



Lyrics in rhyme

-and Sonnets

(1928-1939)

[60 poems]

notebook 7

The Passing Mask

✓

Let this last lyric of a passing day
cry its slow fading way
into some lonely crevice of your mind
Remote and strange remember that its art
once held the heart break of another heart-
whose world went dumb and blind

The time should crumble and the world should break
disaster overtake
the friendly gestured hand the gentle word
yet love and pity shall endure to be
The first green beacon on the barren tree
and the first watered bird

April 1938

Leaf

✓
O Fall of the leaf I am tired
with this sunset let me be still
The tips of blunt stubble are fired
By the slanted blade of the sun
sheathing his flame in the hill
let me smolder so and be done

The withered leaf tumbles and turns
over lazy islands of air
more lovely now as it burns
than when it was green overhead
let me draw from autumnal despair
the strength to be tired without dread.

The pigeons a dozen and two
take a half mile circle of light
they are west in the green and blue
and delicate gold of the sky
let me narrow in on my night
with that effortless certainty

Sept. 1936

Flame

✓
4
O you who are shapen of a flame's delight
in being flame yet delicate and white
who burn against the stars and are not quenched
when lake and hill in silent dawn are drenched
with plashed sunshine how many I who make
my noisy ballads for the people's sake
grow subtle in my thought and tune my song
to gentle beauty unalloyed of wrong
to lonely wisdom moving quiet ways
above the flags and tumult of my days?
Yet in your heart you must have understood
the old drums throbbing thro the leaping blood
and the new wise beyond the scope of verse
like flame you can be passionate and fierce
so to the impact of that terrible fire
I hold the Remick blade of my desire
leave leave a shining core or consume me quite
O you who are shapen of a flame's delight

April 1933

I turned my touch to Campion
and finger'd thro his book of ayres
the griefs of his sapharion
his madrigals remote despairs
mood not at all or scarce could move
my eager thought was so possess'd
by such complexities of love
as tremble in your gentle breast

March 1938

Last Load

✓

Today we carted home the last brown sheaf
and hook'd the scythe aginst the dry ^{barn} wall
the yellow borders on the chestnut leaf
the beech leaf's yellow, all.

Tomorrow we must bring the apples in
they are as big as they shall ever be
already starlings eager to begin
have tasted many a tree

And in the garden all the roses done
the sun ^{strikes gently faint and almost woe} lies gently where he once floast bold
on wither'd goldenrod and snap dragon
and tarnisht marigold

October 1937

The lollyhocks along the wall
like lantern hung pagodas tall
when soft wind from the west begins
sway courteously like mandarins
but with a sudden splash of rain
are occidental once again
and stand with beaded drops of light
as cottage homely and as bright
as when old Herrick made his rhyme
in England in King Charles' time

Sept 1939

Hay

8 ✓
Already summer crested the decline
the surf of blossom fails the high green tide
Langs lulled at full. The sullen midnight's line
of silver light has its precarious hour
A weariness now drowns on the flower
that into seed and apple has not died.

The swallows that were urgent in the eaves
turn wing less deftly. None shall pause to see
untutored fledglings fluster in the leaves
Only the hay cut wet and laid in rows
achieves that rich and aromatic close
the heart demands for all maturity.

June 1937

✓
Let but a thrush begin
or color catch my eye
maybe a spring wotter when
under a reeling sky

and all at once I lose
mortality's despair
having so much to choose
out of the teeming air

Nov. 1936

Frost

✓ 10
With frost upon the thought is clear and wise
that rain made dismal with a mist's despair
light leaps along the lashes of the eyes
A tree is truer for its being bare
The shapes that sag from neon dizzy skies
swing back to gorder in the dawnshark air

So must the world seem keen and very bright
to one whose gaze is on the end of things
who knows last summer lush, brimmed autumn's height
no promise in the inevitable strips
all stripped of shadow down to bone of light
the false songs gone and gone the restless wings

Nov. 1936

✓

Host

Set the tall white candles burning
 bring fine linen from the chest
 let the table gleam with silver
 when Lord Love shall be thy guest.

But the door push to in silence
 draw the gusty curtains thin
 speak no word above a whisper
 when Queen sorrow would come in.

Take no thought of lighted window
 lay no table sweep no floor
 when that old blind beggar Fortune
 taps the pavement to thy door.

Feb. 1932

12

For a Mild Season ✓

Do not be eager Spring to come
 this weather may betray you still
 Frost yet may strike the thrushes dumb
 and snow storm over that green hill.

Be tardy in thy burpeoning
 and bid the trees be patient yet
 lest winter take thee on the wing
 and Spring bring more than Spring's regret.

Feb. 1932

Defeat

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

I shall go forth from thence
aware of quality
and to life's violence
and languor I shall be
at once both rock and tree.

Arithmetic

Six larks are not so sweet as one
or fingers were not made to count
I lay on backen in the sun
and watcht the urgent songsters mount
til there were dozens in the sky
crowding it with monstony.

But striding thro the beaded grass
I heard a cornerake call his mate
the echoes seems to less and less
across two ledges and a gate
Twoes jaery almost. Then I knew
one cornerake's not as good as two

May 1930

There was a piper once who grew
weary of the times he knew
and begged the Woodland Queen to make
an elf of him for pity's sake

she did.

