watch the cold moon rising from the sea
 we then be think us of the sea, the moon,
 the land it beams on and the shores it strikes,
 here is the permanence we anchor at,
 the old known mountains, the enduring capes:
 the landscape does not alter on the moon,
 the landscape, peaks and craters, is the moon,
 without them, moon no longer, naked sphere.

Yet walking at the tide's edge we have seen
 the lips and lips of water tear away
 the brown soil from the grass roots and bog, grass

hitting its crumbling sods for water's wear.
 If you can phrase a spell to counter this,
 or find some way to hold it in your heart,
 the pounding waters, the receding sand,
 the tumbling slabs that lose identity
 of knobs and notches till the grain is all,
 the grain and texture of the battered pebble.
 If you can ring a stone against your heart
 and make of it a secret talisman
 then you are some way toward that permanence.

4 II. 56

I saw a tilled slab among the mounds
 lettered with names and places, dates and facts
 which I could read yet never bring alive
 now nothing but the words in stone remains
 and yet the slab is lovely for the letters
 the way they filled the surface with their curves
 and stood against the weather since my name
 was carved by a hunter round the fairs

I failed my father with a feeble slab,
 can yet redeem him with a harder stone

5. II. 56

Returned from a wet country, where the thaw
 has finished all ditches, dragged all grasses down,
 and smeared the flat dead leaf across the stones,
 let me report the gist of what I saw.
 Not buds or budding shoots, though there were these;
 not flicking finches, sheep skulls in the grass,
 nor the last icicles upon the straws
 that dealt me out a fist of similes.

But rather that the mude and marshy sward
 where hay was, corn was, lay as bare and clean
 as well-swept hearth: no implement, machine,
 or sign of labour, save the threshers' board
 of smoking chaff: a cold world clean and new,
 and no man fretting for a thing to do.

Let no man say the myths have lost their power:
 there is a haunted country where they roam
 in search of some young mind's frustrated hour
 to foster there till final ^{fever} folly come.

The shape they take's heroic; the sworn bands,
 of lonely comrades sullen with contempt;
 the plot, the password and the clasping hand
 in rignmarole some crazy scholar dreamt.

till like Cuchullin grappling with the tide
 or Emmet on the scaffold, they are caught
 in gestures of romantic suicide
 and stalk thereafter through a nation's thought.

Spring of the Year.

In April, the spring of the year,
 it was the spring of the world,
 white with the bleating of larks
 and the singing of the lambs;
 flowers in the ditches-galore,
 lime in the harrowed mold,
 the buds on the stems like corks
 with bottled sap ready to burst
 in froth or ^{dribble} ~~drapping~~ ^{with} flames;
 the bright sun varnished with frost.

The pinkish tinge of the budding beech
 lifts - gay against the April blue
 as though the spring were pushing its reach
 to the point where the sun would not let it through;
 for the light, though bright, is chill with the wind
 that comes far back from the season past
 as it seems that so much has been left behind
 that this colour will scarce have the strength to last.

Sonnet for R

To such a gap as this our love has come
 that when I speak you doubt the words I use
 and doubt no less the moments I am dumb
 till silence is at best a lonely truce.
 I am not crass enough to place the blame
 on other shoulders than my own. I know

took blade and edge to drive a cruel blow
 to your tender heart, tho' far from my intent,
 which, now it seems beyond your wit's belief,
 had set you safe above all chance event
 bukked in the steady structure of my life,
 of the bright fabric part, the peak and chief
 of that which given never could be spent.

Take the intention then and let me live
 a wiser creature for my foolishness
 and from the better hurts you must forgive
 achieve a deep capacity to bless
 this meagre mortal providence has bound
 to your mortality while life endures
 for only in this gesture may be found
 the high estate that is most rightly yours.

For I need mercy much, but blessing more,
 if from the debris of my lost esteem
 I may build again the edifice restore
 to the proportions of a happy dream
 wherein estate and edifice become
 presage and promise of our spirits' home.

For R.

You are much greater than your memories
 for you contain them all
 it is the wall and not the shadow on the wall
 that guards our peace.

Some memories bring back pleasure, some dismay;
 choose you the first and keep
 the second small as service lest they overleap
 the fence as stray

across the borders of the bright parterre
 and wreck the bedded flowers
 that you have planted through the serviceable hours
 with so much care.

When critics speak of strategy
 or the elements of style
 and square the rules of writing
 to explicate a smile

I leave the task of my slow wit
 I keep for thinking with
 as long to find the words to fit
 the image to the myth

But unexpected wisdom comes
 profound and personal
 when a green blossomed lime tree hums
 and distant cuckoo-calls.

