

~~XXVII~~

1959-

ADAMS
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Poems by John Hewitt.

1. I. 59

A Word of Thanks to Jane Corinne
Dowson for the Gift of a Book

I once had many picture-books:
across the years I see them plain;
how full of terror Packham looks,
how full of peace is Walter Crane.

The Looking Glass of Tenniel
shows Alice and her party clear;
yet none of them I like so well
as the King owl of Edward Lear.

My picture-books all slipped away
to other little girls and boys;
and maybe, somewhere to this day
there still is one some child enjoys.

But books where only words are seen,
with rows and rows a print or chart,
took up the years let lie between

Kat Leppay and this battered heart.

Then with her were Corinna Jane
brought back an age I had forgot -
The Great Penjandrum strides again
across the tape of Caldecott.

Edwin Muir

That day the rocket-overshot the moon
a poet died. Few earn such obsequies.
Six years ago another left too soon
what time that sea ship tipped in steep seas.
That man fought sickness and his own despair
like his and my Cuchulain, slipped to rock:
the Lester ravens keeping the dark air
cried out at each foamed breath's sharp weapon-shock.

But this my th- armoured, dream-frequenting bard,
who made grave music of the shapes he saw,
more ripe in song, moves more securely starred,
beyond what charts intelligence may draw
of times' vast spiral round the bounds of space,
into the stricken hearts' safe dwelling-place.

R.N.D. Wilson the Irish poet died on 25th January
1953 just at the time The Princess Royal sank
^{Victoria} in the North Channel.

4 2 East German Repugni
Trans. wts German 19.II.59

For the People of Dresden

city
For me your Dresden ^{set} once was far in time,
a Barock castle built of porcelain
where graceful figures moved in mosque and mine,
its tall walls rich with works whose like again
no brush should ever equal. Time ground on;
disaster thundered through my rising fears:
those walls were broken - and the dancers gone,
in the dark Europe of my middle years.

But now the darkness lifts. And I have stood
^{weeks} here with you thousands in the Altmarkt square
and sworn my silent oet of brotherhood,
and joined my lonely prayer to your rest-prayer,
that by the common will of common men
no war shall ever darken day again.

Dresden

He looks
+ 63

22.IV.59

The Knife.

We always have been unlucky with tramps.
The old man with the sack on his back
trudging to Ballyvoy ^{long} - a dry stick:
his phrases stale, his songs irrelevant.
Even old Mearns, who lay in his small hut
dead for a week before anyone noticed,
was only, for me, a drunk man, roaring home,
holding on to the bushes his person spent
only stamping date on Fridays;
His unremarked and unremarkable death,
like a frog in a tussock or a bird in the heather,
markedly consistent ^{with} ^{neatly} the
symbolical ^{bad} death of his ~~com~~ life.

The tramps in England have proved no better:
They live without letters; they are full of complaints;
their talk is dull; their travelling has gathered
no sparkle of phrase, no lift or colour of tone.
A blind man can be more vivid in his talk,
like takers or soldiers on leave, they stand their ways,
making distance covered the measure of success.
The man we lifted ^{bad} and sent on his way again.

19.X.59

when we ran into water and stalled the car,
was monosyllabic and surly.
When he was gone, we found he had left behind
a little cloth bag containing his capital,
a black lady's glove, a prayer book, some thread,
an empty tin and a knife.

There's ^{in this} may be a story ~~here~~ work lessening out
but it holds little promise. I carry the knife now,
the scouts' kind, far larger than I need,
a sort of renegade, keeping its blade bright;
~~but~~ only & rarely ~~occasions~~ do I ever think
of a trap somewhere, moping and mourning
over his beggar'd luck, ^{without his knife} ~~homeless, knifeless~~.

Four years ago or setting on for five
I made a poem, cramming into it -
all those old myths whose meaning seemed alive
at this dark-crossroads of the infinite;
from photogenic Greece, from Palestine's
hot, faded chromolithograph, but most -
from the grey verses and the twisted lines
that give each bush rock and horn its ghost.

I tried for other images; I sought,
certain these lacked the healing relevance,
for coloured forms to garnish my thought -
out to its limits, that the dark advance
of cynic age and time's decay be stayed,
and all seemed where I was most afraid

19.X.51

But no forms mustered in full armour, each
could slew no more than
the same discrepancy in thought or speech
so image stood full fleshed in its own word,
wheels turned and stopped, bolts flickered as went out
and in the darkness only hawk and dove,
the hawk and dove in ceaseless roundabout-
traces all I knew of terror or of love.

And those two figures - closest to my mind
from exile, into exile, each was sent
betrayed by whom both in his own kind
could not foresee what must be consequent.
Honourlessness too nobly brought one
and angry passion brought the other down.

19.X.59 9

After the General Election - Never had it so good -

The court is over. Let us all go home
to jet suburban comfort, safely freed
from any harsh demand. Let night have come
to meet the hungers of the great world's needs.

Let us go home, let old ideals rust.
Let old folk suffer, coloured men lose heart.
Was Justice offered? Let us be unjust.
Were equal shares? We claim the larger part.

Sir Lancelot shoulder with the money men,
the lords and tipsters, we have made our stand...
From Anglesea - across to Ely Fen
^{grey} the small dust settles ^{on a rolling} over all the land

20.X.59

Election Thoughts

Not once nor twice in our rough island story
the working man has voted Tory.

Breaker there's a man with soul so dead
who never to himself hath said

"It may be Blue. It shall be Red."

A Fisherman negotiates a tie Bristol election.

Sing Cypress Hola, add each name
to the long battle Lourours of your breed
God save your Queen, she'll need it, from the shame.
I love my country, but you love your Queen.

20.X.59

"

Britons never shall be slaves
but for a while will manage
with fine purchase instalments
and a building society mortgage.

6.XII.59

Poems in 1960

Let these pages, line by line,
 take the words which come to you,
 words that sing and dance and shine,
 — only words like that are true.

Verse must have the strength to stay
 from the mind and heart that wrote it;
 to become, some distant day,
 his or hers who love and quote it.

28.IV.1960

This, with Time.

—

Here with approaching age
a stranger in the land
forgive me if I rage
or clench an empty hand
because the tasks I planned,
the hopes I set held my aim,
appear and disappear,
the same and not the same,
down each constructing year.

My hair grows ^{grey} white; the lines
over my features scrawl;
yet these predicted signs
most signify appall;
this certainty is all.
And in the looking glass
appear and disappear
my lonely father's face,
the face I used to wear.

No road less dipped or turned
exactly as it should,
or as I had been warned.
Confronting ill and good,
had I but understood,
I might have been content
to shew and to learn
conjointly each event
my own and not my own.

—

Nicolai

19. V. 60.

Our toothless chauffeur with the rubber face
Let several words be loved to fling about:
He'd lift - a warning finger at us shout
Moment! or Protocol! with a grimace;
and by that gesture firmly fix in place
The ideology we stood without,
Sophisticates of democratic doubt,
The well-fed lackeys of a dying race.

He summoned clerks; he called them managers;
admonished waiters, telephoned his son
to come to meet these men from outer space.
He tucked us in like a child with mother's care,
and when his final dull offices were done,
gave each a tangerine
and each an orange with a gentle grace.

Revised version worked over during May 1960

Turf Carrier on Aranmore.

Now ^{poem} / 196
BBC Schools
April '64

The small boy drove the shaggy ass
out of the yard along the track
rutted between two drystone walls,
his errand guessed from half-built stack.
Barefoot - he tripped behind its tail
too shy to lag and stride with us;
an older lad would match our pace
and snatched some topic to discuss.

He swung his switch, a scally rod,
his bleached head glinting in the sun
but only flicked his repp'd slacks
as lathered nonchalantly on.

We spoke no word. The boy, the ass,
the rutted path across the bare
unprofitable mountain-side
were native to this Drim air.

But as we followed, rag and patch,
the sharp knot braced each splintered creel,

Revised and slightly extended version May 1960.

Rev'd

Oscar's Grave, Lubbersh, Co Antrim

The bald rubbed flanks, the hooves unshod,
growing away and down-at-heel,
so woke our pity, I pronounced
a bitter sentence to condemn
the land that bred such boys and beasts
to starve the beauty out of them.

The small boy heard - not quite my words,
but radio say - my angry tone;
a bright blush warmed his sunburnt neck;
he stuck a sharp and jolting bone,
and turned the ass into prud and cry
through the first gap that caught his glance,
although the ribs roamed on ahead
to meet the bog's black-trenched expense,
misjudging my intent - and sure
that we were prud and critical.
Your father's beast is very dear,
if you are poor, if you are small.

We stood and pondered on the stones
whose plan displays its pattern still;
the small blunt arc, and, set by set,
the pockets stripped of slabs and bones.

The lepers less it, Oscar lies
beneath this landmark on the hill,
asleep till Fionn and Oscar use
to summon his old bardic skill
a hosting fleet lost enterprise.

This, stricter scholarship denies,
declares this negligible form
mullenia older than his time -
if such lived ever, out of rime -
was sloped beneath Sardinian skies,
was coaxed round the capes of Spain
brought here through black Biscay a storm
to keep men's hearts in mind of home

and its tall Sun God, wise and warm,
across the walls of toppling foam,
against this turbolt and the rain.

I cannot tell; one) ask as proof:
let either story stand for True
as least or none shall rule. Enough
that, our long meditation done,
—as we passed down the broken lane
by the dark hillsides holly trees,
a great white horse w^t lifted knees
came stamping hasten, as we knew
his rider was no tinker's son:

A Country Walk [proposed title] Second Draft.

Car parked on gravel near the Castle-gate,
where, though still early, visitors in spite,
unloaded picnic basket, stool and rug,
{ let loose the children and ^{beds}_{dogs}, the dog, locked-in
or clasped the long lead on the ^{long}_{leaping} dog,
bursting
we left the busy converserai;
equipped w^t sticks in the old walker's way,
crossed the hot concrete where the muddy ford
once lapped the oxles, now with ledge and board
boxed back and groined for safety; to the right
the narrow path swung up a gentle height,
roofed by dark branches, floors w^t leafy mould,
from whence, a meadow's breadth away, the old
bare walls of Persilworth against the sky
took the full sunlight with unblotted eye.

We four, who stepped a file, by circumstance
linked for our project, scarce would ^{earn} ~~boldly~~ glance
from any passer-by, yet to explain
our brief conjunction in the Warwick lane

on this bright sabbath at the close of May,
would sees a (Jesus), turn my pen away
from its strict purpose which is but to note
our day ^{the mood} in complete upon or / might quote,
locking a snapshot sharper evidence
^{point of fact or}
to make some ~~sample point~~ of quickened sense.