And now his piping's heard
by none save dragonfly and bird.
By none?

Ah no for when you dance
I always give a careful glance
and would not be surprised to find
his shadow falling on the blind.

Dec 1938

16
When sun hung winter high
and trees stood thin and bare
great flocks of rooks came by
bright in the shining air

and tho the light was wren
a stack men forked apart
glowed yellow til it shone
like gold upon the eart.

The year had just begun
to break frost's discipline
with flecks of gold upon
the dark green spikes of whin.

Sleek starlings in a crowd
massed for the sunset flight.
The wet earth newly plowed
was gash't with silver light

Jan. 1939

✓ For my niece

I would have her go to school
at the cragged mountain pool
learn the best arithmetic
with twelve pebbles and a stick
know by climbing hill and tree
the textures of geography
know a splash stone's widening rings
more account than kings and kings
and a bobbing scut in sight
more than all men paint or write
love rock's edges and in frost
find the pattern I have lost.
Then her body disciplined
by the sweet rigors of the wind
taught by water ice and fire
what is possible desire
taught by water fire and ice
went of thought the only vice

18
may she leave the oldest school
happy strong and beautiful

Nov. 1933

For Colin Middleton, painter.

This quiet witty tense abstracted man
crust art's full orbit in a single span
knowing the heart's worst anguish as he sought
to find the shape exactly to his thought.
And yet when all his agony is done
men will be proud to speak of Middleton.

Sept. 1939

All things were weary passing to the end
defeated now the lush advance of spring
the summer's predest blossoming
turned stale in one hot day
15 weeks of august still remain to spend.
The windless leaves were green and few as yet
lay curled beneath the foot or flat in clay
and unripe haws were on the dusty stem
in scarcely noted clusters set
with ragged tawny clumps in disarray
the lark exhausted lay
and the drab acres of the uncut corn
All waited for a frost to start the fall
to give an edge and sharpness to the sense
with simple statement of mortality
to rust the sheltered rose against the wall
to rime the grass and strip the tree
with the bright blade of its clean violence.

August 1938

Carillon

What use them to assert the nightingale
or mark on bark or whorl of curling snail.
Let the thrush gaze intent on shell and stone
the glitters caught by no eye but my own
if smask for good the nature cannot share
if void and musty can I stew / care?
I heard bells jangling for an ended world.
What little wind there was caught smoke and cold
a thinning smudge against a sunset sky
no stars as yet Two rooks flappt urgently
a chortling starling also late and lost
rustled the heavy current bush and croost
before my pausing face upon the dew

I heard bells jangle for a perisht day:
from no eye but my own light drips away.

March 1938

Swan's Nest.

The way I go is by a mere
with osiers breaking light in green
where in the autumn of the year
the nine great floating swans are seen.

But when the pond was frozen grey
and grey the sky as wing of goose
stiffnecked four rose and swung away
their parents' place no further use.

With splash of February sun
when blue night thro the tattered sky
I saw two flying after one
towards where the northern mountains lie

The two deserted parents then
unvest by loss and satisfied
built up the low round nest again

22
on grassbank by the waterside.

The weary pen cold wing and head
as if to doze away the spring
tho once or twice she rose to spread
the weary but still loving wing

A month we laid them close heed
and studied with what elegance
the old swan oars thro rush and reed
dreaming of nine great floating swans.

April 1936.

✓
Mourne Mountains

But these are not my hills they are too high
they have not been since ice ground slowly over
about to any force beneath the sky
They are too harsh for me to be their lover

The broad stone window with the flattened stream
the sheer cliff barren and the timeless peak
not even sharp against the sun's last gleam
can I find comfort in them I may speak:

for they are from a world beyond my reach
not the warm human world of broken earth
the hand-chipped flints along the gravel beach
the tilted dolmen and the baked clay hearth.

I do not fear a bare land but a high
The curlew screaming moors have no affright
The bog-brown trout-stream twisting hurriedly

24
fading light }
can flash no terror in the blackest night!

But the cold summit hurried by the rain
smothered in cloud or bannered far with snow
has all the high sublimities of pain
I leave for braver hearts than mine to know.

August 1937

Autumn takes earth again
the day breaks late and cold
My friends are older men
and heart you have grown old

Sept 1932

✓
Thirst

And I have also journey'd here
have gypsied always east and south
by dribbled wine by Flemish beer
the old mans fist across his mouth,

By water brought in jolting cart
in days of drought by featy brown
deek streams that split a hill apart
by fountains in a sunny town

by cuppt hands dripping to the wrist
by waterspiders in the well
by mountain puddle capt in mist
by cocoa in a cheap hotel

by sulky brooks on hot dry stones
by ferns that overhang a pool
by rakespring no one names or owns

and covered when the tide is full,

by tea from golden knuckled hand
of black silk lady in the gloom
by coffee from a coffeestand
by froth ring'd glass in smoky room

But where quench need it travels end?
at tumbled tavern or hostel new
with what of any merry friend
O how will taste the final brew?

June 1933

Sarcophagus

They bound her in brown linen ^{with} smear sweet spice
over her cold limbs closed her frightened eyes
tied back her jet black hair in two broad bands
and on her small breasts laid her small brown hands.
They bore her slowly in a carved box
to a brick cellar high among the rocks.

