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DUNSTAN THOMPSON

POEMS

POEMS

DUNSTAN THOMPSON

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To
PHILIP TROWER

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LARGO

To *William Abrahams*

○ F those whom I have known, the few and fatal friends,
All were ambiguous, deceitful, not to trust:
But like attracts its like, no doubt; and mirrors must
Be faithful to the image that they see. Light bends
Only the spectrum in the glass:
Prime colours are the ones which pass
The less distorted. Friendship ends
In hatred or in love, ambivalence of lust:
Either, like Hamlet, haunted, doting on the least
Reflection of remorse; or else, like Richard, lost
In vanity. The frozen hands
That hold the mirror make demands;
And flexing fingers clutch die vision in a vice.
Each one betrays himself: the ghostly glazier understands
Why he must work in ice.

All friends are false but you are true: the paradox
Is perfect tense in present time, whose parallel
Extends to meeting point; where, more than friends, we fell
Together on the other side of love; where clocks
And mirrors were reversed to show
Ourselves as only we could know;
Where all the doors had secret locks
With double keys; and where the sliding panel, well
Concealed, gave us our exit through the palace wall.
There we have come and gone: twin kings, who roam at will
Behind the court, behind the backs
Of consort queens, behind the racks
On which their favourites lie who told them what to do.
For every cupid with a garland round the throne still lacks
The look I give to you.

The goddess who presided at our birth was first
Of those in fancy clothes fate made us hate to fight;
The Greeks with gifts, good looks, so clever, so polite,
Like lovers quick to charm, disarming, too. well versed

In violence to wear weapons while

They take a city for a smile.

By doomed ancestral voices cursed

To wander from the womb, their claws plucked out our' sight,

Who nighttime thinking we are followed down the street

By blind men like ourselves, turn round again, and wait

Only to hear the steps go past

Us standing lonely there, at last

Aware how we have failed; are now the Trojan fool

For all the arty Hellenistic tarts in plaster cast:

The ones who always rule.

We are alone with every sailor lost at sea

Whose drowning is repeated day by day. The sound

Of bells from buoys mourning sunken ships rings round

Us, warning away the launch that journeys you and me

On last Cytherean trips in spring.

There the rocks are where sirens sing

Like Nightingales of death. But we,

Hearing excitements, music for the ear, have bound

Our voyage to find its ending where the sterile sand

Spends pearls and coral on a skull. The sailing wind

Is with us now and then: blows high

As halcyon clouds across the sky:

Falls fast to doldrums while the moon is also young,

Untided, half to harvest whole. See how our sirens die

Before their song is sung.

What we have always wanted, never had, the ease,
The fame of athletes, such happy heroes at a game,
Beloved by every likely lad, is not the same
As what we have; these measured methods how to please
 An indolent and doubtful boy,
 Who plays at darts, breaks for a toy
 The sometime valued heart. Why seize
The moment in the garden, on the stair, to blame
Our nameless Eros for his daring? Too little time
Is left for love. When we come back, what welcome home
 Will he award our wounded eyes?
 What uniform be his disguise
In dreams, when sleeping sentries always march away
Once more to war? Now is our novelty: we may surprise
 The faun at end of day.

Make no mistake, my soldier. Listen: bugle calls
Revoke your leisure like a leave, invade your peace
With orders on the run, and, loud as bombs, police
Your life for death. The poet's blood-brick tower falls:
 Even his vanity is gone,
 Which leaves the loser all alone.
Not private poems, but public brawls
Demand his drumbeat history, the pulse that must increase
Until his heart is ransomed from its jewel. Revise
Your verse. Consider what kings' killer did to those
 Who wrote their way between the shells
 That last delusive time. Farewells
Are folly to our serpent queen. She will not sign
Discharge of conscience for a masterpiece, but, hissing, tells
 Failure in every line.

We are the mountaineers who perish on the slopes
Of heaven high and perfect Himalayan peak:
Exhausted by the cold, we can no longer speak
To one another—only signal by the ropes.

Those best before us have, alas,
Plunged through a gentian-blue crevasse:
The snow-blind flaw. Their glacial hopes
Shine as a stream of desperate stars, icebound, and bleak
That mock their nimbused glory from a frigid lake,
Where we stand now, they stood much farther: climbing like
Legendary guides. But traps
Were waiting for their last collapse:
Inviting visions from the moon world air—misplace
A step to follow, dance to death. They fell, so we, perhaps,
May do as well with grace,

Now noble guests depart for good, wearing our loss
Like flowers. O Damon, decked with asphodel, who moves
Among the shadow dwellers. But he shall hear the hooves
Of unicorns at gallop, see them, coursing, toss

Their fluted horns above the cool
Unpoisoned waters in love's pool,
And, kneeling, lay their heads across
A beatific virgin's breast. The day approves
His passage: sunlight on the secret river gives
Bright benediction to his boat. Elysian waves
Bear him, the hero, far from us
To join the gods. Illustrious!
No words may worship him. The laurel is not all
That withers at the roots, since we, lamenting him, are thus
Autumnal for his fall.

Armed, say you? Armed, my lord. So, likewise, you and I,
Who with the butchered ghost must stalk the battlements,
Shall watch—cold-comfort guards—how lonely lie the tents
Where strangers sleep together just before they die.

Look where their banners in the air
Are half-staff hung. The cockcrow dare
Of dawn is mourning in the sky.

Our thoughts like bayonets blood time, What precedents
Of passion shall we use to brave the coward? Once
Bombs are as roses, will he kiss the black-heart prince?

Honour, more heavy than the sea,
May overwhelm both you and me

To give no quarter choice at all: gay boys, whom war
Won janizary; youths who flung away their shields. So we

Are mort a Singapore.

Narcissus, doubled in the melting mirror, smiles
To see himself outfaced by tears, and, sorrowing, hands
His ace of love to harlequin of hearts, who stands
The distant edge of laughter. Time's joker still compiles

Trick score of triumph, trumps the queen

To play his knave of emeralds. Green

Gamester reflects the water guiles

Of palming, reads the gambled cards, and then demands

Another pack to shuffle. But the glass partner bends

The fate five fingers round a saint's stigmata, wounds

By dealing diamonds from his nails.