So let these flat words ^{state briefly states} ~~serve to spell~~ the list :
my wife, myself, our friend the Botanist,
our other friend the Sculptor. Taken so,
the coarse-winded ends let half the meaning go.

The sculptor, a new friend, is an Englishman,
makes subtle verses which both stink and seem,
plays the recorder, loves an argument,
planned out this walk, and to confirm intent,
traced it on map, and yesterday, on ground,
that hedge or brook or fence he nowhere found
impassable. In that precaution find
some indication of his ordered mind.

The botanist also, bookman, in himself
& general counter over root and shelf,
stuffed with quaint lore, a lodestone for the odd
in epithet, original, or upos.

[They're this in common
BOTH Neill wears blazer ; neither fears his gait
to the fresh rush of the Tombolo State,
wears neither blazer nor the artist's beard
nor shuns the epoch's tint of that disease,
nor is out less in case Kodak bandolier.
He last for plaster-bright commodities
to barricade as garrison the house
against the threatening presence rumors.]

The sculptor is English, but we other three
are birth of the Planters' Party,
[not black-browed Gaels bawling Gaels, addicted much
to the soft answer and the easy touch
the whil of shining words, the ^{sidelong} festive glance
that nests the peasants' eye to the man claret,
the ready blow, the blessing on the lip,
the injured cards, the synalled fellowship,
the Lethbrot's Larson, the melacious jest

which cuts the deepest what is loved the best;
 though generations of hot earth and air
 have predicted that we ^{100 must} also share
 the best and worst, ^{of these to till} for till
 60 like ^{it or not} a dotter, wife of the Trusty.

In Midland precinct or suburban bower
 each moment shows ^{our} wide divergence spoken
 from here good-hearted, cocksure, talkative,
 more tolerant than any race alive,
 brave, costly, ^{but} inhospitable folk,
 who want for wit as soon as ^{any} joke,
 God's Englishmen. Yet such the trick of fate,
 it's them exceptions that have made them great.
 Blake, Darwin, Wesley, Newton, Shakespeare, Wren—
 there's no John Bull among these Englishmen.

My wife and I meet our fourth summer here,
 where my hide prospers in an atmosphere
 friendly ^{independent} to my democratic mind
 more kindly to my ^{independent} democratic mind
 74 has that bronze center we leave (if behind),

and through the months we've grown like the scene
 where the clay's redder and the grass is green.

The botanist where, as he has come
 an annual migrant to our exile-home
 with news and gossip of sea-severed friends
 80 as low time blunts him to his baffling ends.

With ^{am}
 On broader stage than this, one might engage
 minor Canterbury Pilgrimage,
 with some old story tied to tongue of each
 in character, with fitting turn of speech,
 let taken in relation should supply
 ideogram of our society.

But since Dan Clancy's old account book closed,
 its peering Wordsworth long ^{has} since interposed,
 and folk have walked, sans benefit of straw,
 to nature's sake alone, or to combine
 gone for lungs with images for sense
 92 that urban life denies the intelligence

The journey nears its end which was begun
When the giant poet sought the rising sun,
but hurts and memories linger in the blood
and, stubborn, we claim it still is good
To feel the turf beneath our plodding feet,
an exercise that's all but obsolete

In this new age of hurried ends and means

100 The joggled workings of the long machine
best symbolise, we dream, the state of grace
abutte the atomic streaking into space.

Pause and draw breath : These couplets have outrun
the friendly task I set my heart upon.

It is their nature obtrusive to prove,
^{slotted}

Grounding forever in the retine groove,

Betrayed from my intention, ^{tempted by} ~~have let them fly~~
the old tradition, ~~I have let them fly~~

after the shifting targets of my wit
which skew no scar when they are squarely hit.

7 112 But dance and beckon still and mock my shot
and still shall hosting when I am forgot.

Instead of panting in the headlong race,
I should have curbed my verses to the pace
of Crabbe's or Bloomfield's which best match the strides
of one who ^{wanders} ^{ambles} through the countryside,
with time to dally, time to see and hear
and taste and smell and touch the varied year.

At the lane's end a weathered wooden gate

120 gives us the freedom of the country straight.

We stood on sunny turf and gazed in peace
^{undulating} on dipping, rising acres with great trees

seemly moated in their pools of shade,

on a broad landscape centuries have made

and left that necking nelly evident
intended pasture, in controlled extent

of wood and tillage, to the horizon's bound,

The gauge-blue last large swathing veils around

each trim needling tier of field and tree;

a comfortable landscape ^{certainly} ~~this to me~~,

Known from the paintings, sober, nurtured, rich;

132 yet never more at heart.

The whin-bright ditch
across the sloping moss of the long hill;
the twisty trout-trouer stream, from sill to silt
of gleaming rock, that hurtles chattering;
the curlews swooping overhead in spray
out of the mountain mist; in grey of dawn,
the whinchat breaking from the cannae sun;
as that sharp-heathered cone from whence, they say,
are seen the sun-dance on an Easter day:
this is my landscape. Though our fields are small,
capped in steep glens, this roughness edges all
with timelessness and sadness, steaming men,
against all odds, a small precacious clan.
Here, in the English heart of Warwickshire,
though you'll find all a sage man should desire
to keep him lifelang in good countenance,
no steep-bush will threat, no sun will dash]

151 In the great field we entered, gazing sheep
all slow, the Lambs well-grown, alert to keep
their distance, drifted off without stampede,

the legs, the nose bespeak their Leicester breed,
~~walk, if you sought,~~
while here and there a tit, a loper-for trace
but, when I look more closely,
of mountain blood in blackness of the face
recalled the running dogs, the shouting men,
where my scent-knowledge of that breed began.

When distance was established, silently
the grazing was resumed, but ear and eye
kept watching vigil slowly as we moved,
160 our purpose ^{purpose} queried, presence unapproved.

That field was large enough for sheep and men
to coexist without ~~alarm~~ alarm,
so, with both factions safely holding fire,
~~shouldered under sticks wood from bearded~~
we left by dodging under tufted willow,
and struck a rougher ground with bramble, briar
and tangled growth, in depths of which a pool
under the willows ^{steamed} seemed remote and cool —
for water's scarce here in the midland plain;
169 a) ~~so we overrate~~
b) ~~nests are covered by the merest drain.~~

Across the fence which guards its open edge,
 the botanist reached to pluck and skew us sedge,
 sheer pain for me who'd lumped all sedges with
 the thin rush that peasants used to pitch
 with ^{strong thumb} steady nail, for ~~Campwick~~. The sculptor made
 that fest's quotation, then we ^{thee displayed} stood and paid
 the due attention which the event required,
 three angled stem exclaims and
 three angled stem admired.

Then, passing farther, skewed us Paonelone,
 naming the other names by which it's known,

180 The smell when crushed, the flavours in the taste:
 we mused on all the plants ^{which seed and} that ran to waste
 that once sat steaming on the ^{witches} peasants' stove;
 simples for sprains and remedies for love.

He'd lag behind; then, when we'd make a stand,
 he'd hurry after, bearing in his hand
 a twig, a single leaf, a bud of fruit,
 or some long trailing thing with nasty root.

189 From some such pause and sweeping scrutiny
 he brought ^{us its long-leaved} that common bell,
 large-, Dog's Mercury,

not found in Ireland, ^{like} and the Briary,
 which also caught his comprehensive eye.

Our track turned right. An ancient red-brick house
 peered at us from the left - through leafy boughs.
 This is the county's image and motif;
 the old warm brick, the new sun-dappled leaf.
 At Cotswold stone I marvel and admire,
 but brick and leaf for me is Warwickshire -
 Your black-and-white is seldom more than quaint -
 I'll skew you lenses so contrived, with paint -

200 The yeoman's honesty is in the clay,
 Joseph ^{Arch is} and William Cobbett never far away.

But slipping tiles and shattered panes of glass
 as every crevice crammed with ragged grass
 bespoke defect. We murmured our regret,
 as fancied use and purpose far even yet.

Along a meadow bordered by a brook,
 207 where two kids squatting, watching float or look,

turned round back the time, we made our way,
stopped to remark a fallen tree which lay
like sprawling monster on a patch worn bare
by fly-urked cattle drawn for comfort there.

Here each of us sought out and slaved the rest
that part or play of parts which sparked the best
analogy to sculptured stone or wood,
the written torso, and the roughly hewed
limbs of a giant, the mask, the knuckled fist.
Leviathan or Milton's Agonist,
bird's eye, the leap of fish, the snout of boar,
the styles of Moore and Lipschitz not the least.

220 For man the savage knew by hand and heart
a spirit animated every part
of deer or living nature: rock and tree
had valid place in his cosmology
and he would pay w^t sacrifice or prayer
due worship to whatever brooded there.

226 Now we, set free from superstitions, awe,

conversant with the latest natural law,
feel promptings more bosoms urgently
to fix some meaning on the shapes we see.
Thought spins full circle. Content spoke in form.
We grope for content through th' atomic storm
which our reality has now become
^{now} whole all stand waiting for the threatened bomb.

~~and in this Hi-Spy game, scarce serious,
the deets necessarily revives in us,
each with his separate talent, to discern,
as the dim ~~shouts of~~ ~~of~~ ~~inborn~~ fancies turn,
which matches which, in action and in mind:
The skill to name gives half the power to find~~

The sculptor, by his craft, consistently
names shape and shape from his vocabulary,
sweks from stone and wood, through eager years:
but whose sculptures known
we others, only studied through eyes and ears,
224 sketched names, yet each of these was true,

our hearts bared by the parallels we drew.]

We left the tumbled bee, and paced the stream,
now wider, shallower here, with frequent gleam
of light on ripple ^{ripples} splashing round and over stones;
climber barricaded stile, and stood at once
250 in a little field with Hawthorn blossom wall'd;
the sheep, a fleecy flock, moved off and scatter'd,
and over all, the sky, ~~a roof of blue~~^{bare}, as bright,
was strangely deepened by the billowy white
of full-rigged clouds that breasted from the east;
each with its whiteness, blossom, cloud and crest
offered too much to overloaded sight;
I thought of sunshots, overflute and blight.

A coward shamed by opulence I ran
to the diminished form the over alone,
and worse have all things safely trimmed to scale,
for part of me believes that man must fail,
and so life's burning ^{teeming} miles ^{not and} drobble waste,
263 while we starve proudly in the best of taste.]

With the drowsy sweeties of that blossom burrowed,
we had the short halft, hung about and dimmed
with elder bushes hardly yet in flower.