A tall man came and counted out some gold
and led me to the tomb. He was too old
to mourn for youth and beauty turned to dust.
He pointed to the box and said: You must
paint on this side and this Her father was
the Pharaoh and for her in kindness has
made this rich burial in sculptured stone
and said: He is the greatest Pharaoh known
the tallest monarch since Osiris here
put empire on the desert and put fear
on the dusk dwellers by the springing Nile.

The lion dreads him and the crocodile.

He went away. I took the colors and drew
not what the old man said but what I knew
so I shall die tomorrow when he comes
to drive the demons off with sacred drums

May 1929

Yeats in retrospect

The poet made his will:
he chose the losing side
In spite of his bony skull
his stiff cromagnon pride
has left but painted work
on the wall of the drifting cave:
and who shall decipher the mark
of hate or the symbol of love?

July 1939

China

Never for me the agate or the jade
the elegance of lacquer or the full
brush flourish over silk. Let bird horse unafraid
on the bamboostem above the rushy pool
let bronze get rust
and clay horse flake and crumble into dust.
The strange new China will be beautiful

What of the fly black eyes
the dripping sores the terror from the air
the famine in the land
the flooded acres full of the dull skies
the severed hand
the headless student lying in the square.

Never for me the agate or the jade
til the new China on her thick rich earth
sings with her jostling millions satisfied

Then let the hand that never tried
finger the clay in unfamiliar ways
or paint beneath the glaze
or mark on silk a poem newly made
of brotherhood and justice come to birth.

Jan. 1936.

The Mourne Mountains: from the Chinese
of Wang Li Hsi (- 1939) ✓

The Mourne mountains like a team of bears
tumbling into the sea
the embroidered fields like a monk's patcht cloak
spreading their skirts to every door
the peasants leisurely allowing
the chickens and dogs to wander at will
the bare trees standing silent
entangle the stranger's dream.

January 1938

October's Child

I watch the stack tilt on the girth fulfilled
rooks in the stubble rooks appeared fly home
the burst sack drip til half its store is spilled
the swathe uncut from whence the lithe hares come
and know the secret worth of being born
when the full can brims up its purple foam
and clusters haws weigh down the splintered thorn

I came in the full ripeness of the year
my mother held me from the lamb's first bleat
past bluebell days and blossoming of pear
thro sultry noons of rose and meadowsweet
over the ridge of summer til she came
weary to gaze upon the ample wheat
kindled with poppies to a sudden flame

Then when men's harvests fill the motey barn
and hope rejoicing blest it

32
she brought me whimpering in the twilight morn
to follow candles in the crowding dark
-and nursed me warm when time was dumb with snow
and rocked me quiet when the trees were stark
that woke when I began a year ago.

So tho I love the seasons in their turn
for sake of her that bore me glad thro each
when the heapt leaves are swept and set to burn
I touch a magic deeper than my speech
there is a strength and richness and an end
no other season's fledglings ever reach
The years fulfillment knows them not as friend

My child if I should ever father one
let it be born at stripping of the tree
in mellow noon of an October ^{sun}~~sun~~
in well tilled quarter of this north country
and let the full year tincture every thought
not summer's bride or spring's green urgency
to completion brought. Sept. 1936

✓
October's Child

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rooks in the stubble rooks appeared fly home
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past bluebell days and blossoming of pear
thro sultry noons of rose and meadowsweet
over the ridge of summer til she came
weary to gaze upon the ample wheat
kindled with poppies to a sudden flame

Then when men's harvests filled the motey barn
and hope rejoicing blest the laden ark

32
she brought me whimpering in the twilight morn
to follow candles in the crowding dark
-and nursed me warm when time was dumb with snow
and rocked me quiet when the trees were stark
that woke when I began a year ago.

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My child if I should ever father one
let it be born at stripping of the tree
in mellow noon of an October ^{sun}~~sun~~
in well tilled quarter of this north country
and let the full year tincture every thought
not summer's bride or spring's green urgency
but careful harvest to completion brought ^{Sept.}
Oct. 1936

Ode

Sing on and climb the sky with threads of gold
O Skylark soar lift up my troubled heart
You are not mortal. I grow slow and old
In these few narrowing days glut sense with sound
that when I seek the cold home underground
the color dies the song will not depart.
But fool! Too well I know
the song goes with the color. All must go.

But let me brood not on the songless days
when even the thin rain rilling to the stone
or the blind mouths that traffic world's cold maze
are heard not passing. Let me rather turn
to the thrill rippling sky and eager learn
all beak and feather teach to blood and bone
so that in ripeness I
composedly accept my oaken sky

High in your flight I lose the drag of time
am apeless with you in an arc of joy
Rome is unbriquet. Dan Chaucer makes no rhyme
Creation glitters new and clean in leaf
secure above the curling mists of grief
no feather singed with leaping flames of Troy
no dread for last man's death
on the red heap he makes with poisoned breath

Yet not secure. The fragile human wit
can soar but briefly and ere you descend
the clash of finite and of infinite
hurls me against the upward rushing earth
Back then to the small hope my narrow heart
finds lone and lap for as a cherished friend
for now mortality
bares talon and vane pinion over me.