I long have waited, wanted to be free
 to spend the whole will on the craft of words
 that leaves no time to grasp a mastery
 no slub or crust or candle-end affords;
 to let the seasons parch or drench my heart,
 to wear my leaf and bud and flower and seed,
 and yield them freely, and to stand apart
 and let him take for use who has the need.

But having crammed the fragments of my days
 not owed to common stint, with tasks that seem
 of reader service to my place and age,
 I lack the easy skill to disingene,
 my single talent split a dozen ways
 and erect a ribbon for my self-esteem.

The Hill Farm

My errand brought me ^{once again} ~~through the rain~~
^{along} the sleep road ~~and~~ down the lane;
 and thro' the lay and stumbling dark
 there was no cry: no welcome bark
 announced my nearing. All was still
 from ~~darkness~~ ^{darkness} ~~to~~ ^{to} star.
~~no sound~~ ^{no sound} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~air~~ ^{air} and wind on hill

The door was shut, but contained light
 thrust muffled challenge to the night.

Then at the porch I stopped and stood
 to ^{muster} ~~summon~~ courage to intrude;
 and, as I paused, I overheard
 the rise and fall of rhythmic word:
 a voice, the housewife's, speaking clear
 the rosary, the evening prayer,
 and mumbling a - a lower key
 the voices of the family
 responding - and repeating, each
 with adult or with childish speech;
 the invocations running on

with now and then a stifled yawn.

With each Hail Mary full of grace
 I ^{summoned} ~~called~~ up each friendly face
 held in devotion of a kind
 alien to my breed and mind
 easy as breathing, natural
 as birds that fly, as leaves that fall
 yet with a lovely sense of grief
 that I must stand beyond belief
 here in the elemental night
 while there within were grace and light.

And ^{on} a cold december afternoon
 when earth was ^{cold} still and dark and only water,
 of all things, on its surface, satin-smooth
 above the slanted weir, and crumpled silver
 where the round edge was covered, ran silver
 where the high sky was chill and pale and far
 that half a mile before had mixed its marvels
 of pink and blue, of purple wedged with green,
 the lightest green of luminous vacancy
 behind the black lotus wings, we stepped inside
 the tomb-dark chapel with the candle points
 of yellow gloom that blurred the patterned altar
 where the bare light outside lit up the glass;
 and down the aisle ^{at each hemispherical} the little pennants ~~listened~~
 each with a name and symbol, drew us on
 to trace the title from the printed letters
 Mother of Martyrs, Mother of the Virgin's
 Mother of God, St. Dymphna and St. Ita
 St. Bridget also. Why these names were haunting
 we had no clue or calendar to guess

I stood alone and prayed for one hereafter
 but knew my prayer unanswered while I lacked
 the supple knee to bend ^{be} ~~be~~ ^{supple} ~~supple~~ ^{supple} ~~supple~~
 the supple knee to bend ~~and be the target~~.
 Withdrawing slow, I turned beside the stoop,
 the pennants had ^{retreated} ~~receded~~, and the candles;
 and when I knelt at last I knelt to Him
 who is the shade and colour of the ruin
 who wears the aplemural colours of the sky
 who lifts his bare wings ^{bright} - above the ~~purple~~ ^{purple}.

No Verse written during 1957

1958

Read 18. III. 58 by Bryan Bailey
at Acoustic Test of Theatre

February

75

Prologue to be spoken at the Opening
of the Belgrade Theatre in March

As yet this Playhouse holds no memories,
but time must earn them, yielding us a share,
who heed this broad stage first, intent to please,
— and you who first attend, expectant there.

So, sixty years from now, some led grown old
may tell with pride how he was here to see
the first-bright scene within these walls unfold
like dawn attendant the spires of Coventry.

Some say this city breeds (unlearned) men, ^{prosaic}
without tradition, (rusted in) the arts; ^{sceptic of}
the wrench and ratchet rather than the pen
rehears the coiled intentions of their hearts:
but in this Playhouse time can give the lie
to the rash judgement. Has there been an eye
when hearts were still to warm words' artistry
projected living from the peopled stage?
Here we have now this edifice designed

for all dramatic traffic, framed and lit
for any dance of language, limb or mind,
the clown, the lover or the man of wit.

This is no upstart town; in ancient days
the Corpus Christi guilds roared their lines;
from Gosford Street to Bishop Street their plays,
in vivid legend, smote the Philistines;
and when the guilds went down, poor mummers came,
in book and sked, to dare the groundlings' call,
or, shod in stouter buskin, strode to fame
in old Saint Mary's multipurpose Hall.