Then as with the As at the flinging open of a door,
we stepped out into sun and labour'd earth;

The distant fence that beatles its hot grit

270 Reed back the lazy woodlands from the scene,
and through the powdery cloots to tops of green
spiked out ^{but} ~~name~~ what crop was planted there,
with such precision, ^{concentrated} ~~and considered~~ care;
for each ridge of the endless parallels
deep drilled, clean weeded, offered nothing else
than sheer delight in demonstrated skill.

So far ~~we~~ we'd come through fields ^{which} that no man till,

that this vast measured desert seems designed
proudly to keep good husbandry in mind.

Led by a furrow, striding in a file,
dust on our shoes, it seemed a quarter mile
before we found grass: no swat to spare
283 for further comrade or diverting lane.

Economy was all. My cynic wit
imagines what potatoes might be fit
for this accoutrement, soapy, tasteless, clean;
no Chestnuts, with gildowers gold between,
no Anna Victoria flowers on the plate.
With crooked smile I ^{climbed} ~~scrambled~~ the rigid gate.

290 Relief came when we took a path winding
by bank of grass, surmounted with a line
of alders, beeches, oaks, where in the shade
the shaggy bluebells innocently made
the coolness visible. A toppled tree
clutched earth in taloned roots for us to see
what little grip it had upon the ground
when slow erosion of the sleeping pond
had worked against its weight. Let fields or marshes
upon our left, we com still left and passed,
but here and there, a daring bluebell thrown
as seed from safety, sadly drooped alone.

291 The sculptor knight no late. On lagging studs

which hauled a low dragnet through the countryside
had broken our progress, which, by this time, should
have set us waiting near an open wood,
cut through by quiet-by-ways, where his wife,
with basket and walk-afoot would arrive
in punctual car, until her cargo, spread
~~the~~ ^{the} tablecloth, ^{mugs}, ^{dishes}, ^{bread}, ~~etc~~, ~~etc~~, ~~etc~~

310 a grassy wedge of sun beside the road.
He'd planned us here first, Randy bemoaned.
But we were half a mile at least away,
the sun at noon's height, fulcrum of the day.

So, inch by step, we marched who strolled before,
up narrow lane, passed man at cottage door,
flung quick salutes, and took another gate
and blundered into pens incongruous,
empty of beasts, tattered tenements of tin.
Cackle of fowl unseen, that friendly din,
awaking no alarm alerted us, as ~~unseen~~ ^{waking} ~~of him~~

321 we trekked through the suburbs of the farm.

A worn track sloping turned us away
down twenty yards. Then, left, its rutted clay
surfaced by rubble of stones, and some of these
rose^{time-consuming} ~~sometimes~~ curiosities,
for they were black as coal, seemed diamond hard,
and, disengaged, skewed stubborn disregard,
when tried beneath my knife-point, to all hurt.
Was this, we wondered, outcrops, shovelled dirt
from near-Law quarry? We were firmly held

29 330 from near-Law quarry? We were firmly held
by mystery not easily dispelled.

Words like volcano, words like igneous
were dealt at taken back by two of us.
The people deserted but we dared not lag,
till, deeper unshed, a pile suggested slag
by cinder-like excrescence change of hue
from black to grey that ^{merged in} looked palest blue:

slag turned from some furnace, ancient kiln'
or glasshouse rubbish? Say from whence you will,
Black Country, Birley Pit, or Newcastle,

342 the answer to that query still must wait
till we have some geologist to tea.

two fragments now adown
for two lumps now gleaming
~~too shiny lumps adown~~ on rockery. —

But when the track turned back towards earth
my blunt-toe's shuffle hit a something work
another.

A moment's notice, for my second look,
disclosed Laff buried, crouched recuperating look,
flat-pressed in dust the hilt of splintered wood,
who picked up, ^{and} lefted, proved its balance as good

350 as any look flung at the plattered stone
when Larvesthorne was all the country's care,
in days far back beyond our disbelief,
when no sheik bards wined and baled the sheep?
when no stock borders wined and baled the sheep?
but it was proffered in stocks to bless the flocks,
to let all passing folk admire the yield:
for this was smaller than the kind we use
along the hedge rows still. Could ^{one} refuse
to carry it away nor let it lie,
and with it, Laff on human history?

The sculptor leaned on and whistled back

361 that we were waited for. There was no kick

of friendliness to greet us when we met,
 without
 and with ~~and~~ just the roadside meal was set
 with salad, sandwiches, white wine ^{and} beer,
 The first al-fresco banquet of ^{our} ~~the~~ year.

That bottle safely drained of its last drops,
 The glass was stowed when all were gathered up
 and so we parted. off the black car went,
 stepped a la chaise the child sat, too content
 370 on the large moving world before her eyes
 share a single smile to
~~to pay attention to our parting~~ of goodbyes.

The road was our road till we'd turn again
 back towards the castle in its flat green plain,
 so feels that gritted ^{hastily} ~~car~~ bore us on,
 fast high a narrow lane, it looked of stone,
 which, ^{by provision rather than by nice}
~~steeped rather than the~~ Repert breedin in its pallid face.
 This flanked a redbrick ^{yard}, elaborate

379 with tower, niche at arch, we failed to date.

roadside was with
 The hedges foot grasses lush, sea, here and there,
 the bright ^{pink} ~~with~~ Red Campion, in Warwickshire -
 its flora poor, the botanist opined -
 this ranks among the gayest ^{flowers} ~~annual~~ find.
 The sculptor ~~her~~ confessed that he confused
 the Rapper Robin with it, still unused
 to fine distinctions in his botany.
 In this, he comes a little after me,
 but not far after: all my married life
 I've leaned for confirmation on my wife,
 390 who loves all wild flowers, herbs, and cherishes
 the smallest mosses in their crevices,
 and has a way with growing things, denied
 its full fruition, by her being tied
 to my flat-dwelling sedentary trade.

[From that Glen cottage garden which she made,
 a snatched weekends - or scattered holidays,
 survive some friendly tokens which have place
 in this first plot we've owned, in middle age:-
 399 the Rose of Sharon, Primrose, Saxifrage,

Stonecrop as Lord a Pride and three or four
the seedling trees, the thickest; Sycamore

Our conversation ran a wayward course
from names of wild flowers to John Steepling's Horse-
This prompted by two eyes behind a fence
informed, it seemed, with deep intelligence -
15 clerks, one saw, the sculptor's own.
Then drifted round to Emily Dickinson

by way of Zen and Beat and Kerouac,
till shadow, leaf and petal brought us back
410 to Nature as a theme for poetry.
This prodded out old memories for me.
I told how something Havelock Ellis wrote

which mentioned Stitchwort forced me to take note
of this small shapely flower that fails to claim,
by reason of its "unattractive" name,
much place in verse. as how I searched for it,
and long years after found its image fit
with celandine, wood sorrel, violet,
in batch of country daisies green and wet,
3 419 I made about a glen in County Down.

Your native poets mostly live in town.
The ^{native} countrymen will value most
those things he knows the price of, and the cost;
he has nothing for trifles of no use:
his names for flowers and birds are vague and loose -
I've known one day as well, as his mind
finches and crows comprise the feathered kind.
This is, of course, the reason why John Clare
of all the rural poets is most rare.

The sculptor this remarked (Not to be found)
470 in recent months, his taste swing slowly round
from verse begotten only in the head
to slow descriptive lines that come unstuck
within the limits of the experience
for each clear-camouflaged as well-jocussed sense.

He broke off here, to lead us to the right
where surf of tall cowparsley hid from sight
a modest crop of kack so deeply gressed
that, without warning, we had surely passed.

We struck through twigs and stems and slippery leaves
for thirty yards of effort, till our sleeves
were cuffed with bars and faced with gossamer:
small rods & sunlight-mirred the swaying air,
(and somewhere the branches overhead)

The penit cliff-chaff sang his limited
but penetrating comment on the day
and cuckoo echo sounded faraway.

290 We crossed rough grazing with no cattle there,
and swam a wide gate on a field of green grain
pale in the heat. Far down the rippling plain
the castle lifted up its warm stone face
out of the blue-green sea of time and space;
newly abandoned structure, ruin or rock,
no single meaning spoke from the vast black;
but a stone, too, may be ambiguous,
the kindly bather ^{admired} ~~remained~~ us.

450 Across the field close to the left-hand ledge
the sculptor led us down the furrow's edge,
and suddenly a sharp unlikely cry
came from above us, and was suddenly

- a sparrowhawk, broad-winged, broke in view,
crying his private purpose as he flew
out and across the field, ^{intense} slow,
as if in search for something here below,
some creature in the corn where it was high
as standing knee, some bird he scared holly,
that crunched in safety, shone to be concealed.

Out and across, back and across the field,
the tireless hawk was his relentless way.

He gave the test of terror to the day,
that hint of violence which ^{tang} keeps the mind

470 alert to the dark forces, fierce and bold,
which look to strike - or so my fancy turned.
But my first impression was so swiftly scorned;
my wife asserting that this flight and cry
was rather of that ancient strategy
to rattle and draw unwelcome interest
farther and farther from infested nest;

and as each movement made more clear to me
the savage ^{motive} purpose, all the more would sole

480 insist my error, calling to her aid

Those frantic slights That oystercatcher played,
a box of tricks from her ancestral store,
To guard her low nest on the rocky shore.
Rattlin

We left the Lark still crying, launching now
on wider sweeps less certainly, as though
^{ignorance}
our unconcern had statified his aims,
^{foiled}
as out as though another field we came
to where a lower ground, the histories say,

The castle's moat a lake defensive bay,
That now is tufted marsh, uneven, dressed
By narrow ditches, where there still remain
A few rush-bordered pools with yellow flags
Bladed above the darker turf of grass.
Along ditch-ridges to a level square,
For jousts or pleasure, chronicles declare,
We passed and waited till you reached to strip
A sprawling skeaf of leaves. The vines
Half-opened, not full yellow at the flower.

30 499 The a fence-palk, the first for many an hour,

brought cracked step into the field stretch
500 The left Land fence post, thick with grass and vetch,
gave its white campion to the botanist.

Across the wore, corn, sown with mown fest-
and sprouting thickly, some small poppies showed

not Rose greet poppies by the Flemish road,
recalled things ^{the poppies still}
~~seen thirty years ago, when Europe stood~~
~~stood as a symbol of the people's will~~
~~at ease between two festivals of blood,~~

^{wrong}
a species ^{species} ~~seeded~~, often ~~germaged~~ left.

~~it, far a symbol, let loose this opiate~~

^{bold}
To keep ~~us~~ ^{us} the murdered men in memory
^{word} ^{Let nations shall be free}
500 and their pledged word for safe democracy.