I hear the song but faintly now and far
It leaves me as I go. The echoes fail.

That pulsing ounce of feathers was no star
to pin the skies forever in their place.
The grace that passes is the much more grace?
Not so. The blithest memory grows stale
The charitable mould
chokes the crest cheating lips the tongues that scold.

Unmastered yet no rival speeds such bright
arrows of music at the heart of death
no other David. But the broken light
brings silence over. Troubled and alone
I trip on bracken strike blind foot on stone
lash eye on cobweb catch a frightend breath
then by worn pathways come
down the hush hillside to familiar home

August 1937

36
Ode: The Poet on approach of Autumn 1939.

The mist at morning something in the air
hinting no more of burning leaves and wood
the grasses frosted tall trees motionless
made a deep autumn of my anxious mood
and wrapped my spirits in a quietness
beyond the time's despair
For since the spring a truant to my trade
I let themes run untethered in my mind
no dread the flux that threatens vast and blind
were thrust down the dearest poem made.

Now somehow had the mad stream's headlong rush
that snatcht and thrust us swift against the will
to strike sharp edges or be sucked beneath
with straws from meadows tugs from pinestack hill
the mud light shine the gravel's gritty teeth
set in an eddy's hush
my ripple tumbled heart to float at ease

regain a balance and an equipoise
deflected from the terror and the noise
of the dark channels plunging to the seas

Here in this still oasis of the heart
let thought return to what it loved before
God's swansdown womb, the fat translucent grape
the icescord rock above the bettered shore
the phrase or brush that snares the object's shape
so from this peace may start
a lyric molded of my dreaming mood
and labor's skill that takes on blood and bone
to find a sky and temper of its own
when I am one of death's mute brotherhood.

Sept 1939

38 ✓
Antipromethean Ode.

leave now the crest of thought's high secrecy
and the scarce breathable air
Come down come back to familiar hillock and tree
and there
take your inviolable share
You cannot dare
to stand a whole day poised against the sun
letting the unappeasable eagle tear
your quivering entrails with harsh talon and beak
Nor then the self-appointed penance done
would you have skill and language as to speak
of the adventure that men should
walk kindlier follow more lasting good
and build open ramparts of brotherhood.

Come down come back the mountain crags are bare
and only once a lost Clark scales the air.
Did you not hear him crying his dismay

and heading for the cloud hatelt fields below?
Too late returning he had mist his way
when overtaken by the plunging dark
and when dawn came you found him songless stark
shut-eyed upon a slipping ledge of snow.

Come down come back the winter of the heart
must break into a blossoming of joy
That night's cold loneliness was all your part
Time's secret is not mastered thus
The universe is not a temporary Troy
but stormed by sudden sallies glorious
Troy even itself fell not without a trick

Back then to fields and habitable places
swift blossoming, smashing showers and streaming faces
For humble prose
of cart and street and steeple
forgo the frenzied rhetoric
of toppling crags and elemental skies

40
Go back and use your eyes
on hedgehid speedwell or clipped garden rose
on hearts and faces of dull common people.

May 1932

At the Year's End.

After a christmas stands by no belief
a blank adjournment of the year's routine
with neither pushing bud nor spinning leaf
to trouble the heart with yellow or with green

a new year's eve that is no preface
as once was hanging on a midnight tongue
the spring chill shock of growing old and wise
that only mocks the soberminded young.

My face has altered. I can find no rings
garned by time's pebble at the core bare tree

and held them rigid. Nowhere passing wings
have left toothy gashes for a child to see.

My rod has struck clear water from the rock
when most I needed. But the place conspired
a heron stiff by mountain loch a flock
of slow rooks homing brought the touch desired,
a mound of earth a shaggy lamp checker's face
a voice a world of old remembered skill
joy ribbed on canvas attitude of grace
broken from stone or black upon a hill

But these may not be squared to calendar
maplet maybe but as some old seaman's chart
with puffing dolphin scroll or compass star
and in between the voyage of the heart

Dec. 1935.

42
Prelude to Decision

This is the season men in lanes may say
light lasts a cockstride longer every day
and tho' the sky's grey apron bellies snow
-and few buds show
along the turning twigs black lift with frost
yet here before the fanfare of the spring
I pause to make my sober reckoning
what may be salvaged ere the year be lost.

No spring for many bond involved in war
for me none either til aggressions are
scoured from the wide and comfortable skies
and anxious eyes
can turn intent on life release open
slow and repetitive in word and thought
cherish the gestures by our fathers taught
essaying simple gestures of our own.

To let this be to bring again the life
unregimented lazy talkative
to build a world where one might catch a glance
and stop to dance
glad of the guarantee of friendly touch
there will be found no twist of tongue or heart
where no one chides the man who waltzes apart
because they know his silence makes them rich:

to bring this life? Is it by frightened prayer
to doubtful father who may scarcely care
or whispers faith in magic old and stale
that mostly fail?

Not there. The negro moaning in the night
is mobbed by ghosts ghost-gods uncountable
sneak phosphorescent ghosts from death's cold hell
all gods retreat into the infinite.