No marvelled metaphor avails

To vantage this beloved impersonator twin,

Whose coronet, crown crystal, qualifies a peer. My voice fails,

In your name poems begin.

WATER MUSIC

O VER the river, sleeping, sleep your nights
Of never my delights, of famous flights,
Not mine, outshining moonstone stars, displayed
Like summer sailors from black water drawn
To dance on malachite, to prance parade
Past queens last-quarter afternoons of dawn,
First sunset mornings, break-of-day midnights,
O as the snow swans end their Rhenish flights.

Over the river, sleeping, sleep your dreams,
Where heir apparent or presumptive seems
Already king to Nibelung, gold dwarf,
Mock maiden, and the jewel box knave at hearts,
Each standing on the beach, each on the wharf
To wave farewell to you, whose birdboat starts
Rising from submarine savannah dreams,
O as the mermaid is the merman seems.

Over the river, sleeping, sleep your love,
Ice as the crystal moon, so soon the dice
Of death, announcing lunar empire here,
Fall like the songs of Lorelei, like all
The bishop's towers, like flowers, like every tear,
While you, child of the mist, at last, must call
Green knight from water grave to dive for love,
O as my eyes are seven on your dice.

VILLANELLE

To John Cesner

THE dark is danger though it dawns each day.
Disaster knows me as a mother does.
The sun will set no matter what I say.

This paradise, or pleasure park, is gay
At noontime only. Night destroys the rose.
The dark is danger though it dawns each day.

Sirens are silent; panpipes cannot play;
Their melodies are mute; their songs dumb-shows.
The sun will set no matter what I say.

The faun must leave the forest, go away
To summer countries where Narcissus grows.
The dark is danger though it dawns each day.

So spring presents the garden god. This May
His murder is more marked than men suppose.
The sun will set no matter what I say.

The boatman takes my penny for his pay.
Disaster knows me as a mother does.
The dark is danger though it dawns each day.
The sun will set no matter what I say.

JACK OF HEARTS

I

LOVING you more than myself, I offer only
The mirror broken, O at the first word spoken
By you: quicksilver argent through all marrow
Of skull and skeleton; Christ's crystal token,
Spun from the showcase—the one place where the lonely
Hero, passing the glass, reflecting his sorrow,
Looks for the devil, and is rarely mistaken:
Behold the jewel for any fool to borrow.

But I am no thief. For this my grief is formal,
A manner, so to speak, of giving pleasure
To you, who measure me, but not with metric
Standards, nor assay my worth by faith in normal
Laws of balance. You cause the keeper of the treasure
To diamond-cut the bloodstone from the rhetoric.

II

There was no bell. Nor telegram to tell
Me: "All is lost. Flee for your life." Nor call
Intoned by the telephone: "Be warned in time.
For there's no coming back, no second chance."
Nor fancy glance beckoning me aside to rhyme
"Beware" with "There." Nor hand that appalled the wall,
Writing, writing, writing: "There was no bell."

Time is, time was, time's yet to be. Love grants
The absolution of the dove to temporal crime,
Breaks the mirror, stops the clock, and in the fall
Brings back the spring to every wishing-well.
So in that moment, moment of no time at all,
What zenith bell you rang, what crisis chime
Pitched high, O ever higher than my angel chants,

Exaggeration of sensation shows
 The poet loves a person not a poem.
 So you, my dangerous darling, my delight
 And doom, are like the tomb tricks Merlin knows;
 The foolish fever, holidaying schoolboys home;
 And, O so once again, the plane in flight.

All poems are praise, all lust a kind of love.
 But I celebrate the fate of those whose diffidence
 Led them instead of passion; who were of
 That passive nation featuring the future tense;
 The what have we here, better the half a loaf;
 All looking-glass lads who found their class a defence
 Against not being a bastard; those always above
 The in-want-of-a-word battle. For them I write you nonsense.

IV

Here where there is nothing to fear except life,
 I find the knife in the wound, the blood-red blade
 Arrayed against my so-called heart, And all the art
 Of witchcraft, such as I laughed at once, is prayed
 For now. How if those killer sisters, crazy to start
 Operations of love, thrice be bitch, each be my wife.

My destiny is hastened, O not by a star but a war,
 And somewhere, yes, already, I march out to disaster,
 Not needing to guess the place by blessing a better
 One for you. But what does it matter whom it is for,
 So long as the fact is death. Meanwhile, and much faster,
 While my hands drop from the clock, your airmail letter
 Canonizes tomorrow, and, though yet to be written, means more
 To me than poetry, means not the furies at the door.

LAMENT FOR THE SLEEPWALKER

THE lion is like him and the elusive leopard:
Nine lived, he ranges—killer cat—my heart.
Green is the hanging moss, and green the jungle
Creeper: green where the gold plantations part
Their bamboo branches for a murderer's head.
In green courts he eats meat from the green dead.

See, like a rajah, how he ravens fine food.
The long claws fork their lightning; diamond, his teeth,
Glitter of jewel jaws, dazzle—glaze their mirrors
Black blood and purple, stained points of glass. Beneath
Lascivious fur, his regal muscles flex,
Digesting fire, the marrow root of sex.

At bat-call sleeps: at serpent-hour is waking,
My beautiful and butcher beast, once more
The prowler from the palms; and stalks, O hunter
Hidden in death's ambushade, love going before
The daylight with a levelled spear. What time
He gives by lemon tree, he takes by lime.

Sprung from his high point, Tiglon, Prince of Asia,
His forepaw threads through scarlet sockets—blind
Since the great nails pitted sapphire: ice-tipped needles,
Magnetic to their lodestar, flashing, find
Out violet veins, whose midnight rivers race
To Golconda for their trysting place.

Where skullbone banners, no pity flags, are flying
Before the cruel and radium caves, he lairs
His treasure. There, while jackals scream, Lord Vulture,
Wing-caged in crystal, sings his subtle airs
Of praise; recalls how orchid adder hissed
Above the crypt when lion and lover kissed.