A weed of cultivation is the phrase
which best describes the habit ~~gets days~~
it displays

Here, where the scat corrupts the soil is poor,

The poppy weed is right minicare.

When earth is rich as corn is strong indeed

The poppy may be great, but still a weed.

Is this a symbol of ^{complex} ~~another kind~~

510 for the craft fabrications of the mind,

and are men's arts mere poppies in the corn,
520 without the tillage never to be born,

The weeds of cultivation? Or are there
we know not, ^{no more than} ~~nor~~ ^{hortens} symptoms of the world's disease,

The spattered pigments and the tortured wine,
the ^{crusted} ~~shattered~~ cinders of the impending fire,
and the true arts are still the healthy grain,
as they were once, as they shall be again?

Then by this logic, love the growing tree.

The rotting trunks' romantic sponge
can never be of any mortal use,
merely occasion, ^{merely} for aesthetic self-abuse.]

530

The story thought shook me, so I thrust it by,

and followed up the steep lane hurriedly,
and though we scarce had reached our travel's end,

the achievement, the release seemed so impend

that all was over, nothing more to do

than place one shot before the other shot
so often as the distance receded it.

538 and measure out the distance that remained
till at last the welcome car was gained

30

22.VI.60

Some ^{noisy} figures passed us, noisy, who, far less
than drifting feather, stirred my consciousness,
were vague, ^{and grain} diffuse, and less close to sense
than any ^{petal of experience} huckle

The walk had brought us. Moving slower now,
we topped the last ledge of the grassy brow
that banks the Castle wall, and, from afar,
540 among the clustereacars, we saw the car . 22.VI.60

[-10]
+1
-6

—

20. VII. 60

Are the songs over now that used to come
with the first cuckoo and the falling leaf?
Because the heart is full must it be dumb—
the wind still whistles through the tilted sheaf.

290

An ear for music is an ear for life;
to tap the rhythm and answer back in time.
It is such habits surely that survive:
the ticking clock still pecks away the time.

30

Open Day

20. VII

The anxious parents talk about their boy
to the embarrassed teacher trying hard
to choose the answers that will not destroy
the flapping feathers of their self regard.

The boy is somewhere larking with his friends
the lucky ones who leaves, & those that stay.
It is tomorrow that the school year ends:
but custom calls to day the Open Day.

—

Kilkenny Magazine 1963

Mass.

20/21. VII

The church is small and well designed,
The woodwork good, the altar neat;
The only things to vex the mind
The gaudy Stations of the Cross.

290 ad Thesalter-boys with nimble feet
flit
dance round the edges of the Mass.

The priest in vestments finely wrought
moves clever hands in graceful prayer,
so habited there seems no thought,
no effort, when he ^{turns} ~~spins~~ to bless
the hats & heads that bow to share
the latin gobble of the Mass.

3 Yet, rising from the altar rail
after the priest has passed the bread,
a slight young fellow, shabby, pale,
with lowered eyes and palms pressed-close,
moves down the church with dreamer's head,
rapt in the mystery of the Mass.

19/21. VII

52

Now at an age when body slows
and hulks check heart with gaps in breath,
and he sees all as puppet-shows
the things men do this side of death,
instead of drawing-in his thought
on some still anchorage to fix
he finds his eager heart is caught
in the coarse web of politics.

Chinese Fluteplayer.

21. VII

The small bronze figure lips - a silent flute
and stillness spreads about him like a lake
he stands there out of time, and once you look
you are involved, released from mortal state,
because all sense is channelled into sight.
See how light strikes and shakes his rounded brow
and pauses on his dreamy-lidded eyes -
this shell of metal sings forever now.

290

3

The Fluteplayer II

The peace that speaks from this still bronze
is that of which this image is;
the long lips blowing down the flute,
the gentle smile that smooths the face,
an ancient patience that outlasts
erosion of the centuries;

The stance relaxed, the hands and arms
that show no effort in their pose;
the long sleeves' slack uneven curves,
the girdle swirled about the toes,
the full round brow, the dancest eyes
about to close that never close.

If we could let this peace pervade
each fretted cell and fumbling sense,
how swiftly its still gay sound would
the baffled spirit's turbulence,
and set us face to face with time
secure in second innocence

23.VIII

A Thought on my contemporaries.

I have seen them come and go:
at the heels of the last,
there aren't so many beside me,
and very few far in front.

29

3

Verse resumed in July 1962

15. VII. 62
rev. ed
20. XI. 62

laughing children
The little girls climbed up the hill to church,
their confirmation dresses fluttering
in the sun; within the shadowed porch
brown-fingered mothers knotted lace and string
and fixed each floral coronet in place;
while dark-garbed
dark-suited fathers beat against the wall,
pride and affection smiling from each face.

It seemed as if that instant marked all
~~the kindly shades from some festival,~~
~~some recollect'd~~
~~a ceremony natural as the air;~~
~~some sudden change out of bones or clay.~~
Yet this was Poland and the time was now;
and I who pray but seldom felt a prayer
stir in my heart that providence allow,
or dialectic, or whatever name
was put upon time's enginery, permit
that scene to re-enact itself, the same,
but striking such decree as end to it.
so long as any heart takes joy in it.
thus grace

The Island (A Revision)

Our
This colony^{is}^{now} dead and out of touch
with much that is buried in the Capitol;
the ships are leaky, and the storms are such
that most who leave are driven to the west,
returning seldom, if they come at all;
infrequent letters, clumsy expressed.
Slow, year by year, diminished interest.

But strangers from the east come now and then,
the latest gay on lively on the tongue,
to make their way among us; not as when
our fathers came to tame the land and till
and plant a thriving nation here among
the fallen tribes whose remnants linger still
by ready gneiss or on barren hill.

And busily to their fortunes they attend
stuffing their wallets while we stand and gaze,
so drilled in ancient loyalties we less

63

a stranger's voice authority and law,
as have, smug us, some who seek to spe
his accents, knowing when all strangers draw
most credit from the name of our awe.

29 Yet we have seen them come and watch them go,
The noisy names forgotten in a year,
With not a shred of evidence to show
What they wrought or how long and prospered more,
While out of that old superstition fear
we greet the newest comers to our shore,
No whit the wiser than we were before.

—

The Safe Pasture (A Revision)

There in the meadow where will fork the hay
between next August's showers, the Easter day
The yokes move slowly, each attended by
her lamb, her twins, or in the warm grass lie
content beside them. In this world of peace
The slant sun lins the rim of every fleece.

Were I to straddle fence and stride across
I should find nothing : one world rise and fall
= warning bleat; the archipelago
of drowsy islands would drift off and flow
into a ^{large} sea and momentary full
till I had passed beyond them; in each skull
the sparkling batteries of alarm adjusted
in secret range where strangers may be trusted,
while tactics of evasion and defence
stand mobilised around their innocence.

So let them hold, unwise, their Easter peace,

for neither they nor I have longer leave
of quiet: yet their being offers me
a mood to share and bask in, which will be
an ease to much my sorriest thought,
rooted in grass, and parable-enough it.

—

The Old Collector (A revision of An Old Man)

"I have outlived my time" the old man said
at eighty-five it simply is a fact:
and all my friends, or nearly all, are dead.
Most of my books ~~are~~ ^{now} ~~are~~ ^{or} safely packed
to quick disposal when I go myself.
"I still keep two or three for memory's sake —
He looked to the almost empty shelf —
"On how-a-day's the most my eyes can take"

I scouted round the house and carried in
the canvases and prints I hoped to buy;
then poised my pencil, ready to begin
to set my bid against his shrewd reply;
the merry challenge glinting in his eye;
his time was short, but time enough to win.

—

Inish Glass (a revision)

We who know are careful here
 never to say 'Wataford' or
 'Cork' or 'Dublin' but simply
 'Inish' - and even that with
 a depreciatory smile,
 disclaiming any precision
 to our expertise.

These, then, you may take (the hand
 makes its ambiguous gesture)
 as typical: the boat-shaped
 salver bowl with the turned o-
 ver rim on the square foot set
 a little crooked; the squat jug;
 the heavy barrel-

-like decanter with the three
 ringed collar; the cutting deep in
 'slopes' and 'diamonds'; full

of light. Not 'the bluish tinge,'
 which is a dealer's fable,
 giving, when used, the illusion
 of easy knowledge.

Made certainly in Ireland -
 by English craftsmen to evade
 the House of Commons duty
 on the metal, and only
 then till 'the economic
 balance' tilted back, when they fol-
 lowed the profit line.

Typical, it may be, in
 that the deep cuttings, the coarseness,
 the weighty grace, were surely
 quite appropriate to the
 randy squire with his high boots
 and his stucco flaking into
 the encroaching bog.

(A Revision)

- 22. VIII. 62

For a September Afternoon of Unexpected Brightness

The afternoon had opened like a rose:

The fallen leaves lay still; no others fell.

Time, like that golden moment when the bell
holds its round note before the dying close,
seemed being, not becoming. Even those
whose movement and direction briskly spell
the city's ordered habit, capsule

and agent, by their gestures spoke repose
and not intention only. For this hour,
all unexpected in the failing year;

they peopled the warm world so of by right,
each natural and easy as a flower
that needs no courage and can know no fear
because it is interior of light.

—

5. VIII. 62

69

The Malevolent One

Tho' dogs may bark and bound,
and cats come arching round,
of creatures there's but one
is dark to me, alone.

The hedgehog, badger, fox,
and sheep in drifting flocks,
I pass with mere salute;
they fear not my pursuit.

But yesterday a goat,
garbed in a tatty coat,
stood on the right-hand sward;
her round brown eyes were hard.

That I might safely set
a spell against the threat,
I checked my steady stride
and took the other side,
then bravely turned to see
her looking after me,
and fled from that intense
faze of malevolence.

The Glen of Light

This open glen is brimmed with air and light
 That space, itself, has body, palpable;
 Between the steep fields running left and right,
 This seems ^{this seems} to lead the cool floor of a crystal well.

Nepted by green ledges, shadow-sharpened, clear,
 Graying and grain their varied textures tilt;
 The small sheep on the mountain flank appear
 like rough bars clenched against a sagging gulf.

Too full the sense. This eye's no mortal lens
 Clouding with time and thought. Reality
 must wear the edges of this innocence,
 else how could creatures man creation see.

10. VIII. 62

The Glen of Wind

The ^{roaring} ~~flowing~~ wind, less solid than the ground,
 But strong as water ~~water~~ thrusting from the west,
 Shuts leaf and branch like weeds in waves drowned,
 That toss and sway as bold and do not yield.