If you should scan the annals year by year
you'd find no easy target set for scorn,
but proudly point the finger, saying "Here
was Siddons named, Ellen Terry born".

Let these remembered bargains in our thought
tell drama jilt its place within our lives,
as men of Athens, Shakespeare's London, wrought,
so nurtured, many a gesture that survives
the drive and drift of time, and still is left

of what, for good, men yet may claim as his —
the power and heft of the playwright's art;
and may our city find its heart in this,
as loyally these wells safe home provide
for holi' craft, for actors' discipline,
and a great audience generations wide
achieve enhancement of their days therein.

Another Prologue for the same.

a hungry poet centuries ago,
his supper's price a prologue, shovels to show
by what contrivances you could combine
- a new ship with - a new-built theatre.

Let's blow the dust of this old metaphor,
imagine were about to leave the shore,
to face the rising wind, the breakers piled: -
the immediate forecast - certainly is wild,
to be shamed now - and then with song
to lighten the voyage - as we cruise along.

Before the anchor's up let's look around;
see how this vessel's every plating is sound,
from keel to rigging, trim and elegant,
equipped for every ease our comforts want;
designed for speed - and graceful playmanship;
appointed well for any kind of trip
the owners promise in their bright prospectus;
it seems - as if they actually expect us

to be alert, demanding, critical,
so raised their sights to satisfy us all.
Round the green shores of Shakespeare's happy isle
there's not another touching us for style:
captain and crew assure a pleasure-trip -
but as the last phrase presses past my lip,
for such occasion, such historic date
this image scarcely seems appropriate.

This ship is old dorky and, chance-supplied
by the odd jolt of the 'indifferent tide.
No ship provides our emblem. For our still
's all of this present age, progressive, still
pressing the furthest frontiers of science advance;
technology's our passion and romance.

What then now fit to represent this act-
of high faith squarely carried into fact?
Tonight this play house starts on its career
first to attempt the cultural shatoplane
of all the 'adventurous means our hopes devise
for Common Weal, our aim and enterprise:
this is our Sputnik, this our satellite.
fasten your belts and so on with us tonight.

5. III. 58

Too long with fumbled verse
 that never clinched its rhyme
 I fret my wits, or worse,
 like some poor thrush in line
 drag limb that will not stir
 and beat the baffled wing —
 this fails as metaphor —
 that Thrush at least can sing

completed 10. III. 58

I wait, Lord, for the words
 as I before have waited
 but never for so long;
 as if by gale belated
 the spring-^{releasing} ~~promising~~ birds
 had failed the spring of song.

Yet far beyond this range
 a drought may hold for years
 mid rocks — and desert places
 — and when no spring appears
 no men will think it strange;
 this is the life he faces.

The Guided Painter of Hell-Mowthe

Who should I summon, if I had the skill,
 out of the ^{shadowy cadres} ~~hushed cohorts~~ of the dead
 to reinforce my passion or my will
 against the threatening years that crouch ahead?
 Some ^{gum} ^{maybe} ^{spooky} ~~surely~~, from his tortured bed,
 who learned by tribulation to endure,
 -plucked heart of joy from body of his dread,
 and out of doubt distilled the strong and sure
 until death's menace ^{narrowed to} ~~only~~ seemed an open door.

For he might teach me by his naked thought
 the appointed posture and the discipline
 that, when man's worst imaginings wrought
 to mad fulfilment, I might walk therein
 like those who heed the trench of fire and win
^{unscorched} ~~scattered~~ to safety on the other side.
 Yet if he came, his coming ^{would be} ~~were~~ in vain;
 the books are written and the words abide.
 I fail by every clause: Lust, Anger, Malice, Pride.

No. I must throw my call to one less rare,
 less sanctified than he, within my reach,
 some footloose rascal, light and debonair,
 of easy gesture and of ready speech,
 some fellow strolling thro' a country fair
 with glib and story or salute for each
 who breaks his passage: and when terror falls
 will play his penny whistle thro' the breach
 and wander with his music past the ^{broken} ~~troubled~~ wells.

It is were no easier nature to assume:
 I lack ^{all} ~~the~~ talent for the ready jest;
 I cannot grasp the attention of the room
 without due notice; and I am oppressed,
 at certain moments, by a rest unrest
 that mocks all action, brooding cold, alone;
 I knock few doors, ^{must be a hidden} ~~am an infrequent~~ guest;
 my gifts for silence, even where I'm known:
 I win most wisdom from interrogated stone.