Nightmare is livelong by a never-ending:
In the most mandrake forest, I walk, love lost,
Through panther grass towards no good morrow. Agave
Leaves like hundred years impale my ghost
On yesterdays of youth. At crossroad stands
The strangler with his four and frantic hands.

OCEANIC ODE

BRAIDED like bravo, gold as gay day gallant,
Love's ensign flagged my fleet, decked ship with signals,
O more than commodore, commanded cannon
Fire forever.

You were so many snapshot minutes, such perfect
Photographs of fun. Time's black-page album
Displays you for a picture-postcard witness:
This charmed the traveller.

I see you now, the fancy boy of heroes,
Bold as if life were ballet, you the dancer,
Who—swan surrounded by romantic robots—
O'erleap the future.

But history hates the humble, pins her ribbons
On flagrant butterflies whose wings mean murder;
So you, exalted not from radio station,
Like poems are precious.

Where gardens once, where fountains always flowering
Kept summer solstice through the rose of autumn,
Now leaves are cancelled. Triton springs from water
Fall to winter.

So see war's salamander burn, fire angel;
Emblazed with swords like fencer foil the dragon,
Even the submarine success is doubtful:
How drowns the German?

Surrender not. There are no sweet surrenders
Left to the lonely, left to those whose longing
For friends explodes a lifetime charge. I wish you
Fair winds, my sailor.

NOR MARS HIS SWORD

To *Richard Hager*

MY life is legends of the yellow haired
Who coin their eyes with money from my hand,
And seeing through me their good looks endeared
To the rough boatman, go, laughing, to a far land.
Each burnished boy, his riches squandered, spends
My fortune to persuade me we are friends.

You were the first—but may not be the last
Contriver, O death-in-life long lover. Time
Which we failed at school; time when devotions past
Reason ransacked us—what moonlight for crime:
That time runs out. Now I besiege a bad age
With courage. And you in a wrecked square rage.

Tomorrow I may not give you. But today
My heart, as instance, for your faithful watch?
Why, you shall have it, if one word I say
Lights up the nightshade by a striking match.
You turned me once against myself, and for
Your welfare I can offer nothing more.

At moments such as this my failure takes
Wing like the swan, and, singing, flies through death,
Air of the sad daredevil. Tears, these snowflakes
Mantle the ruined duchies underneath
My eyes. "God have mercy on us both," you said,
And looked in the mirror at the glassy dead.

Angel of anguish, suicidal saint,
Dear friend with a sunburst for a martyr's crown,
I am your praising enemy, a faint
Fellow, but the broken voice is still my own.
Pray, rest—the world is wide awake. In heaven,
I believe, even our deaths are forgiven.

*IN ALL THE ARGOSY
OF YOUR BRIGHT HAIR*

WHOM I lay down for dead rises up in blood,
Drawn over water after me. His wavering
Footfall echoes from the ocean floor. Blow,
Ye winds, a roundabout. These bully sailors flood
My eyes with tears, treacheries, But his voice shivering
North in lamentation is all I now know—
Whose million miles, once worth gales to be glad,
Tell me last look was best photograph I had.

When that damask duke took my heart for hound,
I dogged him with praises, with poems, a beggar's homage.
His blue eyes, fencing like a dance of swords,
Ringed me from foemen, were night lights. I found
He turned my head from death's entrancing image,
Gold in the desert sun, who sang: "What words
You want, I have." He saved me from my own hand
And the five assassins nervous for the grandstand.

My whole life in gratitude does him no good.
Whose happiness was dancebands, beer, and baseball,
Talked love to be polite. But the soldier boy
Grows up, goes after the goddess in the barbed-wire wood
Who sells him secrets for a firing squad. This tall
Young man, this blond young man, his mother's joy,
Must kill her first, his father next, He shall ride
To the top of the hill where three thieves died*

The whores of Wardour Street, the Soho whores:
"Give us a light, dearie." But I have no match.
Now the inconsolable year hazes with twilight,
Only the cold phantasmal rose burns out-of-doors.
Inside, the lamps are lit. If I should watch
All autumn nights, I'd see no ghost. My light
Fingered friend stole the world away. Imperilled heirs,
You of the equal sadness, give him your prayers.

CIRCULAR TERROR

AFTER the drink, and after much too much
To think about—the bills; unanswered letters
From friends now fathom fived by war, who touch
Like nerves a wound; and envy of my betters
For poems I cannot write—after all this,
I am persuaded by a second drink
To try another bitch betrayal, kiss
Goodbye my swimmer when he starts to sink.

My debtors sand the seven seas, suggest
Eternity like any Jesuit Joyce
Of words. My money and my mercy wrest
Away from me the foghorn's haunted voice
That praises rock of ages. I am lost,
Lilac and lavender, a faded south
Of sweetheart roses, pink as a drink, that cost
Only a wordless gesture from my mouth.

The land of desolation rises out
Of water dreams where looms my drunken boat,
Cargoed with love apples, red as ruin, rout,
Rebellion—end of friendly Jacob's coat,
Too many colours. I protest my wit
Is shipwrecked by the lack of sailor's art
To read my compass. Drink disasters it,
And with it breaks once more the cut-glass heart.

ARTICLES OF WAR

I

THE dead young man stood up in his grave:
"Grieve, grieve for me," he said. "I was brave
As the best of you successful few
Who followed your hero home from war,
Haloed with laurel leaves that grew
Like legends and curled like snakes your hair.
I was there—but not to live, not to save
Even the life-given love I gave.

O wave, wave to me across the loss
Of laughter, and, after you pass, toss
Me what are more than flowers in your smile;
While I, death's dandy, string these tears
For pearls on unstrung years that while
Away no daytime fame like yours.
The mask of memory greengrows the moss:
But where the worms work—there is my source.

You, false to me then, be true instead
Now when the stone crown crushes my head,
Be the king's friends when no king reigns
Save in the exiled grave, be the bell
That rings from hell my famous thanes,
Be court, be kingdom, be my most of all,
Be mindful of me in the loveless bed."
The dead young man went back to the dead.