Can art make certain justice moves in men?
Art can but jig according to the tune

This man has still locked and to break
great stones awake
a lecher king's whim crackle him to his best
and this too music from the Thunder once
at hiccough order of a halfwit prince
The hand that drew this was a coward's at last

Not there. Surrender hope of influence
Walk quietly within your painted fence
and set the paths in order tend with care
the blossoms there

Be happy to achieve a balance's shape
for hours and pulses of your family
prune your tall fancies to a fruiting tree
and bid the slow thought bulge like drowsy grape.

Well then and well. But if a roar should come
who knows what trumpet or demanding drum?
The fence field can no more than bramble hedge
turn back war's edge.

There still may smoulder house against the sky
Not dead leaves only. Not alone with spade
The loam earth broken but with bomber's load
or trench for you to crouch in jeopardy

These fail us all. Art Quality and Prayer
can have no blessing for the beam stabbed air
Here I before the great ninth wave of spring
pause wondering
if when the tides and moons have spent their power
and the cold waters have run sighing back
who left shall venture from obtusive rocks
to count old landmarks on the ocean's floor?

To win the life my aching senses need
I must be bondsmen to a narrow creed
I must strip off my fancies and desires
like flint cut tyres
and ride upon the rims that jolt and hurt
I must give over the attempted grace

Th' uncertain gestures of the dancer's pace
for honed mind sharp eye and hand alert

Instead of as before from bush and bird
obtaining beauty's retrospective word
I must attend before the order's done
make order one

with blueprint action triggered on a hair
I must become no more the man I was
vain at a trifle eager for applause
an epigram or attitude my care.

Then courage first and caution: in reserve
that love of laughter which must ever serve
to keep me wise when life the brittle thing
breaks beak and wing
upon the smooth and old sun-ketted stone
for in the strict occasions of delight
always my impulse urges me sketch out
the warm hand's mercy ere I go alone.

Feb 1937 Mar 1939

Christmas Eve.

Note in Prelude

There is a time for the crying thin

the lyric tone of the violin

There is a time for the hammer song

of the cane banded drum and the brass lunged gong.

The Song.

At ten o'clock on Christmas Eve

I thank my host and took my leave

and shut the door and hurried down

the rut road lane that leads to the town

Snow fell lightly with never a noise

making the houses look like toys

the windows shining like colored paper

that someone holds before a taper

When snow lay inches inches thick

and steel shod bells made now no click

the wind came up and cleared the sky

with a gusty broom and a husk's eye

The stars were shining knockers bright

across the great halldoon of night

The trees in the fields stood still as stone

a fur dog barkt alone . . . alone

At Graveyard Corner the old church clock

crestt at the half woke foolish cock

At Headless Cross my watch face shewd

eleven o'clock and half the road.

At a quarter to twelve I heard a sound

that battered the air and spread around

Between two stars that sang and shone

an angel trumpeted a mellow tone

Behind him far and behind the stars

seraphs leand from their flaming cars

and splendid feathers and glowing feet

slitherd along the golden street

and golden voices and golden lutes

and dulcimers and golden flutes

O high sky crying violins

awoke the coda that begins

with golden instruments golden throats
-and deep earth shaking organ notes

This Christmas morn
to you is born
a Christ again
rejoice o men

Then I saw the mother sitting on the throne
and a little laughing baby wrapped warmly in her gown
Then I saw the stable and the shepherds kneeling there
and old bearded Joseph with the starlight in his hair
and the cattle in the corner and the crib among the hay
and the droop-eared little donkey with the melancholy bray
But when I heard that sudden bray
the vision vanished clean away
and Heaven shut and the music died
and I stood alone on the white hillside

At ten past twelve I reached the town

The snow was slushy trampled and brown
and at the end of the glimmering street
a sleet-scummed puddle soaked my feet
And at the corner near my door
I saw them standing singing there
a shabby host of the weak and poor
beneath the street lamp's windy glare.
A big beat-boy beat on a thundering drum
and a thin man screech of the Kingdom Come
and a red-jack man covered over with braid
knelt in the slush and prayed and prayed
A half-starved cat crept frightened out
by the hoarse Hosanna gospel shout
a drunk man lurched from an entry's dark
into the lamplight's windy arc
and a ragged boy with his papers unrolled
blew on his fingers that were red with cold
a heavy-footed policeman trundled on his beat
with a deep chest cough and stamping feet.
And a big boy beat on a thundering drum
and a thin man screech of the Kingdom Come

November 1928

Turnley's Tower

I mounted slow the hollow stair
and sat awhile in Turnley's Tower
thinking of that eccentric man
whose dreams died in a foolish son
that litigation batten on.
Francis Turnley on orient shores
made a fortune in five years
that fifty more could hardly spend
over eighty thousand pound
buying here and buying there
in his passionate character
one estate at Drumnasole
the other here at Lushendall
In eighteen forty five he dies
in County Down at Hollywood.
He made his roads. He built a school
at Carlbough. He longed to rule
over land and man and beast
like a mandarin of the east