Who then should answer if I gave the call?
 No James name for any skill or art;

but first - my father, best beloved of all
 my buried friends, for his the better part
 of what for good endures within my heart.
 I'd have him come that I might ask the way
 his slow step took beyond me. From the start
 his still demeanour, ^{no more} ~~neither~~ grave than gay,
 had the ~~cool~~ precision of a bright autumnal day.

And watching how he matched his word and act,
 both aimed for justice, in a straight intent,
 turning the chancier dream to simple fact,
 I had some hint of how the blessed went
 about their quiet business diligent;
 but so much meekness and such clarity
 are not within my nature to present,
 who am of rougher cast, and must be free
 to stiffen the soft core with joints of ironed steel.

And after him, his father I shall call,
 that red-checked man whose fingers were alive
 to seeding grass, the root and floor of all
 wherein our states are founded firm ^{and survive} and true;

and that man's father who knew how to give
 the ancient cure for ailing man or beast:
 for, armed in their skills, I might survive,
 should floundering science fail to blight the least
 green valley crevices somewhere secret in the West.

If I could gather them about my hearth
 there'd be good natural talk not ranging far
 from season's round and love of death or birth,
 and I should find myself familiar
 with depths of meaning that this moment are
 mere wisps of memory glimpsed behind my thought
 swift flicking out of sight as shooting stars,
 that in a stronger mesh securely caught
 might in some durable philosophy be wrought.

For they were of the context I have lost,
 born of a certain people and a place;
 unanchored and in exile I am tossed
 by crossing gusts of nationhood and race,
 and if by subtler spells or sudden grace
 my summons overlook the centuries

I will might find some unremembered face
 to join ⁱⁿ that circle - and accept with ease
 the tense cotterdale of our genealogies.

For this man bears my name, an older John,
 a peasant craftsman in this midland town,
 when the great guild plays in their wagons drawn
 filled narrow alleys with a loud renown.
 He gilded wig and mask for saint and clown,
 shaped wooden swords, - and angels' buckram wings -
 - all's in the blotched parchment written down -
 He painted Hell mouth and the fates of kings,
 and the Last Judgment gawped in his fierce jurbishings.

It well maybe were known of a sort -
 some restless grandson of this man enlisted
 - and straggling out to Chester's sandy port,
 with promises of lands and plunder fisted,
 crossed the grey western waters chill and misted,
 to sleep on lush turf - and clear his ground
 and plant his fruit trees, not for long molested
 by the rough natives from the hills around,

till gradual comfort and a steadier peace he found.

When the first blossom drenched his apple trees
 he'd damped his wells and got himself a bride.
 Then with the years sons bred their families,
 and spread an honest name on every side,
 and generations lived and worked and died,
 till with the crowding seasons they'd become
 as native as the clare their lease denied,
 and knew these hills and ^{moors} orchards so their home
 for sketching memory jolted at the winning foam.

And so when searching for our ancestors
 we ask no further than that little hill
 where the square tower within its shaggy walls stores
 the crumbling spiral of an older skill;
 for there, in that high ground, my people fill
 the marked and unmarked graves of centuries:
 but tho I swear by them, I wonder still
 in the rust this determine all my certainties
 here in that quiet country of the apple trees?

If Hanker John just comes by my fire,
 he'll so inform us in his cunning head,
 that when his finished talking we'll require
 no further symbols mustered to our aid
 to realize the End for which we're made;
 for out of Jammi, pestilence and fear,
 he and his fellows laboured undismayed
 that Death and Hell and Judgment should appear
 surely to purge them dread this drama's painted gear.

A terror painted is a terror tenes;
 a person's leashed when scared as paced in time;
 a nameless fear's diminished when its' names.
 Tremendous in the narrow frame of time,
 a tyrant's gestures but a foolish name
 against the backdrop of eternity.
 Perspectives all. It's only when you climb
 at last to gaze again that you can see
 the detail-cluttered landscape's instant unity.

9/ I should meet the men who order Hell
 as all its layers with a painted board

and let them tell the world they had to tell
 till round the groundlings' hearts the terrors roared,
 then closed the curtain with a jerking cord
 till Corpus Christi hauled it up again,
 the attitude behind his craftsman's word
 should strengthen eye and wrist and sharpen pen,
 and stand me armored well among my fellowmen.