II

The boy who brought me beauty brought me death;
Like laughter he came after me, came through
The dew of danger to come down to earth.

Not as I dreamed he seemed, but as a stranger
Met at a railway rendezvous—a new
Announcer on the deadly nightshade hour.

But strong as anger and powered from every finger,
Skyhigh his hand commanded me to flower
My dragon tower with love's heroic rose,

Who throws the flame, corona crests his name
Like lilac Lucifer? who flaring goes,
Galaxy of glitter, hailing stars in hell?

I could tell as well the tiger to be tame
As ask this prince of risk how now he fell:
His secret is more brazen than a bell.

My ace of swords is words away from doom;
And I am made a merry maypole groom:
A jack of hearts, life's fumbling tumbling fool.

All my immediates are here: the fear
Of failure follows Narcissus from the pool
Cool as a death's-head to his bed of glass.

Alas, the leaves are red that feed on blood,
Are torn by thorns to valentine the grass:
My garden grows when winter snows are near.

But now is not for fancy dancing doubts
When war shouts down dead aeroplanes, down flood
Of fliers flapping wings like eagle scouts.

This is the kiss of peace, my dove of death,
To weave like laurel through your olive wreath:
Now strike the hour and let time's towers break the earth.

III

Whirled in the waltz when by the bagpipe skirled,
Our fun was done with laughter, went after tears
And terror—war's era, like a searchlight curled
With night around the sound of planes, appears
 O as love above the falling years.

Not you nor I are drawn by dawn, who sight
The bright before the morning moon of sorrow:
West, while the dragons over Asia fight,
East, as the swans of Europe die, we borrow
 Time whose clocks and mirrors mock tomorrow.

Revolvers fire their salvos: poems like a kiss,
The instant whisper pledging peace, outrage
Not the heart already, but the mouth to miss
The pulse of peril when the lips engage:
 Death is the chance we take to come of age.

Whether alone with loneliness, or gay
At drinks in the cabaret of fallen angels,
Our doom is easy through the room: there to stay,
Lazy, voluptuous, waiting—equate the angles,
 Springs like the lion and like the leopard mangles.

Our season of success has every minute hands
To gesture haste—no words to waste, and shows,
A finger on the danger, where our stranger stands
Ready to rifle us of luck: the devil knows
 How many marvels we could still propose.

But if the spectre on the stair is there
At all, the sunlight on his hair shall cherish
Green crowns of flowers: though powerless queens despair
Of honour, gold is the mould for kings who perish
 Like Lucifer with hell for passion's parish,

So we are lost, by careless history filed
As smiles and memories for the famous friend:
Still we, chancing romantics, must be heiled
With Hitler by the human omens of our end:
Even our souls forgiven, ourselves pretend.

Suppose you had by heart the stressed heroic lines,
To act the part—elected, had Hamlet's choices,
Would you choose well? and I—say fame defines
My poems with those whose seraphim rejoices,
Would I be graced with such celestial voices?

No: we are children wastrelled by the war,
Idle mollicoddles, mothers' darlings, fools
Who fancy aunts to air their summer seashore:
In short, the lads who love their lovely schools.
Murder is horror: like love breaks all the rules.

There's little left, and what is left is leaving
As fast as trains we missed, or beauties kissed:
Cheque cashed, and, cancelled, bill: no use deceiving
Ourselves that we are final on death's general list.
Like time is nothing more for me to tell:
Yet, at this moment, O I wish you well.

IV

At the end, at the end, there is time,
Like the past, like the past, to be mourned
Over and over again, but the time
Is so short, is so short, I am warned
O to spend with a friend my last time.

So with life I would have you be gay
As the carnival waltz at a dance,
All glitter, all lights, always gay
Like laughter, champagne, a romance
With the one who has fun being gay.

May the talk, may the joke, may the kiss
Still stay for a day, for a week,
While the smile on the face that you kiss
Stays still as a place, when you speak
Not a word to be heard but a kiss.

At the end, at the end, there is love
To mock time in the mirror, the clock,
Which I turn back, returning like love
Is returned by the tide to the rock,
O to send to a friend my last love.

*PROTHALAMIUM
FOR THE BLACK PRINCE*

To Anthony Aitches

MIDNIGHT, The gaydog heart bays moon and murder.
Our loneliness is like an island's when
The mail boat leaves never to sail back again.

You brought us love letters and drinking parties.
As tall sailors with yellow hair, your eyes
Widened our lives beyond the seagulls' cries.

Or as young soldiers new come home are giddy,
You told us of foreign books, how the girls
In port cafe's looked after your water curls.

We were your knowing guide to island customs,
Showed you a temple where the priest is slam
By humming bees hived in his golden brain.

On long walks with us through the native quarter,
You heard our music, watched the ritual dance
Of beggars, acrobats, and boys of chance.

You were the charming unofficial traveller,
Who praised our parks, our public gardens. Where
The veiled statues stood you knelt in private prayer.

We were enchanted. Surely, you might welcome
An audience with our pearl and coral king
Who words the songs that wanton dolphin sing.

You smiled, and failed us. No, you must be leaving
Now, at once. "Time," you said, "holds nothing here
For the last moment. Time is to disappear."

Goodbye, the poet's friend, gone far as legends.
You sleep on shore, white sand your bride, while we
Wake with the green and never loving sea.

TARQUIN

THE red-haired robber in the ravished bed
Is doomsday driven, and averts his head,
Turning to spurn the spoiled subjected body,
That, lately lying altar for his ardor,
Uncandled, scandalizes him, afraid he
Has lost his lifetime in a moment's murder:
He is the sinner who is saint instead;
This dark night makes him wish that he were dead.

What daring could not do, the drinks have done:
The limbo lad communicated one
Last sacrament, and, fast as falling, heaven
No longer held a stranger to emotion,
Who, like a star, unsexed, unshamed, unshriven,
Was hurled, a lost world, whirling past damnation:
Circled by chaos but by eros spun,
The devil burned much brighter than the sun,

This bellboy beauty, this flamingo groom,
Who left his nickname soul too little room
For blood on blades of grass, must now turn over,
Feel for the fatal flower, the hothouse sterile
Rose, raised in no god's praise, and, like death, never
Again enjoyed, must make his madness moral:
Washed by the inland waters of the womb,
The salt sheet is his shroud, the bed his tomb.