52

He ordered this demanded that
Janatic and deliberate
suggesting even there should be
a proselytic society
of servant girls who's hire out
to Papist farmers roundabout
and win them by good works and faith
from scarlet woman's leadlog path.
Then he made Janatic will
left the house at Drumnasole
as a haven for th' insane
under charge of clergyman
now in wiser circumstance
but had been afflicted once.
Then he ordered they should write
on a rock in all men's sight
where the basalt salt's outcrop
Craig-a-Tinnel's leather top
certain words St. Matthew spoke
in the English and the Greek

"When he sent the folk away
he went up the hill to pray
when the evening was come"
Now the hill he loved is dumb
save for cry of passing gull
or keewee crying at nightfall
Here is no lettered rock or stone
where Christ or Turnley stood alone
contested with and foolish son.
with one thing more the tally's done.
He built this tower a perfect square
rising to forty feet or near
in the new town of the Glens
where Macdonnells lorded once
a stipulated garrison
of a solitary man
armed with bayonet and gun
with a pike and with a brace
of fine pistols in a case
for the place did then decide

54
on one Daniel Macbride
if he undertook to ring
the bell at nine each evening.
Dead for ninety seven years
all his passionate desires
No high temper daunted with clay
shall make turbulent the day
Sun shall pass and moon shall rise
in the transitory skies
and the rain shall rot the stone
sand shall rub the edges down
the Turnley's live at Drumnasole
none for prayers for Francis now at all.
I have been to Drumnasole
stood beneath the waterfall
climbed the cliff the waters leap
from hung ledge and mossy steps
to the hazels at the top
I followed close the twisted course
to its mist-wrapped mountain source

passt from Hagels up to tracken
crat stone fences among wlin
til bog cotton tufts begin
and I say no waterfall
can be a man's memorial
A mountain can. He thought of that
They cheated him by law's debate
And in this very place I sit
The strict command he left is broke
They ring the bell at nine o'clock
if they remember or are free
from any great activity
like buyish fish or washing clothes
And now but I now seems to muse
on that violent eager heart
who dream'd the carver's, mason's art
shoud keep his name awhile in mind
when he was dry bones in the ground
who always thought high places were
fulfilment of his character
text cut in rock or rocklike tower

April 1938

25. Sonnets

Pour Hélène by Pierre de Ronsard

When you are very old by candle glow
spinning beside the fire with wearied brain
that rings and sings to many a merried strain
remember how I praised you long ago.
And then your servant drowsily and slow
who dozes after work will start again
at my forgotten name and that refrain
wherewith for you I wrought times overthrow

I shall lie deep in clay a misty wraith
neath myrtle shadows taking my repose
while you that crouch beside the glowing brass grate
will cry against your scorn for my young faith.
Gather today life's everfading rose:
believe me love, tomorrow is too late

March 1930

After a Political Debacle

We have stood too long at corners shouting: Come
to the drab hungry thousands shuffling by.

The count is over. Let us then go home

The people do not want us. Let them die

Let us go home. Are there not friendly fires
in comfortable places, love and song;
and we may lose the skill for such desires
at windy corners if we stand too long.

Let us go home. For never in our days
shall we behold the hope we shouted for.
There will be other men and wiser ways
to win the final battle of this war.

Let us go home. And if at any time
men press for battle let them read this rhyme

June 1930.

58
80
A fresh night wind from the forgotten north
brings hint of winter in its boisterous kiss
Tomorrow walking wet roads I shall miss
these heavy banks of green spring flaunted forth.
So in one venture autumn takes the earth
with hoarfrost etching its sharp emphasis
til every leafy hot twig stripped naked is
turned with a cleanness lacking since its birth

No doubt then sudden in my dusty prime
when I have been intent on common things
that trim a man's short hours with urgency
there'll be a sunrise glittering with rime
and a far seaward rush of homing wings
as life puts on reluctant dignity

Sept. 1932.

✓ Pathetic Fallacy

I have known men who carried to the end
as shining moment in their dusty years
a sea spread out just round a white road's bend
or concrete crying thro the moon's bright spears

a tree that tapp't the window or a field
rich with red settle or the flowering thorn
a flight of pigeons when the church bell peals,
a field of clover or a field of corn.

Am I then foolish that I set in rhyme
(Even that's demodé) these that I have known
because the tedious fashion of the time
rates steel and concrete over leaf and bone

selects for praise from sunny countryside
a langer's shadow or a pylon's stude.

June 1933

✓ Aquarium

Let wonder leave us for another place
trees bred for nurture of themselves alone:
be no rock split or turned: let stone be stone
black with the leath'ry fires of a beaten race.
Poised in the sunlit quiver of the ease
the smooth fish mocks the jet of troubled bone
turns tail or twitching features not its own
and moves superb on any plane of grace.

Learn that, if it be possible, and try
new scopes of motion dealt is in the old
no feathered rescues trumpet from the sky.
No truth remains so having once been told.
This tides of being swing unhurriedly
to strike, who knows, sunk shaft of shattered gold.

May 1935

The Bitter Gourd

✓
This angry self dismayed by fly and leaf
cold in the dawn and nervous in a crowd
seeking by day the shortest way from grief
and only stood in corner safely bound,

This little self out of its narrowness
would thrust warm eager hands of fellowship
raise fingers not to bargain but to bless
and more deft knife in school and loving grip.