The long clouds scud as stiff the mountain's breast,
 As changing shadows flicker field by field,
 Then break in pools of brightness, emerald,
 A wide landscape suddenly revealed,
 As sudden darkened, when, across the sun,
 The golden bordered drift is loosely screwed,
 And floods of color pour a pause and run,
 Are blotted out at last, as spilt again,
 On the broad shoulders of the Lege-blue Glen.

10/11. VIII. 62

Sonnet: 19

I pace these roads where progress and decay
 scribble their haphazard upon the scene:
 the new byre-gable rises white and clean
 where once a reeking midden stank away;
 the tractor-tracks have sliced up the clay
 but left this middle track still clover green;
 those tired walls, once a homestead, bulge and lean,
 and nettles swarm where children used to play.

And all those old men gone, those slow old men
 whose heads were thick with skulls, no longer wait
 for my approach, at loanen-end and gate,
 to warm my heart's dull embers with their speech
 that offers less to sermons ^{still} than preach
 when I am master of my moods again.

Revisions of earlier verses 1963.

The Knife

The Priest-in-the-Glen

No harsher this, for an ambitious man
With only ignorant peasants at his charge,
Hard as their flinty acres, stiff-as-clay,
ever, fat in harvest, making the poor mouth,
and grinding out their dues in sixpences.

What can a man do here, who, where he came from,
was notable for deep sermons and oration?
Scatter his eloquence and scholarship
over these grubbing minds, and
these ~~sweaty faces~~, like deer rain,
& leave a bright track for, at most, an hour?

I will not do. But they must still be taught
never to forget their priests' authority.
They're given to wakes and bawlish drunkenness.
I will pluck these out with uncarved hand.

These hawks are removed to their lonely hearts.
Save for the youths at crossroads, and the men

at cattle fairs, as all at Mass, they seek
occasion and place for common fellowship.

I'll build a hall for this: They'll clear the debt
if every house in these unfeeling hills
must sweat a beast to meet it. I shall see
that those who play or dance there all maintain
a proper Catholic bearing. I shall find
and clear up root the ~~rogues~~ who run the stills,
so that no plastered bed rocking in his books
may break his liquor in a young girl's face;
as every stranger shall be catechised;
and courting couples hunted to the light:
There'll be no bye-blows here, beyond a cano,
as in the ditches at the old Cano's day.

And when my last hour comes, I shall offer up
a cleansed and shining parish to Our Lady,
now here as a shelf of books, as brief name
for clarity sermons or Lenten Pastors.

The Tinker's Answer

The tinker sat, long-legged, beside his fire
on the grass sward. His hooded cart was humped
close to the hedge. The horse grazed, tethered
to a slack rope that looped from branch to bush.
A lean hound lay, the tinker's woman sprawled
beside him but apart. Two flea-fouged beds
lay spread apart on the road, and bantam fowl,
a nest half dozen, jerked round sack and box.

That afternoon, when we led come before,
only the boys were stirring. The little child,
foretelling the elders back within the hom,
promised our kettle ready, say, by six.

Now, after six, we stopped, but saw our kettle
"limmered and turned between his thumbs. You asked
will it be ready soon?" The tinker paused
and turned to the woman, telling her how long,
in words we could not catch. She answered for him,

"2 Twenty minutes, lady, or half an hour".

111

that broke them well down, left no work since.

And as we walked 15 min 16 minutes into.

I thought of that odd family, not sorry
that in the crannies and interstices
of an ordered state, all tested, all tabulated,
there should be those who drift outside the state.

Taking their time by
~~time~~ from the sun. As I recollect
item by item of the inventory

I realised how each was functional
as any other device of the brick age:

The house for rabbits, the fowl portable,
even the children's game such that two
could play at ease, needing no bought kit.

Some say that are not gypsies with the dust
of the world's roads than their shoes, but, ^{naphtha},
descendants of the old artificers
who wrought broad blades and tongs for knifis;
others that they were thrown upon the roads,
from generations back, by balfiff crowbars

You take your choice. My choice is ordered by
the tinker's face evoked from your question,
and his wife's answer for him; something old
as proven and tried assumes that gesture;
an ordinary craftsman's glad to talk.

Rev. 30-XI-63

Corridors

Mazed in a spray of lonely corridors
anonymous as a hospital, innocent
of number, name or arrow, windowless,
I shuffled under balls
of bright unbladed light. What people passed
were deaf and slipped, and in uniforms
with neither rank nor grade. When I spoke
they gave no heed; my fingers found no touch.
I paused at shut doors, flush, smooth, bare
that took my rapping knuckles as blotting paper
takes the blamed letters backwards. When I ran
it was the same anonymous corridor
continued in
that I returned to. So I stopped to listen
for any elevator's whir or grind, [forked]
but no sound came or passed. Where three ways
I stood to hear my heart make up its mind,
and as I took the left-hand corridor
a slow door opened and I saw the king,
the dead, the bearded king, my boyhood's king;

79

I'd heard he was a gruff but kindly man,
so I approached him. When he turned to me,
it was the little bald prime minister.
I offered my slow hand
and saw the hand that answered, recognised
that carved thumb, and that finger ring-tattooed,
and so I met my father five years dead.

The Green Shoot

In my harsh city when a ^{native} (catholic) priest,
Known by his collar, padded down our street,
I'd trot beside him, pull my schoolcap off
and fling it on the ground and stamp on it.

I'd catch my enemy, Veteran-and-boy,
grip his torn jersey and admonish him
first to admit his faith; and when he did,
repeatedly to curse the Pope of Rome;

school'd in such duties by my bolder friends:
yet not so many turned years before,
when I slipped in from play on Christmas Eve,
my mother batted me on the kitchen fire,

and wrapped me in a blanket for the climb
up the long stairs; and suddenly we heard
the carol-singers somewhere in the night
their voices sharper for the frost was hard

My mother carried me through the dim hall
into the parlor, where the only light
when the patterened oak and furniture
came from the iron lamp across the street;

and there, looped round the lamp the singers
but not a snow or grocer's calendar,
singing a song I liked until I saw
my mother's lastes were all burst with tears.

But of this much of ready sentiment;
gritty with streaks of flinty violence,
I am the green shoot asking for the flower,
soft as the feathers of the snow's cold swans.

Revised from
the Roger Sod

43

Verses in 1964

When I was smaller, closer to the ground,
my paradox found paddles promised most,
with west Pacific to my paper fleet
and continents beyond each cobbled coast.

In wedge of ice would gather up the world
in mist-blurred dance of longshot, horse & wall.
The frost was always better than the snow
which turned to slush the moment that you fell.

My fingers still remember how they stung
when scorched by splash that dribbled from the frost.
Snow, humped from roofs: snowballs were cores of stone.
There never was such treachery from frost.

5. I. 64

Ecumenical

Now, with the heart gone out of it, they mine
their ancient grave synthetic ritual
of mass and candle before invited guests,
and priests on presbyters most courteous call.

They make a trace among the sundred sects,
and loose bows & beard, tongue answers bell;
pulpits that once condemned the Scarlet Whore
pronounce a hissing disbelief in Hell.

The stakes and faggots all are thrust away,
martyrs and thumbscrews bundled out of sight.
The sacred oils poured into one round dish
to feed one flame against the Arctic night.

9.I.
⁸⁵

I cannot force my mind
as steel against the stone
Till sparks struck from my thumb
and dullness all is gone.

In patience I must wait
the season undismayed
when through the frozen sod
here brands the living blade.

The Old Sod

20.11.64
Tintern 2. III

I've shaken out no lap of English hay;
There's no lent here to drag across my knee;
dug no potatoes out of this red clay,
nor shouldered twigs or tares to feed my fire;
this may be England's heart, this Warwickshire,
but my heart faces west - across the sea.

I've steppt intent among these English stones,
and screwed my eyes at tablets in the gloom;
tho' these may strew a zone like mine, my bones
feel no compulsion to lay down their weight
by Norman chancel, Decorated gate;
I know which butt hill will yield them room.

Yet by what logic must such notions rise?
The old globe shrinks. The galaxies draw near.
The whole earth's needs bespeak our enterprise.
But since, by cells chance or genetic twist,
one sod proves closest to the infants' fist,
the first dirt touched must be of all most dear.

On the old London road

10. III. 64

87

This was the road that Saunders took
to face his fatal last Assize,
turned at this bridge by Whitley Brook
and sensed the spines with steady eyes;

then left the uncompleted hege
like pebble dropped down some deep well.
This upcurves of honest rage
no later penmen cared to spell

But there were those in Smithford street,
The Butts, the Burges, Bayley Lane,
who lagged the embers of defeat
and prayed that Saunders come again

Yet when I watch the tall blocks rise,
the broad roads run, the schools extend,
it seems the bitter certainties
continue an estimable end.

10/13 - 3-64

89

Once, from the Precinct's star and press,
turn into dim St. Mary's Hall,
and with delay spend success
and judge him victor, after all.

Moraine

Patched Tents pegged, the beds unrolled,
pitched on the high moraine
we're given time enough
by this unsettling sun
to cram our waking hours
with necessary work,
though, sometimes when too hot
we strip, black insects itch.

Our small ship in the sound
fast-cabled floats secure.
^{A geologist}
Above the scorching sky
the tall peaks tipped with fire
as if with mescales
the light brings far bergs near.
The radio gone dead,
what should we need to hear?

First then to plot our route

across that broken slope,
sharpening the disciplines
of toe and fingertip.
And if we reach the tops
before the long day's done,
we shall have touched our goal,
the last peak scaled by man.

If it's too difficult,
and, beaten, we return,
we still may wait the end
here on this last moraine
no oft less usefully
with no less fortitude
than those who squat among
the rubble of their world.

Reviscan

Defeat (1932.)

So from defeat I learn
the stress and strength of bone
the twigs that spark or burn
the stone remaining stone
no matter what way thrown.

I shall go forth from this
aware of wood and stone,
and these on theses
shall not be tied but one,
henceforward I must be
at once both rock and tree.

Revision

30. IX. 64

93

Daybreak at Long Lypall

I always shall remember that long dawn
the torn cloud opened in three separate wounds
slowly the grey light smoking over the dew
birds wakened each in loneliness beginning
their melody that widens with the light
~~become too many for the ear to greet
till ears stoppe left it was too loud to hear.~~

The new wind woken also in the reeds
shrieked for grass seeds for passage, taking sudden flight
and rocking twigs against the open sky,
till life resumed, and sun and song involved
the scuttling spadei and the slope of corn.

like action-painters spill your phrases out
and hope that someone looking will surprise,
among the dragging strokes, shapes brimmed with thought,
or colours such as sunset on a rose.