THE THIRD MURDERER

To Howard Turner

I MASQUE OF THE KING AT ARMS

THE mourning skies of England weep my victory
And with tears take me to the vacant heart:
By scorched grave, in church wide open like a skull,
I kindle fierce crown of candles; but, valiant
Though they blaze, eyes more brilliant than fever start
From the locked head, shoot down my slipt sea gull.

Where time's lookout watchful by a sudden ocean
Shouts you compatriot of terror, I grip
The pearled periscope, spy, through fish bowl eyes, luck fly
Like eeries—not wish you mine, whose mirror-murders,
Geared by this blood greased hand, assaulting, rip
Away the milksud waves, O to blow you hell high.

Now searchlights show their crucifixions in heaven
I hear waltzes and lies. Am led, even by dear
Voices, still the flawed crystalline faces, to silt
You deep in labyrinth palace, bed sleeping beauty
With the killer's kiss. So swan in opera, queer
But alto boy, exalts the imperial box of guilt.

How shall I pray, death's anchorite of kisses,
For two thieves at their gothic crossing, reprieved
In place of suicide, London, and underground?
Our only wonder, love's awkward fumbling gesture,
Is ambient, is a best mercy, so ungrieved
Machines of glitter move along like the war wound.

II *ALL FRIENDS, ALL SUICIDES,
THE ENAMOURED DEAD*

All friends, all suicides, the enamoured dead
With violets from their eyes, and in their hair
Forget-me-nots, are gilded romantics, sped
By our wishes, and sung on the swan stair.

They dance, O my masquer, down
Arcades of cannon who crown

Peace in the carolling bed with bomb's burst and the teardrop
flare.

Each enemy his furious charm, no less
The compelling ardour of war's guilty heart,
Together turn us to each other, and bless
This world of kisses, losses, and fine art.

We live and, lovers, are
Locked in one shooting star,

For who die, their grief to guess, going alone must fly apart,

These pass, the gallant and the violent, brave
In furs like polar boys, who, leaving, lend
Their praises to warm houses, give the grave
Last letters, and have luck for money to spend.

In the stabbing torchlight, they
Smile once and walk away:

And we say goodbye, and they wave to us at the street's end.

Time flowers their fingers, and a young man springs
Through hoarfrost, through the winter dinged by hate,
While here, from this cold city, where gangster kings
Nailed youth in shrouds, we hang flags for a last fete.

Our names are published, known
To the knights who sleep alone:

Stone fingers touch gold wedding rings, but the bones lie desolate.

Triumphant hours like diamonds shine between
This moment and its meaning, are omens spun
From love, whose moonlight fountains, over green
Passionate dreamers, mist the still bright gun.

How in these vespers, death
Whispers from every breath—

But gorgeous ghosts may keen: if we wake, sweet prince, the night
is done.

III *REVENGE FOR LOVE*

Through nights of dynamite their meteors burn,
Our rockets rooked, flame flaked like foam, the wish
Failing and falling, while tired automatic flyers turn,
Pinkshot eyes, the air to fire, the love to ash,
Pity those pilots too perfect to be alive,
But pity yourself, their projector, on the high dive
Down to this drunken city. You have no houses here to crash.

Why like the scarab, a jewelled spider, weave
Silk from self centre, black blood catacombs,
To spin my hanging for bride brother's bed? How fast friendships
grieve
To hate. I see the swans float over the Thames
With rotten garbage, sucked under by the Isle of Dogs.
At hellgate bar, airman I cared for damns me; his decalogues
Hail home, unman my epicene admirers proffering diadems.

If you are dressed to kill, no fumbling off
Of clothes to plunge in swimming pools of lust
Washes you clean from the rank stink of fear. Clown-flushed
robots cough
Once from electric lungs, and *Consumtnatutn Est*.
Gaylord, not the lime moon's ghost, kiss our rock-a-bye world
good night.
Soft, you, a girlish boy, the vixen foxed, whose furred teeth bite.
Boom—from no friend's far flung death. Your tantrum nerves
sing him to rest.

What do you hear, my bomb-shy hero? When
You ascend the moving stairs to terror, red
Radiant trains, careen of window diamonds flashed by men
In uniform for feeling, race past the sad
Shelterers underground. Where they shall battle, lilies first
Flower the sun kings, gunned in their aromatic noon. They take
the worst
War wins, and bless not flags nor the mad great but love their
life had.

Now through the siren's sobbing voice you speak:

"O by dying is no safety. I have died
To music. Listen! The radios. Our drumhead tyrants shriek.
My manhood leans, like the lurching crazy arches, splayed
Across London, and I, as these incinerated churches, keep
Silent. I lacked my looks one deadmarch day, Go, weep
Yourself. I feel no love, no hate, Only, to my sorrow, I am
afraid,¹¹

In the ocean of your single tear, my heart
Sinks like the shimmering iceberg, and that green
Deep receives my pride, a winter island cracked apart
By violence through the summer. Here all vain
Glory drowns. A sea mist wreathes those towers; and those
Terraces of snow, where the cold crystal fountains froze
For beauty, startle, and on the sweet salt sea they fall like rain.

But I can promise only poems. My maniac mood
Presents to every friend a farewell gift,
His name, the dragon charm, alas, the last time said. Youth I
pursued
Overtakes me for a word to thank, and prince, bereft
Of power, breaks the great seal, weeping. Remember, should I
live
In glass, you kept me there against my will. I have nothing to give
You, says the panic soldier in retreat. If you had left me, I had
no one left,

*THIS LONELINESS FOR YOU IS
LIKE THE WOUND*

THIS loneliness for you is like the wound
That keeps the soldier patient in his bed,
Smiling to soothe the general on his round
Of visits to the somehow not yet dead;
Who, after he has pinned a cross above
The bullet-bearing heart, when told that this
Is one who held the hill, bends down to give
Folly a diffident embarrassed kiss.
But once that medalled moment passes, O,
Disaster, charging on the fever chart,
Wins the last battle, takes the heights, and he
Succumbs before his reinforcements start.
Yet now, when death is not a metaphor,
Who dares to say that love is like the war?