For if, on fact or on a hopeful guess,
 I base my claim to kinship with this man,
 his shadowy hand shall have more power to bless
 than any saint's in holy picture drawn:
 for I'll have found a Jemmi rock wherein
 I may prop up my laboured edifice,
 of personal myth, my little Per thein,
 the unsteady structure of my loyalties
 that action yet may prove no mere hypostesis.

11. IV. 58

Jacob and the Angel

The words I write are what I shall become:
 but my slow mind must spell that paradox,
 trace every step and link and find its name,
 and pace them so the meter never rocks
 or stumbles short of breath or out of step.

The words I write are what I shall become,
 tho' what I was and am picked up their shape
 and colour as when blossom tinted eggs
 for Easter Monday's child. You see, I slip
 into the Celtic curve and loop that dogs
 my straight intention to be understood;
 a trailing arabesque of images,
 sense-accurate but cluttering the quick blood,
 making the pulse in grave cambic phase.

The words I write are what I was before,
 and so must write as my flesh wears out
 skin ~~so~~ scruffs, hair whitens, body readier
 grows weary. I must-leap from thought to thought

not as before when I was what I wrote,
 but what I will be write before I am.

Poetry Ireland 1962

I wrestled with my father in ^{my} dream,
 and in that dream remembered who we were
 and why we should not struggle, he and I,
 and so desisted. Now the meanings clear
 I will not lay to struggle with my last-
 locked in an angry posture with a ghost-
 but ^{standing forward} ~~ready~~ ^{trust} ~~rather~~ ~~not~~ the shrunken thing.

11/12/1958

Now having lived four seasons round
 in this flat leafy midland plain
 where water drifts with scarce a sound
 or only with the sound of rain,
 where fat thatch bulges over brick
 and towers are square among the trees
 - as pictured headstones tilted thick
 insist the crowding centuries,

Ho! I may miss the crashing tide,
 the dark glen ^{sheltered} with wisps of cloud,
 the white house on the mountain side,
 the mountain tunnels pouring loud,
 no exile's anguish frets my mood;
 for sun and wind and seasons come,
 with ~~at~~ flowers and birdsong in the wood,
 and half my heart finds here a home.

This has been long me for years. Finally?
 Indeed 12. VI. 58

Inst Glass

We who know are careful here
 never to say 'Waterford' or
 'Cork' or 'Dublin', but simply
 'Inst', and even that with
 a broad inclusive smile,
 disclaiming any precision
 for our expertise.

Then when you may take (the hand
 makes its ambiguous gesture)
 as typical: the boat-shaped
 saled bowl with the turned o-
 - ver rim on the square foot set-
 crooked, the squat thick handled grip,
 and the heavy barrel -

- like decanter with the three
 ringed neck; the cutting deep in
 'blazes' and 'diamonds', full
 of light. Not 'the bluest of tinge'

which is a dealer's jangle
giving, who used, the illusion
of easy knowledge.

Made certainly in Ireland,
but by Englishmen, to evade
the House of Commons' duty
on the metal, and only
then until the 'economic
balance' tilted back, when they
followed the profit-home.

Typical nevertheless in
that the deep cutting, the coarseness,
the weighty grace were surely
quite appropriate to the
randy spinnie with his high boots
and his stances flaking into
the encroaching bog.

The Mainland

The island people just were mainland people
shouldered from crowded valley to the beach;
some even afloat before the outsiders came
with emblem and ultimatum of invaders
heavily armoured in rumour, invincible

Always they were the young, the loose of foot,
could grab the few tools handy, bundle up
the little earthen gods, the lamps, the flints,
the pots of seed laid by for the next spring.

Occasionally one might clear a space
for a grandfather who knew every stair
and all the runs for luck and love and labour,
but this was seldom. Children, goats and women
left little room enough for the rowers' knees.

And so departed while the drift of smoke
from the forested thatches hung a day's march off.
The only chance ^{then} was from the known landmarks

into the sunset out of the fierce noon.

When seven generations had been buried
in island earth and all was planted well
the hill tribes broken and the hills renamed
a long while since, the story should have ended,
the island now a nation, its people free;
but legends of the mainland still persist
in hearth-side talk and songs of belated day;
and now and then a man will test their truth
by sailing back across the ancient tracks
to find it not in all but what he sought.

Those Who Remained

Some would not leave because their lives had gone
into the furrows and the drystone walls.
Others because of their elders, father, mother,
or wife in childbed turning: loyalties
not to be thrust aside. And some who dreamt
deliverance from the east might set their feet
upon a fairer path than the old road,
and saw their talents burgeon in that sun.
Some ready to die behind shutters, in the flames,
remembering storied heroes of their breed:
the man who caught to his breast the gathered spears;
the man strapped to the boulder holding the pass.