But all you're left with since we cannot fix
or focus a target, is this hope,
as maddeners we launch among the rocks
and near and nearer still the blind tides rip.

Summer was long that year. The setting sun each evening was monarchically rich.

The trees turned lighter slowly, and the leaves cut loose and tumbled seldom. Though the earth was hard and dry, no cry of drought went up from barking suburbs or sunburnt villages.

The green was baled and piled as tractors off the harsh bright stubble, till all fields were bare, passed into leisure, bland, secure.

The children played till dark released the stars each shortened day. Along the worn red walls the shadows made new patterns, never marked at just that angle, that intensity.

Flowers took a second season, those of summer postponed and elbowed autumn's, till it looked as if winter ^{were} ~~was~~ hastened for some event, long waited, to occur. No young spring god, born when the edge of colour broke dark moulds could be expected now. No monarch sat,

sceptred mid sheaves, biding his jubilee.

No rumour of invaders still beyond

the mountains but approaching certainly.

Did not the wire-plucked air west still with message of tornado-flood and famine a far plain, of shouting crowds storming the alleys of hot continents, and that west nation poised to fling in its load of terror on the balanced scales — it might have seemed some sort of Golden Age tarnished, no doubt, for lack of poetry, but strangely satisfying, had begun.

27/8. X. 64

On the Occasion of my 57th Birthday

My fifty-seventh year
ebbs toward autumnal end.
As winter shuffles near
I pause to comprehend
what lack these twelve months brought
of measurable gain
in feeling sense and thought;
and what may yet remain
now, and in circumstance
that breath may still afford
of blunted will or chance
with its deciding word . . .

Those landscapes boldly placed
which brimmed my summer page —
that town by rain grazed;
the comfortable days
of decent work achieved,
no scent of praise or blame;

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The same brave dreams believed
which show the road I came
from that myth-haunted land
still scarred with bigot-stife
to this small city planned
with studied scope for life

For body and for mind
I gauge familiar stride,
and, edging forward, find
the landmarks still abide;
(my senses undecayed)
for sight, for touch, for sound —
but yesterday I layed
an acorn-gravelled ground
and found October true
as ever, sense by sense,
as ancient as so new
as childhood's innocence.

And with me walking there

28.X.64

99

To pluck the coloured leaves
was she who still will share
the thistles and the sheaves,
when this long Harvesting
my husbandry shall prove,
as she has shared the sprays
and summer of my love.

—

With yellow leaves of lime and beech
the narrow runnel's lined,
the chestnut splays still out of reach —
illlogical, I find
my heart-beat seesaw on its spring,
and load, lone alone,
a leather fleet with drumming wing
drops, somewhere, like a stone.

Much revised and rewritten section of a longer
poem Exposition 13/23. XII. 1944

The Picture
Collector's Choice

XI. 64

well-sculptured head held high,
Janos with the swept-back collar long
not comprehending all the Chairman says,
hoping he flatters, smiles at the audience
and sits behind that smile remembering
^{so long ago} how once he raised a loan of ~~that picture~~ there
~~over~~ beyond that woman. That far to the right
on the wall opposite of the yellow village
in the blue valley over the fire-tipped bushes.
His native village. He paid back every penny
in the first short boom. A picture is credit.
Better than money. It keeps its shape and size.
The famous Balkan master presented it
to Janos' mother. ^{He was born there too} It was his native village
He came back every time for a holiday:
they had been to the wooden school together.
Did the war wreck it, roaring ^{round} the hills?
Is Peter living? or was he a partisan?
The letters were never answered. Too long. Too long.
The masters
The painter is in a big book in a cardboard case.

That picture left of the last, the interior.
A present to himself for his first English house.
That flowerpiece, roses, was simple extravagance
That, ~~the dealer talked him into, to be, after, glad.~~
A bargain the rest, the artist let it go
^{his wife was sick} ~~settled in~~ after persuasion, the ready cash ~~dearly helped~~.
~~The rest~~
Years, an exchange, on the field critics' advice.
On that other wall to the north of Thomson's pride,
he noticed that day the contract was agreed.
So the collection from antiquaries were borrowed
and lent by, lent by, sang in the catalogue
till he was invited. Friends, asked to join
communities, the well-known person, interviewed.
Every picture a story, a chapter of life
his life, that is, since he sat in the dark train
and touched the large parcel for comfort,
fingered the monogram under the blanket-cover.

Hands clap. Throats clear. The Minister stands up,
his suit well-cut, to congratulate, to declare.
Janos wipes his fingers on white linen

and searches the faces for answering affection,
unsure as a Jew. You too would be unsure
and smile and pat the elbow
or bolder hug the shoulder of anyone
patient enough to wait, if your world had gone up
in smoke and dust and you were left alone
with the need for living and finding bread
and finding friends to sweeten the exile cup.

The speeches end over. There is a shifting of feet.
The platform party descends and Tenos descends
Roping Whored the handshake against the program.
Tomorrow photograph will also be evidence.

The Wheel

I remember that ^{wooden} strange wheel on the kitchen shelf
beside the boot-trees and the copper lamp
~~last relic of my uncle's ornithopter~~
~~but large in circumference with thin spokes~~

~~The lost of Sam's ornithopter monoplane~~
~~flagged up three feet by its trailing wings~~
~~The flapping wings once mounted a field~~
~~above the front yard of a sloping field.~~

Left in its sled of rot, it was preserved,
the holister steaming wheel
and meadows, while my uncle turned
lesser
to food inventions. The invisible hinge
recalled now as the lime-black illustration
Brown tropical as a dream
of a prospectus flight ^{latest}
printed on pink paper, and the charm
totem - applied - for never seen in use,

~~that stood long years among the brooms and golf clubs~~
~~long with gods and bycabs under~~
~~stacked in the empty hole below the stairs.~~

I loved my uncle, loved his dark reds
on their equestrian island's jungle thicket,
his pigeons in theathi, his bottled snakes
in bathroom cupboard, loved his watch like a

the little eagle he carved, his mandolin,
both the sawmills from cubes of wood;
the stone pipe-bowls, the clowns of prairie-grass,
the pianos and the phonographs.
The shells which roared their tides against your ear,
the two great shells which lay inside the fender,
the long walks with him by the river side
~~when everything was named a mystery name~~
with me and myself is a perfect ladder.

when I was ten years old

But how could you after a family row
trust ^{but} him, and never again
drive him off ^{but} silent, and never again
I crossed the threshold of that learning mind.
My father had a hunt, so I took the ride
daily ordered, as of the flesh were cut
with a machete, and so with one hand since
I have explored the surfaces of life

I had forgotten him as his horse for
my task unconscious coffining his face,
convinced my maimed silence was normality:
until today the old wound cried again

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and all come running back as flicking through,
cheer-gleancy through a book on
by Gleance, a history of aeroplanes,
I ceased to study the blurred photograph
of a gigantic dragonfly on wheels
pedalled by a dark man ^{with high} steering it,
and underneath it, his name ~~was~~ hairless,
bristles. The smaller type
giving the dimensions, etc. the date,
main chord, flexing portion, trailing edge.

Collector's Choice

XI. 64

Tanos, with well-sculptured head held high,
not comprehending all the Chairman says.
Hoping he flatters, smiles at the audience,
and sits behind that smile remembering
how once so long ago he raised a loan
on that painting over there, behind the hat,
of a yellow village beyond the fire-tipped bushes.
His native village. Paid back every penny
in the first short boom. A picture is money
better than cash. It keeps its shape and size.
The famous Belker master presented it
to Tanos' mother. He was born there, too;
they had been to the wooden school together.
Did he ever wreck it, roaring round the lake?
The letters were unanswered. Too long. Too long.
The master's in that book in the cardboard case.

That picture, left of the hat, the interior,
was Tanos' present to himself for the house.

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That flowerpiece, roses, was simple extravagance.
A bargain besides it; the artist let it go;
his wife was sick: the ready cash settled it.
The rest, an exchange, on the bold critic's advice.
So the collection grew and pictures were borrowed
and lent by, Lent by, sang in the catalogue.
Invited to join committees, a patron, a name.
Every picture a story. A page of his life,
once, in the dark train, he touched the large parcel,
fingered the moulding under the soft padding.

Hands clap. The Minister was now to declare.
Tanos wipes his fingers on cool linen,
and searches the faces for answering affection,
as sure as a Jew. You too would be unsure
and smile as lay the shoulder of anyone
kind enough to wait, if your world had vanished,
and you were left alone with the need for living
and finding bread and friendship to feed your hunger.

The speeches are over. There is a shifting of feet.

The platform party descends, and Taros ascends,
Loping toward the Land-shake against the program:
tomorrow's photograph will also be evidence.

The Wheel

I remember that wooden wheel on the kitchen shelf
beside the boot-bras and the copper-pans,
last relic of my uncle's ornithopter,
flapless-up three feet once by its threshing wings.
Left it unshed to rot, this was preserved
the polished steering-wheel, while my uncle turned
blessed inventions, like the invisible hinge
recalled now as the lone-block illustration
of a prophetic leaflet, and the patent charm
stacked long with rods and golf-clubs under the stars.

I loved my uncle, loved his dexterous nets
on Stein aquarius-islands, his bottled snakes
in bath-room cupboard, his pigeons in the attic,

the little eagle he carved, his mandolin,
the two great sea-shells lying inside the fender,
the long walks with him carrying nets and gins.

But, when I was ten years old, a family row
brought him into law-silence, and never again
I crossed the threshold of that steaming mud.
My father too was hurt, so I took the ride
duly ordered, as if the flesh were cut
with a quick knife. And so, without hand since,
I have explored the surfaces of life.

I had forgotten him - and his horse for years,
my brisk unconscious coffining his face,
convinced my named gait was normality,
until today the old wound cried again;
chance-glancing through a book aeronautics,
I paused to study one blurred photograph
of a gigantic dragonfly on wheels,
a dark man with a high collar steering it,
and, underneath it, his zone; the smaller type

27.v.65

providing the dimensions - and its date,
main chord, flexing portion, trailing edge . . .

To the laying of the foundation-stone
on 12.vi.65 Lyric Players Theatre, Belfast

1965

Another place, another theatre
first urged my pen to shape saluting rime.
Should this occasion bid my wits bestir
to spell the phrases out a second time?

That place had taken me for what I was;
it seemed what stills I had should serve it well:
so I had right to offer my applause
when the first curtain rose, not when it fell.

Before all others here was built a house
for drama's traffic for the common good;
and I, too, long ago, had made my vows
to quality of life and brotherhood.