*LEAVE PRIDE TO THOSE
WHO HAVE ALREADY DIED*

LEAVE pride to those who have already died.
Even in heaven they need it more than you;
There—where no one is lonely, where by your side
Stands the lover of ever you—there the two
Completely one celebrate the state of the sun,
Famous at last, past peril from hell's cold harm,
And, O time rhymed, beginning, not yet begun,
By angels gloried, circle the centre of their charm.
But now only humility is the right disguise,
For the devil, good-looking as a movie star,
Moves among us, conversing his clever lies
Over music and drinks and pleasure, at war
With what we want most though it cost our art,
The end of every poem, the always loving heart.

*THIS TALL HORSEMAN,
MY YOUNG MAN OF MARS*

THIS tall horseman, my young man of Mars,
Scatters the gold dust from his hair, and takes
Me to pieces like a gun. The myth forsakes
Him slowly. Almost mortal, he shows the scars
Where medals of honour, cut-steel stars,
Pin death above the heart. But bends, but breaks
In his hand, my love, whose wrecked machinery makes
Time, the inventor, weep through a world of wars.
Guilt like a rust enamels me. I breed
A poison not this murdering youth may dare
In one drop of blood to battle. No delight
Is possible. Only at parting do we need
Each other: together, we are not there
At all. Love, I farewell you out of sight.

*HYD, ABSOLON,
THY GILTE TRESSES CLERE*

To William Manson

YOUR eyes like islands lure the wanderer now
From salt-sea travels, water world of tears;
And welcome, O as hyacinthine spring
After a wintertime, your lips allow
Expense for roses on a lawn of spears
To show the soldier who is killer king.

What wisdom has the heart which worships God
Only by indirection, by grace of gold
And tiger hair, extravagant like sun
Light? How is praise made perfect when the nod
Of a halcyon head exalts my hand to hold,
Heraldic acolyte, this sword-shaped gun?

The question never finds an answer: boys
Who take to talking take to drink as well;
And I, rejected now by heroes, write
My name like mist around the secret convoys
Of those I love, whose dogwatch kept, still tell
Glass beads for one another through the night.

You too are one of them. You also mean
The figure from the frieze, the scarlet page
At stirrup, groundfall, mercy in between;
So I must martyr you, must disengage
My heart, that sad spectator, from a scene
Where war unwinds you like a clock—but my age,
O myrmidon of doom, shall see you seventeen.

THANE OF GHOSTS

WHILE lights flash double meanings, dot and dash
Their cipher message, code whose key is love,
My mathematic *dazzle* dives like crash
Landing plane, where pilot spins, perilous of
Self-satisfaction, through no triple point
Approved to airdrome happy slant of wings:
But, rebel rather, whom not smiles anoint
With benediction, I, as elsewhere kings
Wore courage more than crown, return my plane
Like Newton's apple down to death again,

Once more, once more, and still once more, I raise
Outrageous banners on my kingdom come
Of continents, O isthmus where all ways
Atlantic spend themselves Pacific, home
Ten thousand leagues from home, and dearer, yes,
Than boyhood bays where paper galleons rode
To anchor, mother marvelled, first success
At make-believe of life: but now, bestowed
Like luck to almost suicide, my new-found
And wonder world extends love's golden ground.

Cabala, crystal, ouija board, and pack
Of queens, where every ace is death, foretell
Time's thriller-diller danger, night attack
On welcome worshipped to a fare-thee-well,
Whose house of cards, doom castle quite in Spain,
Dissolves, dead-level, when esquire of looks
Loving leaves, for what disaster, green demesne:
Then neither letters serve for patent, books
For herald heart at arms, but, sweet my lord,
Tomfool is joker, Jack whose tricks are scored.

All thoughts are thieves that plunder me of you,
Lay waste love's landscape like a winter, make
Meantime midnight, Macbeth of dreams, review,
Deadmarch, my Duncans, bloody heads that shake
So grizzled locks, and point the dagger out
That did them in, when neither tears nor prayers
Cried: "Hold! A graveclothes masquerade shall rout
You from stone throne of state, and double dares
Of death shall come by dawn." O, Banquo, see
Your boy from Birnam Wood now murders me.

SONG

WAITING for the telephone to ring,
Looking for a letter in the box,
Daydream minion, he is nightmare king,
Timeless lover who has stopped the clocks.

Time revolts: he abdicates as king,
Lives his exile in a land of clocks,
Waiting for the telephone to ring,
Looking for a letter in the box,

IMAGES OF DISASTER

To Alfred Green

I

WHO salvaged not my deep sea dredged my shallows:
O fished me out like suicides, like anchors—
Blood rust on both: then threw me back, all-hallows
Dumbstruck. From Venice carnival to Greek-fire tankers

By plane I came, so quick, so sudden shifted:
Not wax-winged Icarus, drowned, what water-welter
Sunset of salt, what tear-crowned pearls, But lifted
High, higher still, and highest, saw the dead-time delta

Outblack Africa, flood tide for war. Marked, flashing
Island to island, fly, like hundred million,
The murdering Minotaurs—in *excelsis*—crashing
Perpetual spires, rubble and ruin, no green Avilion

Of life left. Beheld, gazer, thus dove violenced,
Sand castle, postcard-pretty park, the fountain palace,
And my fair lady, London Bridge—all silenced.
Not sleight in garden, ghostly father, grail chalice

Crossing above the rose tree, thorn tree, rood tree
Made me a vision, Starset I looked: unfolding
Their Flanders poppies, cannons rose, and showed me,
In sex of seconds, Venusberg of death. But holding

My heart under glass, still in my hands, from Dover
Was wafted East, and, over swanland, marvelled
At mouse-plagued river: regarded the vultures hover
Like luck above the loon king's lake—by no bombs rivalled.