Others, not many, waited murmuring
"Those who come riding today will go their ways,
for they are but banished themselves from another place,
followed tomorrow by others to beat them down;
each using our service only a little while;
if longer, our children's children will outlive them,
and the name of our people survive the eddies of dust."

51/58

98

26/30.VI.58

I have outlived my time. The old men said
not sadly but—as one who states a fact—
and all my friends, or nearly all, are dead.
Most of my books are gone or are safely packed
for quick disposal when I go myself.
I still keep two or three for friendship's sake.
He pointed to the almost-empty shelf
an hour a day's the most my eyes can take.

You'll have a glass of sherry? Sweet or dry?
He brought a bottle and two glasses back
and set them on the table carefully.
That nearest to his hand was deeply chipped.
He filled mine to the brim, his to the crack.
A better sherry I have never sipped.

2.VII
revised
IX

99

An Irishman in Coventry

Here for an hour in this strange phoenix city
in knot of fellow-country men apart
~~I met a cluster of my countrymen~~
~~old needles thrust~~ ^{stacked aside for time to answer}
~~and feelings I had swept up and forgotten~~
~~—touched off long fuses in my travelled heart~~
~~rose like the tide and flooded me again.~~

for not in bannered nations, but fragmented
^{storing} that peoples of this ~~city~~ ^{sift} ¹⁵ multitude ^{in place} are found
only the darker coloured ~~lace~~ ^{than} ^{of} ^{lettices}
and ~~this leads out to tint the neighbourhood~~ ^{alleys round}
^{small brown faces that the street-gangs round}

These may be ^{neighbour gables} ^{across} ^{corners} ^{together} ^{neighbour pockets}
^{stocky} ^{trundled} of ^{men} who ^{wait} ^{here} ^{from} ^{despair},
whose ^{burly} ^{surnames} ^{tell} ^{of} ^{rocky} ^{valleys},
the ^{lath} ^{wheels} ^{standing} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{air}.

For fingers ^{hurred} ^{hungry} ^{skills} ^{from} ^{scattered} ^{places}
and ^{long} ^{good} ^{for} ^{to} ^{this} ^{best} ^{market's} ^{of} ^{the} ^{gauge} ^{and} ^{tool}.
its ^{solid} ^{best} ^{vision} ^{rested} ⁱⁿ ^{fair} ^{wares},
the ^{better} ^{motor} ^{car}, the comprehensive school.

Starlings, thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows,
 How the world around me narrows
 with its swallows robin's fences
 to a plot of feet and inches
 that was wide enough before
 for the heron on the shore,
 and the gannet tilting by
 looping across of the sky,
 traversed by the gluttoned rooks
 heavy from the plundered stocks
 and the high hawk over all,
 hills and rocks and waterfalls.

Never now to my small street-
 shall descend the heather blast-
 and eternity must pass
 ere a concrete stir the grass.

Preliminaries for a set of verses intended
 to celebrate the 21st Anniversary of Labour
 control of the Coventry City Council

A. I set myself this task
 since words are all my trade
 for if a man should ask
 that something might be made
 out of this circumstance,
 by way of speech or verse
 I'd think myself a dunce
 or maybe something worse.
 if given a little time
 I could not flog my wit
 to balance mine with mine
 and give a shape to it.

B. There are at least two ways
 a man might tackle this:
 find tilting line or phrase
 the groundlings could not miss
 and throw the long line out
 as ballad maker would

as simple as a stout
to hook & hold the crowd

The second might be wrought
by careful resonance
to give the common thought
degree and elegance

The stanzas should be spun
of bright and coloured threads —
and if the colours run,
'Twould be above their heads.

To the Memory of John B. Shelton
The Coventry Antiquarian

A friendly ripe old man, full-charged with tales
of ancient trades and offices of state;
Boarder of buttons; rich in spoons and nails;
The chronicler of ruined wall and gate:
There is no man among us, now he's gone,
will know, as he did, what a story's here.
Wholl date the broken pot, the pointed bone
when holes are dug with no John Shelton near?

Yet though he hugged this city to his heart
and scattered knowledge with a lavish hand,
when trudging, mercy-bent, down Bayley Lane,
his ploughman's face bespoke another art,
of well-pleached hedge and red straight-jarred land,
and barns stout-timbered, stuffed with clean-threshed grain.