But now a stone is laid in hot fer place
where I met malice and intolerance:
Shall I then greet it as a sign of grace
^{that} where charity inhabits every glance,

an earnest that the rising walls will yield
fit scope for values such as others knew,
its squared rule of bigotry repealed,
opinion measured - and all judgments true?

This is too harsh. Among the folk I left
there still were some of single mind and heart,
- a golden thread that thrust thro warp and weft,
the hard and lonely disciplines of art.

And it is for those few that I must raise
my hand in greeting.

In recollection of Drumcliffe, September 1948

113

The years spin quicker since that day I stood
to watch the poet's coffin take to the earth
- a second time, in kinsfolk's neighbourhood,
which gave his proud imagination birth;
and my clenched handage bent to cross and tower,
to those dark lemon hills which, till time ends,
will wear the shapes confined by retic power.
The power that fleshed our legends - and his friends.

Although I could not share his thought - and choose
instead a faith in man's progressive range,
^{and} to his stance and temper dear,
I carry thence what I shall never lose,
his clenched cadence, and the right to cleave
the masks ^{with which} I use to face my fellowmen.

Yate: prophetic.

For Mary O'Malley & The Lyric Players

I owe much thanks to players everywhere
 who've set such circumstance before my mind
 that I have sted my momentary care
 in kept occasion of a richer kind:
 the marking and his pool, the broken man
 who sees flames make the scut; the peasant pair
 who wait beside the ^{tree} road; the Lorrigan
 urging her cracking wheels beyond despair.

With all to thank, I name a gratitude
 and set beside the best, with them aligned,
 the little bird upon their little slope,
 tempered to stew, by that dark woman's mood,
 O'Casey's humours, Lorca's salty rage,
 the Sheben monarch's terror, songed and blind.

Conditioned by the easy commonplace
 that all is altered since we two were young,
 the attempt to find correlative among
 the roaring forms that pour in Leedong race
 seems doomed to fail. No moonshot stayed in space,
 or bomb in China while starved nations wait,
 though each may be quick trigger to debate,
 provides sharp symbol for retreat from grace.

Plucked-up and rootless, mocked by our peers,
 to worse, by mute acceptance of the absurd,
 the least of things our lost condition show:
 no concretes brought you spring this many a year,
 and the last shooting cackoo that I heard
 was in a Polish wood three Tueses ago.

Hot Press

— 31. VIII. 68

6/7. VI. 65

Glens Talk

Partly from reading the books and hearing the plays,
and partly because it has happened to us now and then,
we expect the caressed phrase - and the singular image,
when we stop to talk in the Glens with a likely person.

Such things have become our estate, like that metaphor
of the lively man that 'Took lightning out of the road';
but, more often, he would have no more style than a rod.

You will remember that woman whose house we passed,
the last house close to the road, going up to the moss,
the whitewashed gable - a lattice of fleshing leaves,
and across the yard - and over the shallow streams,
a squad of children calling and running about;
and you said "You have a lovely family here",
and she, "Och well, they have all their features, thank God"

And that day when the national leader came
to attend the ^{commemoration} along the coast,
stopping for lunch at the Convent, the village crowded;

we met the long-faced old man on the mountain road,
and I said "You didn't go down to see him ^{Come in} ~~about~~?"
"He didn't come up to see me. Why should I go down?"
and strode with his one-man republic back to the hills.

7/8. VI. 65

A Representative Person.

We met her first in Prague two years ago —
Prague of the castle and the ^{reeling walls} empty plinth —
more like a Swede than Greek, or so we gauged
against our meagre gallery of types,
with pale blonde hair and skin; her hair swept up
in what we'd then thought Western fashion only,
dark brows, grey eyes, with a just friendly mouth,
soft down along the lips; — a comely girl.

Her ^{vivid} easy English lively from a mind
informed, as few of our compatriots,
in theatre and art, precise with names,
could turn to brisk translation when required,
and quick with exposition of the facts
of industry, production, wages, hours;
yet never priggish, never doctrinaire,
would take the proffered drink or cigarette,
dance at the evenings, and share a joke.

And in our thought she became identified
with the best facets of the People's State,
part of our Europe still, though communist;
intelligent and young, a rounded person;
unlike those arid Dresden bureaucrats
with dull shut minds, securely orthodox;
nor hard and brittle, as her counterpart
might be with us, a cynical P. R. O.

Over the years cards crossed, remembering;
and when at odds with our sick polity,
our hopes swaying eastward to the growing ends,
the sprouting grain of Larvosts we'd not share.

Then Songja came herself; her altered hair
with centre parting, curling round her face,
the natural colour slanting out the black;
a little tired, a shade more womanly
who'd been an girl before; the lips still soft.

I wondered if she'd see much change in us,
more grey for sure, ^{coarser} and less flexible,

18.VII.65

in mind,

so much the second year accelerates;
and what sort of a symbol we provide
here in our garrish context,
with our divided loyalties laid bare,
tarnished by acceptance, self-deceived?

(21)

The lake at Bled. Trees thick to water's edge.

Castle on bulging cliff. An island-church.

Flagged restaurant with running waiters trained
to hold tall ices straight

Bare-shouldered women with dark glasses. Men
in shorts among them under peregrines
Brown restless children perched with sandalled feet
on the light-metal chairs.

Postcard of tourists' paradise. A dream
The parked cars turned here to realize.
Accept the song euphoria. Accept,
you too, the workers' state.

(21)

18/19. VII

16/19. VII - 65-

123

Lawnmower's whirr Greensleaves on icecream clinics
somewhere shadecasts a child laughs sparrow chirp
like water-droplets on a brimming bath
intensify the English Sunday peace

Delphiniums tremble - and green apples rock
among green leaves as air stirs through the fence
Rose-petals tarnish on grass-cutting-malachite-
earth, and a whiff of burnip-weeds drifts by.

The year's noon tilts toward autumn yet still holds
as stem-to-branch before the sun withdraws.
but far transistor signals six o'clock
and hell outside is morning in the news.

Fretting this showery summer, bogged with life,
like reaper gripped in a laid field of corn,
my loose thought travels back by tick of mood
to those hump-islands off the shores of Split:

Hot bowls of sun where the bright gravel strips
and Tamarisks and oleanders stand
stiff in the heat, where the dark water's warm,
lapping against the scorching tilted slabs:

where for an instant, floating on my back,
I realised, by grace, the classic mode,
the comfortable body, buoyant mind,
that was the norm for mastery of life

and in that realisation, out of time,
duties and debts forgotten, period
and problem washed away, the self intact
is still - a cell of something wider yet...

16/20.7.

115

I've stood out in the night, - and the wide sky
with its dimensions and its distances
had shrunk me smaller than a grain of salt,
single and brief - against eternity .

But here the self unhidden opens out,
includes for blessing all, includes itself,
one with the light we live by, solarised.
as you might say - a brute was humanised .

My friend the sculptor modelled the large head,
cast it in polyester, metal coloured .
Not an exact-likeness or so it seemed:
it did not flatter, roughing the smooth cheeks
in search for planes, declensions, light and shadow,
making a feature of the fleshy nose,
catching the eyes but coarsening the tight mouth .

But when I turned it round to observe the profile,
it brought my father's face at once to mind,
dead twenty years, the sculptor never knew him;
my sober father, that just, quiet man .
So it must touch some essence, ^{stab} strike some truth .

I set it in the gallery with the bronze
figures and faces by accomplished hands,
it stood beyond me, representative,
a period head wearing the date of style .

There I have left it to submit to judgment;
some name it at a glance, some have to guess;
too young think some, expressing one mood only,
correct for the hair, the chin, the hooded eyes ...

Within myself I already sense a change;
with it set there I have been liberated.

My life of strong opinions, ventries,
is held contained, sealed-off from chance of time;
this was that stubborn, unforbearing fellow,
dogmatic in assertion - and dissent,
staunch democrat but cast with noodling neighbours,
short of talk's snark charge, in love with words,
egalitarian - and humanist;
and I am left with these alternatives
to find a new mask to what I wish to be,
or try to be - a man without a mask,
resolved not to grow neutral, growing old.

The Word

Gathered in the dark pub at the Basin
after a long slow Sunday on the canal
learning of towns from backyards, fields from grass-roofs,
we sit on benches - at a narrow table
as drunk our pints - and decipher the shapes around us:
the brown walls plaster, low ceiling tongue and groove,
the notices - and varnished calendars,
high wooden settles either side the fireplace
where no fire has been since Victoria.
and listen to the locals by the window
who sat where they could watch what came by water,
talking of locks and cuts - and the long boats
and the strong men who worked them, greats all.
One stout old fellow leaning on his belly
buried up the conversation, propped with rods.
Prompted by Rose who drew his stories out
eager to hear them told for our amusement,
he spun a set of words that coiled and shrouded,
nestled with genealogies and seasons -

in and around my mind a) imagination:
and out of the spoke one word beat like a bell;
Bedlam, he said, where one lock keeper went
after some robbing trink or accident -
Bedlam meaning Hertford, the County Asylum.
And on that ringing note, old Poolendson
was there at the kitchen door, gripping his bed,
and sketching with the hotening faces round as
the dark path, the scrubbed table, the stout old men.

There is no other experience
exactly like
standing on a high cliff-path
and watching the white gulls far below
cruising and gliding
turning and returning indifferently
over the dark restless waters
and foam-fronted rocks.

Add to this:

The tang and taste
of the salt air and the sea wrack
and the red irregular endless
metallic crackling of the gulls' cries.
They are at ease in space, their element;
and for once, you are above them,
the consciousness that alone
giving gloio meaning to the event.

Started awake in the worn darkness
 I cannot for a moment recall where I am
 In a strange room in a strange city,
 all evidence engulfed in the featureless night.

Then suddenly beyond the enclosing room
 somewhere outside, from some place in the dark
 in an unfamiliar existence
 a rough voice flings out a long trailing cry.
 And at once I remember that I lie in bed
 in a room on the top floor of a tall hotel
 in Sarajevo, high above the streets,
 and that yesterday
 from the balcony we saw far below
 the folkdancers jiving and spinning like noisy puppets
 on the floodlit slope of the cafe' square;
 and just across the ^{steeped} roofs in the evening light
 the abrupt mosque with its sentinel minaret,
 and that this ^{my} must be the mosque in there,
 the last in darkness now,

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two points in space, he and I,
 like two blind planets.

We'd seen him, yesterday, a man in a lounge suit,
 - as we stood at noon looking up for the flagged yard
 where the faithful washed their feet and went in to pray.