Mazurka, polka, polonaise: music, deceitful
As mirrors, whirled my memory, waltz for wonder,
Through sound of shells, machine-gun fire. Fateful,
This feather-floating angel heard, not thunder

Baroque, rococo, but fall, like summer season,
Dead white, the wedding-cake disastered city.
North Northeast, Northeast by North: there treason
Of weather glazed my glance, froze polar pity

Blue ice of sorrow. But eagle still, imperial
Assassin, witness watched, when flag-flown colour
Of blood was banner, waved for snowman's burial
Beside the bullet's harvest hero. What killer

With kisses then could matter me, death's darling,
And gay boy of ghosts, whose eyes, sapphire no longer,
Gored, dazzle dagger, God's good-looks. Now the starling
Fast flew me home: O nothing said, no word of anger.

II

Nautilus, deciding at an early age that he
Was different from the others, my merman wore
Mother of pearl, his mistress jewel, life's undersea
Surviving lonely light. From siren sweet-sung shore

Absent as time, he plunged, boy bold, not moonbeam
So cold, but colder, down, glass meteor of ice,
To doom. Plunged. More silent there than any daydream,
His water wonder without shadow wandered, where voice

Ding-dong, aerial, weeping rang no buoy bell so deep.
But further fathom dived than whale, dove Davy Jones
His locker loose, where, Lo! the emerald dead, asleep
Lay languid. Those whose beautiful and oceanic bones,

Less opulent than only coral, treasure trove
Him madman, wave wracked, moving among enamelled wrecks
Like Perseus, pirate prince of ships, who, rocked by love,
Unchained his captive's nacreous, O salt-sewn, novel sex.

Through cobalt caves, stalagmite columned, groined
Androgyne—translucent washed, the traveller breasted waves,
Quartz crystal swimming. Sand-shifted Naiads never joined
Largesse of arms so amorous: who, keeping kelp-grown graves,

Shrouded by shells, said Nay, said Nay, for no one, no,
Would they unwind their glowworm hair, Grottoes of green
Gold glittered his eyes; while levitator serpents, slow
As bubbles, blew up, warm weather, father fortune. Obscene

The Old Man of the Sea, octopus, his paramour, kissed
Not once such heirloom lavished luck, but, stranglehold,
Embraced, all feelers fierce, his lovely lad. Mirror mist
Around him, Neptune-drowned Narcissus, lax limbed, rolled

Fancy free: then fled him far. Cross currents swirled
Him past Sargasso longitude of longing—where no tide
Turns turbulent: no surf. Whirled monsoon mad, and curled
Like combers, came he dolphin through the foam, There glide

And glisten of scales played him, pretty porpoise sport,
Aquatic gambols, fun with fish. Sudden as Fundy Race,
More sudden so, he saw the submarine by depth bomb brought
To grief. Like flotsam floating, the death-deflowered face

Of a sailor sorrowed him: and once, not for himself, he wept.
But hurled high heaven, holocaust of oil, his geyser speed
Fired him to fleet the singeing sun: O, matchless, not accept
The giddy god from flying Greek machine. Fell down gay
Ganymede.

III

"Preclude, preclude," he said, "love's first and lasting judgment.
Not every flier comes to kill. This mask of stranger
Dominoes no bully boy from gallows tree. Engagement
Fought at airdrome, mooring mast, or landing stage puts danger

Beyond the range of romance—fly high, fly low, dying
Is still the same sick falling out of guts. Grave gravitator,
Tumbler for tombs, black ace to spades on bedrock lying,
Lord Lancelot of Larks is dead. The faun as instigator

For lilac elegies—such as you say you write—may fancy
Himself, unarrowed, forever jewel and silver marrowed,
Tripe rhyming God's mainspring timing. Who knows? His
chancy

Bravado beats pulse of saints, who, more than heroes, harrowed

Like setting Son the root-red soil of hell, My friending
Of fauns was schooltime life for lovers. Now novel and luckless
Boys, whose every violence probes the bomber's nerve-rack ending
With pierce of pity to the bowels, falter. I see them, reckless

As fashion in the hats for pretty girls, go queer, go glamour
Eyed, go wild as Jesus Christ across His holy horror heaven
To wound themselves with wonder. Gelded catamites clamour
For heart rubies, diamond-tortured clubs, bur pilots seven

Dice devil's score by crashing ivory bone to splinters
Of what their worships call the soul, We wear no gold-fleece
collars.

The snow moon, murderous, the ice star, shot with bloody
winters,

Signal our searchlights: no more easy money. O the green dollars

Of gay days we shall never spend again! I think our sadness
Is such we drop more tears than bombs, more tenderness than
terror.

The enemy mans our controls. But bridgeheads of this madness
Are held for minutes: the bombardier corrects his error.

Love like the lancer shatters us. However lively
May that lady be, however quick this lad for laughter,
So soon as either would lie down from dancing, gravely
The gentleman in death's-head uniform, who follows after

Torches and tinkling music, draws back the spider curtain
From bride bed, boy bed, death bed always, to offer only
The kiss and knife-thrust both at once. Now nothing is certain
But being far from home. Survive me for a friend: lonely

As you may be, I shall be lonelier—by the sea invested
With green waters, or by the cruel earth to time be broken.
Remember. Legions will come, the lionhearts, the laurel-crested,
Who demand a requiem. Speak for us then," he said. "I have
spoken,"

IV

Now every meeting means a new farewell:
With armies levied by the loss of friends.
Sailor and airman each go off. Who shall tell
The last one left goodbye again? Childhood ends

For the toy soldier: bugles, drums, the moated fort,
All come alive: war's monstrous magic lantern shows
Gigantic grown the man of lead. How short, so short
The springtime was, the charming river walks with those

Whose every gesture was a gay one, whose words
Rippled like rapids, flashed, spun, sparkled, and ran
In waves of laughter through the college, Season of birds
And violets in the courtyard. Evenings that had no plan

But turned to triumphs: music from the phonograph—
Waltzes, the German jazz: and always too much gin to drink.
Or those long late drives to pleasure parks: the happy half
An hour on the carrousel: a chocolate horse whose eyes were pink.