Walking in failing sun, the ledges bare
 save for the scattered hips, the blackened laws,
 the troubled waters running everywhere,
 our winter journey seemed without a cause:
 no hearth to heed for, where Taped-Turf would lead
 the ready kettle voice; no friendly face;
 no dog to greet by name at Loosen end
 whose tongue would tell our coming round the place,
 no twist of road to mask or to reveal
 the stoned wallstead, the familiar view;
 no print at gate of any roof or heel
 to bid us leave the road and follow through.
 Yet it was good to move with limbs alive,
 with senses stretched for nurture, even though
 the sodden year's end led no more to give
 than song of great hit from a hidden bough.

I face and wide road like cautious dog
 that seeks a place to lie on, for my thought-
 will not be stated boldly - I must beat
 the bounds before I claim my Tenancy.
 If I could come directly at my thought-
 like sparrowhawk, like gemet striking down
 I'd master the swift meanings of my sense
 that flicks the pages pointing here and there
 at the flat symbols asking for my nod;
 but edging like a peasant at the fair
 towards a bargain I must - advance, withdraw,
 lifting woe into up into a rite.
 So must the words I think with twist and write
 like some rank weed in grass that shales have struck
 strong root in ground and shot up into flower.

Some Intimations of Mortality

So face by face mortality obscures
 the running crowd about my little fire.
 When it was old men vanished I still young
 accepted like the leaf's fall their default.
 Sometimes occasion gave the end a form
 that firm in symbol flung a backward light
 into the dark surrounding. So with him,
 my father's father, kindly, palpable,
 who, when my back turned, died in the full sun,
 an end in ripeness like the Topship swathe.
 So too that sad man smiling, hating war
 and dying of it, plucked right out of time,
 a name and shape for ignominious violence.
 My father's grief at this was terrible
 to tiptoe round, avoiding the full gaze.
 This was my first grief also, shut from him,
 incapable of comfort, each alone
 in lifelong isolation of the heart.

Then with the years as none by none became

mere labels flapping on the brittle stalks,
 gesture by gesture, posture, tone of voice
 of kin- and kinsmen utterly withdrawn,
 left me with easier skills for handling death.
 I shed no tears but marvelled at the master
 necessity laid set upon each face,
 keeping my pity for the fooling world,
 the famines thousands, the catastrophe...
 these were those eager years when all's involved
 in the most ^{playhouse} drama of the expanding mind.

Later, my prize achieved, my father dies,
 my father also. Death rose up in him
 like a slow poison, clouding his clear wit,
 mastering, pulse by pulse, his valiant heart,
 who for two stricken years had held his ground,
 setting the mind against the chilling flesh.
 If I may choose my death I will not accept
 that long unequal war.

My mother's end,
 two crazy years with trivial drama crammed,
 streaked with harsh malice, craft- and bitterness,

110 bound among mining shapes that leered and mouthed
each in her lonely fantasy consumed
like shrinking cinders of the living flame.
This by its lack of struggle, lack of thought
beyond the limits of the nagging self,
has wrung less grief from me. I watched her box
go down into wet clay without a tear.
The spray we offered lost among large wreaths
carried the note I wrote with steady fist,
"Remembering the best". Yet this was she
who holds an equal lease upon my care
by right of blood and nurture, by the pride
my growing gave her, by the turns of speech
and tricks of feeling I have drawn from her;
But no sign tumbled when her life collapsed,
hers was no keystone for my arching hopes.

Yet if I tot the date of affection:

The first large letters spoken, the dark weeks
of gentle nursing when we were alone
with my long fever... the blossoms from the sky
upon my blanket, sheltered from a shower.

111 this spells no monstrous novel's metemorphosis
nor crooked tyrant of a fairy tale...
For years we shared a saga, she and I;
the after breakfast hush when all were gone
and that day's ^{tasks} duties not yet imperative,
she sat ^{darning} at sewing, I sat at her feet,
and we wove out a story of myself,
my alien-ego and my avenger,
who sought for Captain Scott across the snow
and beat the Redskins and came back from sea
with presents for his mother and went off
to preach and heal the bodies and to save the souls
of the poor tortured Congo people, till
another Balkan battle summoned him
to seize the Turk's red crescent and release
the pale Circassian girls. I named the theme;
my mother told the tale, inquiring if
I wanted this or that twist to the story,
and we would argue till the slope came up.

Yet I've no fancy we shall finish it
for in the future snug in Paradise,

as sometimes I still feel my father's waiting
for my report on how the battle goes
for human justice, for the welfare state.

I pity that strange woman, mocked by fate
that tied her to that clear, unkindled man
whose passion was impersonal, for justice,
for high abstractions, education, art,
cooperation - and democracy,
and other words she had no meanings for,
being concerned with colours, textures, tastes,
and animal vitality that leaps
from love to hate and back through hate to love.