Bridge me the gap then. Let the current thro.
Power singing down the channel of my mind
may reach crescendo state in narrow sluice
drive wheel, split rock light sidewalk broad and new.
Now at spring trickle you will only find
small flints not even chipped for clumsy use

June 1935

Revolution

62
80
My name is Revolution. I will speak.
You find in me no feathered sentiment.
Not pity makes me base upon the weak
the tiptoe hope of half a continent:

but law that's wrought of changelessness and change
the alternation of the upward slope
the spiral core of being tant to range
back on itself and yet surmounting hope

reach levels that deny the limited
validity that once was careful deed
th' insurgent bud that thrusts aside the dead
the growing thing's negation of the seed.

Choose then the little choice that is your own
death's rigid circle, life's inverted cone.

March 1936

Bonamargy Abbey Co. Antrim

Here where McQuillen built his God a house
behind the sandhills at the water's edge
where trout scours Margy ends in shoal and sedge
and the black nun still seeks her blessed spouse,
where sodded safely til the last carouse
the turbulent Macdonnell's, ledge on ledge,
lie rent within, where by the slanted ledge
deaf to the sea sleep men anonymous,

in this rich acre brimmed with memories
that roof the shattered walls and shuffle down
the time-chast steps with chaunted elegies,
here where a man staid tread with quiet care
still trippers gape oblivious to renown,
the golfer's shout is harsh upon the air

July 1936

Not Even Juice

There was a time a man might weave his days
into an arabesque of excellence
include the skill of gesture and the phrase
and take no thought for war's impertinence:

Let Europe thunder with a people free
or men be kings or be no longer kings
they did not vex the lonely quality
of his remote and wise imaginings.

But tho' I fly the dark and shrieking street
and pass a quiet acre of delight
the bomber's shadow furrows at my feet
or breaks the star-pact surface of my night

The war is on: and til all troubles cease
I shall not dare to make a separate peace

September 1937

Mocked by the prettiness thought of permanence
The sick desire to leave a shape or sound
That will survive when I am ordered hence
and find cold comfort bedded underground

and how whatever I leave is left to chance
event of bomb or gradual decay
an age of terror or the gay advance
of happy people and a wain day,

yet knowing life a frail and brittle thing
I set my skill against what things abide
the solid mountain and recurring spring
and need no allies rallied to my side

save such as score across my windowpane —
the transient diamonds of the rain

September 1937

Ulsterman ✓

Far back the shouting Briton in foray
The sullen Roman with his tramping host
The fair beard plaited in the Saxon way
The horned prow touching terror to the coast:

Then the dark chanting Kelt with cups and cross
The red Scot flying from a brother slain
The English trooper blowing whin and moss
The gaunt Scot praying in the thin grey rain.

These stir and mingle, keeping in my blood
and what I am is only what they were
if good in much in that where they were good —
a touch transcendent and irritable hair.

Kelt, Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane and Scot —
time and this island tied a crazy knot

October 1937

If I make quittance of myself and die
by poisoned air or poison I'll have lost
such probable delights of earth and sky
my doubtful comfort is not worth the cost.

And yet I would not die at harsh command
of any traggart. How then to survive
when the spent shrapnel cuts my knuckled hands
and only cats and cripples are alive?

Or is health valid in a shattered time
for such as I who cannot build anew
save in the trembling scaffold of a mine
that April's first bright broadside whistles thro?

So vain my fancy. Henceforth let it be
I live my life with quiet urgency

March 1938

Vacation

I have gone back into another time
have spent two days admiring lamb and goose
fried wagtail nodding slow men mixing lime
with lurching harrow tied to joggling horse

watcht dreaming ducks and black calf newly born
carried behind thin cow down narrow lane
have learned wind's habit from the slant of storm
and talked at gates about the chance of rain

flung stones at sticks skimming flat stones on the sea
leant over brook in quest of stickleback
concerned myself with rook's economy
and followed slowly sheep's close bitten tracks

and stand a small boy's wonder at a nest
with five eggs warm yet from the robin's breast

April 1938

Stallion

Caught in a wedge of clanging trams and cars
that screech their comfortable arrogance
boys shouting hoarsely of averted wars
and crooners touting queues for penny glance
a man strode anxious dragging frothy bit
as the brown stallion with the long white nose
batters the squaresets with sharp itching feet
or veers like windslapped schooner tugging loose.

Then I remember from the whinny ridge
lauding with you to watch the sleek mare run
to toss mane tassels gaze above the hedge
and whinny to the passing stallion
as proud boy trotted him along the ditch
and foolish foal lay kicking in the sun

May 1938

Immortality

I would achieve an immortality
not of this tedious mind this troubled bone
that cries for peace and whimpers finding none
to match th' unbarbed beauty of a tree
for thought convinced by nature's strategy
accepts diffusion of the skeleton
nor needs my name or features to be known
when bangles make tomorrow history

rather the immortality of song
not scribbled in an ink gone brown with rust
but clean from implicated right or wrong
such as springs wandering hotener takes on trust
sure of the blackbird's call familiar long
but not if last year's singer lies in dust

May 1938

August 1938

During this silence, innocent of song,
concerns with faces, places, shapes of stone,
things thrusting hands out eager to be known,
things true in distance proving to be wrong
on close sensation, I have lost the long
withdrawal of the sap, the undertone
of leaf's retreat. The heedless rose has blown
unmarked unneeded in the looting throng.