And there were other nights, in the blue room, so all alone,
Reading Marvell, the perfect poet, with world enough and time
To twist conceits for one, who, though he read, was never done
In asking why the moon was cheese. What lost romantic rhyme

Scheme, tangled like treason, wound metric masquers in a maze
Of heartbreak? Still there was fun—so much, and once or twice
The game was worth, O, all the candles that have burned in praise
Of beauties melted down to wax. Another light: but the price

Is never paid. Illustrious this now historic past
Hangs like a tapestry at which the moths already eat.
For the swagger lad, swashbuckled as a hero, came at last
To join the party. Time's trifler, watching ghost boy beg a seat

Across the table, played foppish with his dilly-dally pen.
He signed the cheque, looked up, looked up. Disastrous eyes,
Wanton as wounds, gaped with God's terrible tears. It was then
I knew my nighttime had come down. Death and the Devil's
surprise

Whirl through the world in search of more to devour. Foretold,
Foretold, I was foretold, how boys shall nothing be by shells,
Shadow like ambuscades the madman's quarry, or cold, as cold
As cowards, ferret for their savaged sex. What victory bells

Are left to ring shall ting-a-ling for these. So let us pray
Grace for the gallants when they stand in love's most need:
And for ourselves, if killer, or if killed, courage to say
Something in prayer for mercy on the friend who is not dead.

GLISTERING PHAETHON

To George Barker

THE light was lava to explode your heart
When crowns of fire were kingly to your head:
The mountains of the moon gave up their dead.

The countries of Atlantis saw you start
Ascending through dimensions of the sea:
The dolphins drew your chariot to me.

As stars were seven, so the sun was one
To aureole your landfall in the west:
For you the swans were singing at their best.

A pride of lions was triumph to the gun
Fauns fired when unicorns unfurled your flag:
The local peacocks had no cause to brag.

Here you have seen the loveless river run
In cut-glass torrent to the bay of saints:
The pool of pity that Narcissus paints.

You have explored the ruined city where
Time takes no time to do his jungle duty:
The serpent-twined and bat-infested beauty.

Plateaus of peace you found whose desert air
Loomed like an avalanche to catch the breath:
The last mirage before the pass of death,

You drew a map of praise with drops of blood
Raising a poem to name each place of rest:
The phoenix asked you to remain his guest.

When you had gone the pole began to flood
The Gulf Stream with the melted ice of love:
The current changed to let the ocean move.

The silent winter spoke of you in flowers
To bring the birds of paradise to spring:
The bells of morning heard their welcome ring.

As land of gold proclaimed in fanfare hours
So orient your passing brought it birth:
The continent now novel to the earth.

May gods be gracious to the favorite one
Dynastic in succession to the sun:
O may your day be only just begun.

DREAMS OF THE BARRACKS EMPEROR

MY summer season like a winter weather
Comes cold as reason to love's faithful heart,
And where were once the sun and moon together
Eclipsed with stars, now voids of vanity impart
Their lonely, O by cock crow, space of time.

My noonday zenith makes meridian laughter
Turn tears at midnight—Look, the pumpkin plane!
Not torches then to light this flier after
His bombardiers of glass: but falling rain
Puts out the flares for pilots, lands him in the dark.

What vision of violence can I plead for pardon?
I walked the streets, a stage star hearing cheers
From blackout boys, whose lucent cats' eyes—in the garden
Later at leave-taking—run me through like shears.
Guards! Guards! Blood on the white rose, death by thorns.

THE MOMENT OF THE ROSE

A GOD of love among the silent flowers,
Your looks play rival to this sunlight view.
Late afternoon, the fragile, delicate time
Of sadness almost sorrow, overpowers
The languid air, as though these roses drew
Their perfume down long avenues of lime.
I see forget-me-nots are less than blue
When to their colour your deep eyes are true.

Dear visionary, gloss the awkward guest
Abashed by plants and trees and foliage things;
Reflect this moment when the rainbow gives
Images of triumph to the sky—the least
Lasting enchantment; for past, perfect springs
Regaled those youths who lost their loving lives,
Some among gardens, some by seaside swings,
Or in a mean street, or where the nettle stings.

The dazzling slain companion you in arms.
Guardians, the watchers by the water clock,
They gaze like mica from a wall of moss.
These champions muster at the clanged alarms,
The one-toned coffin bells that muted mock
The rose, the willow, and the golden grass.
Against dead friends you need not ever lock
Your door, or wish them good or evil luck.

Now marble broken, now the gilt gone off
The princely monuments, one noble tongue
Recites historic love, this land of blood,
The murderous kings, the ladies cruel enough
In lace and luxuries to bear a wrong
Made madrigal, and lords who understood
Their sentence by a sonnet—these belong
To terraces where flags suggest a song.

The end of love is that the heart is still
As the rose no wind distresses, still as light
On the unmoved grass, or as the humming bird
Poised the pure moment by an act of will.
Death may be like this, but here before night
Sends us to sleep murmuring a drowsy word
Of prayer, affection, or the idle flight
Of fancy, let us praise the rose and light.

Of gardens there is much to say, but now
I write as witness to an English one.
Between black clouds and white, between the hours
This island rides the misted ocean, how
Debonair appears the gallant shining sun.
Here I have found, as after thunder showers,
The friend my childhood promised me, when on
A desperate feast I met myself alone.

In summer when these blowsy roses break
The heart, and turn from pink to purple, deaths
Like butterflies exhaust their heavy scent,
And fluttering through vermilion mazes take
The time of day away, and take our breaths
Away as well. Then tragedies are spent
By gardeners on their ravelled funeral wreaths,
And wraithlike weather brings the almond moths.

But now the stars of heaven sail like ships
Above the trees, and round about your house
Ancestral ghosts are wandering, long come home
From wars and voyages. Now this garden sleeps
In shadow. Only the rustling field mice
And owls on vigil keep the hours. We dream
Of the rose and happiness, we dream until
The end of love is that the heart is still,