Now he was only a voice in the darkness calling,
 and who can say who hates or how many,
 calling not for help nor anger nor protest,
 but ^{offering} throwing out an impersonal assertion.

There is something terrible and sad in that repeated call,
 each repetition a little different
 as the man moves round his narrow perspective.
 And I in my dark box in the air
 lonely
 listen and am moved with melancholy
 though outside the talk,
 not knowing the ritual and necessary response
 to that admonitory call
 forever
 and unable to answer it.

13.XII.65

Poetry, Then

"Poetry, then, is an imitation of Nature by a poetical and numerous speech. Let us explain it."

John Dennis: The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry [1701]

Let us explain it. Consider if it is
a simple hobby like collecting stamps
or vintage cars, the best least numerous,
or annual sky-blue livels which result
in tedious evenings with transparencies;
a game like patience with more opposite;
relief from ledger's prose; a substitute
for childhood's dreams; a quiver of gaudations;
solipsists' rainbow looking-glass; a drug
to ease the faint nerves ^{barely} scarcely resonant
whose stretched pitch threatens ^{snapked} hysterie,
a pipe, a glass or some other sedative.

No. Poetry's an exercise, - a way,
an attitude, - a holding of the mind

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like a vast radar-dish alert to life;
propping the few ports open welcoming
to Nature, Human Nature, the Past and Present.
All other ports are jugged or overgrown,
or focus one ray only in one direction;
the Lazer-beams of ^{utter} supreme intellect
bounding its naked signals from the moon.
oblivious

You cannot trace the painter's muddled chart
for he is lost too, where, before, he saw
and set a frame around experience,
trecking wave's echo in the tossing hills,
the tides' rhythm in the seasons and the pulse.
who now but scribbles in the running sand
his ignorant and ephemeral signature.

The east wind strengthens, and the worried priests
swarm and buzz and disperse from the holy place
in deeper confusion than when they droned - in
to sit it out safely on the quaking bog.

The statesman's fingers, plugging hole by hole
as each jets mischief, are not free to point
being too stiff and cold; the barometer's
become his compass. The hard moralist
scissors his reason through the seeping web,
starving the spider, ravelling the threads.

For Poetry bogs snare, sends ruin, the moon
races through clouds yet slowly sets and rises;
the dyke breaks and the flood lets kent and aberri,
litter to offer tair for the first song;
the spider settles on Blekki's open helm.

¹³⁵
Be old ambition still has stayed by me
of all that stugged my sleeve when I was young:
to drive fast engines; better, perch among
the palm-thatched huts romantic; best, to be
great mentor of my nation just and free
with heart compassionate and healing tongue:
the last of these it was, that longest clung,
till crass conceit appeared mere clarity.

Though my account with hope is overdrawn
by those snug creditors, pride, indolence,
comfort and cushion, I am not afraid,
so much else spent, discarded, lost upon
this raggy track, to hold, in innocence,
I never have denied the poets here.

15/16. XII

The Pet Shop.

I never had the luck to keep a pet:
2 kitten, 3 cat, rabbit, and canaries, all were tried.
When it went me, my father drowned the cat;
the rabbit pestered, the canaries died.

17

Among the crowd that idled round the door,
you'd sometime see a fellow slip his head
into a ladder pocket ^{to} and withdraw
a frightened lark or linnet contraband.

So, though my legs grew longer with the years,
I had no pup to race me round the hills.
The very sticklebacks brought home in jars,
within the week, ^{were found with} ~~had~~ ^{tiny} scales to certain ribs.

But when, a Saturday, we went to town,
my chums and I, one window drew our gaze:
glass-tanks of snakes and lizards green and brown;
white mice and pied mice on sawdust trays;

dumb tortoises; a haughty cockatoo;
bright-feathered bantams picking in the grit;
little ferrets sniffing straw for something new;
and pigeons jerking round a clockwork feet.
jerking pigeons on perch clockwork feet.

17/20. XII. 65

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My Grandmother's Garter

I never really liked my mother's mother;
she was too stiff and hard:
^{one single soft kindly}
^{a kind word from those tightly-packed lips}
I never heard.

Slim, Lanksome, straight as a rush, her soft hair white,
^{skinned,} smooth ^{and} fresh of cheek,
with purple ribbons in nest yet-bladed cap,
dressed all in black,

Those
she who ever her acknowledged her the regent
of her grim Methodist God.

The little lead figures on the drawing room piano
^{sat} would, when you fingered them, nod.

Possessor of her house and six grown-up children,
she worshipped her eldest son,
but found the ^{last} anchor of her long widowhood,
in the second, John.

She faulted and grumbled with every servant girl,
until, in tears, they left,
suspected of trying to reduce the master,
accused of theft.

After twenty years, he married, escaped and died,
untimely, that good man.

So, when the house was sold and the young widow persecuted,
her travels began.

Each daughter's home, in turn, became her bower,
till restlessness set in.

The disagreements flared to rows; she packed her trunks,
and moved again,

keeping her children in perpetual turmoil,
a disruptive element,
leaving a trail of sickness and anger
everywhere she went.

Yet she always had a pouch sewn to her garter.

cremned with snippets of clipped verse,
 Emerson, Tennyson, Longfellow, George MacDonald,
^{the} ~~the~~ ^{her} guineas in a purse.

And when at last she died, there was scant mourning;
 Her closest son shuddered dead,
 The family ~~still~~^{had} poured its share of sorrow
 over that noble head.

Yet though I did not like her, nor she me, swearing
 I'd come to a bad end,
 Remembering that satin pouch of poems
 I slept her bony head.

My mother's father, when he came to die
 summoned his house to join him saying clear
 his road to Glory: this, obediently,
 they, with schooled voices, did, well versed in praise,
 for Methodists were folk then without fear
 of Hell or doubt of Their Redeemer's Grace.

That first time it was difficult for them
 to hold their grief in ~~rounded~~^{balanced} harmony,
 asserting
 claiming death's gate & joys Jerusalem,
 while their bereft father struggled with his pain:
 but when the crisis ebbed, relieved to see
 his breathing regular
 the steady breath restored, they wept again.

For days he wrestled, weakening, called for song
 when the end beckoned, falling back in sleep
 each time death failed to answer. Far too long
 and pitiful a vigil for his kin;
 a nurse was mustered, so that they might keep

some count of time, some rhythm of discipline.

One afternoon, slipped down to fetch his hay,
quickly returned, she found him sprawling dead,
atwixt the tumbled blankets' disarray.
The men who never once had failed a friend,
^{only} alone now on that easier journey sped,
not one less ^{making clear} than the end.

—

22-XII.

She took me for a walk once as a child;
a great event; no more survives of it
than that I plucked a blossom, and she said
"Throw that away, Child - It is Cuckoo Spit."

I stood and wondered at that frost-like flower,
and thought of cuckoos spitting from the sky,
and spat it down. It was her natural rule,
in my shy childhood, to forbid, deny.

Striding

~~Walking~~ ~~to church~~ one Sunday evening to church,
— a twenty-nine stretch, ~~a longish~~ ^{about} mile,
with ribbed bonnet, dolman, muff, umbrella,
leading her grown-up family with style,
^{moved} my grannie strode, her sabbath rôle secure,
her retinue sedate, respectable,
nodding but briefly when need prompted it:
(adding) ^{confirms on} a smile for those whom they knew well.

Then, swinging up behind, with bang and blare,
along the cobbled road, a band boomed by,
with drums and tambourines and roaring brass,
Boots' God-commissioned army. Suddenly,
to the shocked consternation of her kin,
my grannie left the ^{pavement} sidewalk, took her place
within the rearward, tall among the shrubs,
her ribbed bonnet and her comely face,
meriting a skip, elastic-sided boots
at one with broken boots. The family

worthered their outrage, prayed that no nice friend
should glimpse, by chance, this lapse from dignity.
Yet what could you expect? Had she not been
a small girl when our father married her?
journeyman himself
A working man? It owns the Foundry (now)
's his
You'd think, for all sookes, that sleds had a care.

But is that coarse and noisy company
my granie marched serene, until she came
to the church door, and stopped, her cheeks alight
with something other than her children's stems.

—

29.XII.

Because of the day-long frost,
and the mist-soaked atmosphere,
all other colour lost
save white for twig-tips, and black
for the pony and the ass,
a still, consciousness laid,
standing back to back
on the grey sculptured grass.

With E. M. Forster on the 28th December

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I see him, in his clotheah, standing beside the car,
admiring the ^{large} winter sunset,
a bright orange balloon in the deep white mist
behind the black frosty twigs:

and, after, in the tiny church,
when I read aloud the grandiloquent epitaph
for some bustling Queen Anne functionary,
his clutching comment was "Wretched man, follow"
the speaker himself eighty seven next Saturday,
and by so means wretched —

—

23.XII

I remember my father's father telling me how
his mother died of famine-fever,
caught over the Laff-door from a hungry stranger,
and fixed my trishy forever.

29/30 XII

Conversation at Yule. For R.

From Christmas sentiment can talk man on
to what, if anything, we thought, was lost
by disbelief, and if in keeping up
the seasonable legends as good stories
too good to lose, we'd be ~~not~~ much less honest -
not to report our disbelief to those
who take as gospel all. Last night you sang
the carols because you like the tunes,
although the words have no more meaning or sense
than those of any song whose bright light lifts it
from the rank of Pop. The tunes, besides,
reverberated back across the years
to when, ached, you learnt them first at home.
This woke the old nostalgia of time,
time and its changes, rarely holding on
to the quick minute with its certainty
of growing older, drawing nearer the end close.

Then you fell back to musings over death,

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death not an abstract notion, or a fact
so far off it can safely be ignored,
but death as felt experience, death of friends,
of kin, of faces never seen again
save on memory's badly blurred film.

Your mother's death - it was that moved you most;
and weighing death with death, found definition.
Pity, it was, your sister's and evoked,
pity, not grief, for her loneliness in life,
withdrawn from others, expressing nothing.
But grief, not pity, when your mother died,
the words awoke at moments when realised
since she could never know now that you knew now
the courage and the strength of that small frame
which bore and nurtured you, - and set you loose
to be a person in the indifferent world.

Then, ticking-off folks' deaths yet must follow,
in time but not in any reasoned order,
and gauging how you'd feel, if pity, grief,

or shades and levels of these, or death emerged
which would provide the inevitable challenge
to test the lack of faith by which you live,
my death, still touchstone, unsweet argument.

[68-1845]

1959 11 · 140

1960 12 · 704

1961 — —

1962 10 · 181

1963 Revisions

1964 11 · 255 + 2 revisions 22

1965 24 · 535 · [Highest total of poems for 10 years]

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