I turn today then from the published mask,
the attitude commended, these assays,
the imminent insistence of the task,
because the hard red berries of the law
report an older an austerer law,
a season older suddenly afraid

August 1938

72 80
after Munich

Despondent at reported violence;
the rubber club, the comrade waylaid,
the sniper on the housetop, the immense
shamefaced relief when Benes was betrayed,
all art gone barren, crazily afraid
or overcomplicated for the sense;
the wells of wisdom choked, the heart dismayed
that finds no comfort in time's evidence;

I can but turn from man's crass enterprise
that mocks his hope with its distorting pain
while yet there lags a respite from the dark,
to gaze with free unimplicated eyes
at mud daubed marigold, or mesh of rain
that runs like resin down the rough elm's bark

October 1938

Extension Lecture

I learn how once men painted bison bear
and leaping boar upon the shadowed wall
their bones bespeak them skilful swift and tall
men write large books to prove them dark or fair
til lost in willing wonder unaware
of time's cold flux I seem to hear the call
the hunter makes returning and the small
girls' laughter finding pretty shells to wear.

Yet while I read and dream and half regret
the bitter dark that quencht their smoky light
our epoch closes and this very day
a once great nation's word is overset
her statesmen traitor barter her away
and art and freedom pass into the night

October 1938

The International Brigade.

'Tis All Saints' Eve. Tomorrow they will pray
in twilight cloisters for the souls of those
who out of night magnificently rose
unnamed unnumbered into broadest day
And I who walk a stricter colder way
who early in my thought deciding chose
instead of Jancy's lyric Jact's slow prose
must half regret the words I cannot say.

All Hallows' Eve - if thought has any power
beyond proud limits let love's mercy fall
on those who went in Spain's defeated hour
from Winnipeg, Provence and Donegal,
and, by weighing well the chances carefully,
died for the dream still called Democracy.

October 1938

For My Wife

Urgent and restless since on every nerve

life's blunt or gentle fingers move and play
you pass across each thought-tormented day
no place to pause: you cut across the curve
my plodding logic maps as certain way
to that good future which we strive to serve
when people find the peace their hearts deserve
Have merry years and happily grow grey.

Could you but rest, could you but stay to be

the eager dancing creature nature planned -
that yet seems in some democracy
of joy the shyest woodfolk understand
there is no time for sloth's warm ecstasy,
for you to rest, for you to stay your hand.

November 1938

For Arthur M. Alister late Royal Marines
1929-39 attendant Belfast Art Gallery.

Straining and breathless savagely intent
he argued out his case relentlessly
they bade him wait till the cold spell was by
he packed his box and begged until it went.
The staff surrendered and the word was sent
of his returning. Then with tearless eye
not drugged with hope now, knowing what it meant
the tall gaunt man was driven home to die.

For the wide ward with bed remote from bed
with windows open to the morning air
for punctual needle putting him to sleep
he wanted more to lay his aching head
on greasy back of long familiar chair
with wife and child the darkest watch to keep

March 1939

Aspiration at Thirty One

I dream at sixty being large and wise
with grey streaked beard and tumbled shocks of hair
with slow paced speech well charged courageous fair
a ready laughter in my weary eyes
saluting freely each new enterprise
no midnight hour surrendered to despair
nor stung to anger when young men declare
the images I loved mere fantasies.

At sixty so. Content in having known
a richly textured love a friend or two
achieved a shape and accent of my own
for what the marching years had proved astute --
Yet in the gaps aled what chilling dew?
What gutters light? What baring of the bone?

March 1939

Summary.

At summer's end before the harvest's in
and men content or discontent assess
the stubborn profit of their business
with cloud and cloud I venture to begin
my own appraisal for my discipline
the needling sun's encounter none the less
dare find in drought and thunder ought to bless
and count among my treasures thorn and thorn

How stands my harvest? Where the ripest yield
for scattered year that promise little worth?
Gazed over now on this slow august day
I name the net in terms of stack thick field
ironic islands in warden'd earth
some corners unequivocally gay.

August 1939

I tried to find a verse to fit my mood
of labor skill then somehow confident
to make a measure of the road I went
beside the stook rows and rook guarded wood:
long having watcht the craftsman's attitude
and how the little words may be bound and bent
to catch and hold I knew I am lent
some novice mystery of that brotherhood.

But when the words find place and pace in some sound
the war upon the world's edge blunders in
as tongue by tongue the dial fingers round
and the still evening's shattered with the din
til all my careful craft joy in craft is found
frail as the hammock web the spiders skin

August 19 39

With heart untroubled, never knowing grief
save youth's dream dwarf in coming - nothing more,
friendship outgrown that seemed all life before:
through years have made the little pitiful brief.
Not then for me the heart's disasters chief -
death yet of him that taught, or her that bore,
the love denied full body, and the shore
in exile trod, the wreck on homeward reef.

They say from sorrow art must touch its height
blindness and madness, bloody fate of friends,
life argues that from pain all wonder springs
May I find rather in the failing light
the slow achievement of small peaceful ends
the quiet wisdom of the rested wings.

August 1939