He was all thought - and she was all sensation,
both crippled by the context, by the cold
Sahara of morality they'd faced
from infancy, dry bones of abstinence,
thorn-bush labours, infrequent blackish looks,
close-tened with strict denials too long
whose hoarse hosannas and irruptive prayer
and stiff domestic virtue swept all skill

for stars' reflection, for the feel of things,
the seeded grass-tuft on the bird's bright eye . . .

In some humped balance I hold much of these.
In structure, feature, ways of acting, thinking,
now this now that strand shows: a certain harshness,
rigidity of attitude, opinion,
threw light on how my father kept his stance;
the easy lump in the throat, the sentiment,
my mother's this, hers too, a joy in words
far fetched in time but apt again in time;
a firm deductive purpose never hers;
her mind, her senses, yet these are not fused;
and she who knows me best - knows best - that gap
and lives in the tense field between those holes;
for a man's more and less than the full sum
of his inheritance. This generation
confers upon him something as by grace
of its new nature, never known before,
never again to be known. Half my mind
sees Accident, and half ^{finds} Purpose here.

S3/58

28.XII.58

114

The Midland Landscape.

The air in Ireland's of another kind

than this spent, overlaboured atmosphere.

You leave the ^{fleck shields} city for the country near,

along the tarmac roads, where, loud and blind,

the ^{blunt} ~~squad~~ cars hurtle to no end - ^{assigned} ~~designed~~

save ^{rather} ~~seeming~~ to be ^{anywhere} ~~there~~ than here,

and over fields and hedges like a smear

they leave a ^{greasy} ~~muddy~~ stir of breath behind.

And engines, lorries, barges, chimneys throw
long trailing scowes to ^{drift & play out} ~~down~~, drift - and rise,

not far above, into the sagging skies;

^{in other landscapes like this} ~~the life in the landscape~~, inland waters flow,
^{that here drift}

now ~~transmitted~~, unreflecting, thick and slow,

when no bright bubbles break nor ^{quick heat} ~~salmon rise~~.

S4/58

29.XII.58

115

(My country's air is)

The air in Ireland's cleansing to the heart;

fresh from the ocean, washed with spray and rain,

it leaps from leaves and drives along the lane,

and in ~~gay~~ ^{gusto with} ~~police~~ ^{skins} sometimes ~~totes~~ - apart

to pluck at turfsmoke, bearing in its stride

that friendly tang across a lonely glen;

whisks the lake's ripples to a little tide,
or ~~squanders~~ ^{half a feathered mountainside} ~~half a feathered mountainside~~

or ~~dances~~ ^{heads} ~~the headlong~~ ^{swans down} ~~back again~~ ^{beyond the walls of men.}

^{follows} ^{shaped by} ^{lives} ^{lights}
It takes the lively ^{shapes} of rock and hill,
it ^{combos} ^{cards} ^{the} ^{light} ^{flapping} ^{crow},
shakes the bog - cotton ^{light} ^{flapping} ^{crow},
rips off the cloud to shew the high blue sky,
or, drunk on Rowan, rounds the heath until,
emerged at sudden thunder stamping by,
it ^{cuffs} ^{gives} the rocking thistle, blow for blow.

29. X. 80

Dear Anne,

I have, as you are aware, received a letter (16. X. 80) giving me a statement of commitments for royalties for my publications with the Blackstaff Press.

I have always considered such figures as book-keeping entries with the publishers of earlier volumes.

But if they have any concrete significance beyond this, I should be happy if any accrued credits to me should be retained by the Blackstaff Press to be used at the Directors' discretion to assist the publication of any work or works which they believe to be of literary value but which might not attract any other support. I said as much to Mr Greevy years ago, and so far I ~~do~~ consider that it is still there.

On another matter, a letter (15. VIII. 80) from Grenada Publishing Limited, who took over from Macgibbon and Kee, the original publishers, ~~that my~~ ^{of} Collected Poems 1932-67, which confirms that that book will not be reprinted by them, and "that all the rights in it may revert to (me) forthwith".

This will free us for any future reprinting of material derived from this source without any obligation to any beyond myself.

Best wishes

John Hewitt

1955 Jan 3. III.	29 poems	- 754
1956	18	292
1957	no verse written	—
1958	21	686

House a the hill ✓

X Mrs Stone ✓

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Malabar

1955 Jan 3.11. 29 poems - 754

1956 18 292

1957 no verse written —

1958 21 686

