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SELECTED POEMS

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THE DANCE OF DEATH

POEMS

THE ORATORS

LOOK, STRANGER!

SPAIN



written in collaboration
with Christopher Isherwood

THE DOG BENEATH THE SKIN

THE ASCENT OF F.6



written in collaboration
with Louis MacNeice

LETTERS FROM ICELAND

SELECTED POEMS

by

W. H. AUDEN

FABER AND FABER

24 Russell Square

London

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From
POEMS, 1930

★

PAID ON BOTH SIDES

CHARADE

TO
CECIL DAY LEWIS

CHARACTERS

★

Lintzgarth

JOHN NOWER

DICK

GEORGE****

WALTER

KURT

CULLEY

STEPHEN**

ZEPPEL—JOHN NOWER'S SERVANT

No. 6

JOAN—MOTHER OF JOHN NOWER

TRUDY***

Nattrass

AARON SHAW*****

SETH SHAW

THE SPY—SETH'S BROTHER

BERNARD

SETH'S MOTHER

ANNE SHAW

FATHER XMAS*

THE DOCTOR

BO****

PO*****

THE MAN-WOMAN

THE DOCTOR'S BOY**

THE ANNOUNCER*

THE CHIEF GUEST*

THE BUTLER*

THE CHORUS

The starred parts should be doubled

[No scenery is required. The stage should have a curtained-off recess. The distinction between the two hostile parties should be marked by different coloured arm-bands. The chorus, which should not consist of more than three persons, wear similar and distinctive clothing.]

[Enter Trudy and Walter.]

T. You've only just heard?

W. Yes. A breakdown at the Mill needed attention, kept me all morning. I guessed no harm. But lately, riding at leisure, Dick met me, panted disaster. I came here at once. How did they get him?

T. In Kettle Dale above Colefangs road passes where high banks overhang dangerous from ambush. To Colefangs had to go, would speak with Layard, Jerry and Hunter with him only. They must have stolen news, for Red Shaw waited with ten, so Jerry said, till for last time unconscious. Hunter was killed at first shot. They fought, exhausted ammunition, a brave defence but fight to more.

W. Has Joan been told yet?

T. Yes. It couldn't be helped. Shock, starting birth pangs, caused a premature delivery.

W. How is she?

T. Bad, I believe. But here's the doctor.

[Enter Doctor.]

Well, Doctor, how are things going?

D. Better, thanks. We've had a hard fight, but it's going to be all right. She'll pull through and have a fine infant as well. My God, I'm thirsty after all that. Where can I get a drink?

W. Here in the next room, Doctor.

[*Exeunt. Back curtains draw. Joan with child and corpse.*]

J. Not from this life, not from this life is any
To keep; sleep, day and play would not help there
Dangerous to new ghost; new ghost learns from
many
Learns from old termers what death is, where.

Who's jealous of his latest company
From one day to the next final to us,
A changed one; would use sorrow to deny
Sorrow, to replace death; sorrow is sleeping thus.

Unforgetting is not to-day's forgetting
For yesterday, not bedrid scorning,
But a new begetting
An unforgiving morning.

[*Baby squeals.*]

O see, he is impatient
To pass beyond this pretty lispig time:
There'll be some crying out when he's come there.

[*Back curtains close.*]

Chorus. Can speak of trouble, pressure on men
Born all the time, brought forward into light
For warm dark moan.
Though heart fears all heart cries for, rebuffs
with mortal beat
Skyfall, the legs sucked under, adder's bite.
That prize held out of reach
Guides the unwilling tread,
The asking breath,
Till on attended bed
Or in untracked dishonour comes to each
His natural death.

We pass our days
Speak, man to men, easy, learning to point
To jump before ladies, to show our scars:
But no
We were mistaken, these faces are not ours.
They smile no more when we smile back:
Eyes, ears, tongue, nostrils bring
News of revolt, inadequate counsel to
An infirm king.

O watcher in the dark, you wake
Our dream of waking, we feel
Your finger on the flesh that has been skinned,
By your bright day
See clear what we were doing, that we were vile.

Your sudden hand
Shall humble great
Pride, break it, wear down to stumps old systems which await
The last transgression of the sea.

[*Enter John Nower and Dick.*]

J. If you have really made up your mind, Dick, I won't try and persuade you to stop. But I shall be sorry to lose you.

D. I have thought it all over and I think it is the best thing to do. My cousin writes that the ranch is a thoroughly good proposition. I don't know how I shall like the Colonies but I feel I must get away from here. There is not room enough . . . but the actual moving is unpleasant.

J. I understand. When are you thinking of sailing?

D. My cousin is sailing to-morrow. If I am going I am to join him at the Docks.

J. Right. Tell one of the men to go down to the post-office and send a wire for you. If you want anything else, let me know.

D. Thank you.

[*Exit Dick. Enter Zeppel.*]

Z. Number Six wishes to see you, sir.

J. All right, show him in.

[*Enter Number Six.*]

Well, what is it?

6. My area is Rookhope. Last night at Horse and Farrier, drank alone, one of Shaw's men. I sat down friendly next, till muzzed with drink and lateness he was blabbing. Red Shaw goes to Brandon Walls to-day, visits a woman.

J. Alone?

6. No, sir. He takes a few. I got no numbers.

J. This is good news. Here is a pound for you.

6. Thank you very much, sir.

[Exit Number Six.]

J. Zeppel.

Z. Sir.

J. Ask George to come here at once.

Z. Very good, sir.

[John gets a map out. Enter George.]

J. Red Shaw is spending the day at Brandon Walls. We must get him. You know the ground well, don't you, George?

G. Pretty well. Let me see the map. There's a barn about a hundred yards from the house. Yes, here it is. If we can occupy that without attracting attention it will form a good base for operations, commands both house and road. If I remember rightly, on the other side of the stream is a steep bank. Yes, you can see from the contours. They couldn't get out that way, but lower down is marshy ground and possible. You want to post some men there to catch those who try.

- J. Good. Who do you suggest to lead that party?
- G. Send Sturton. He knows the whole district blindfold. He and I as boys fished all those streams together.
- J. I shall come with you. Let's see: it's dark now about five. Fortunately there's no moon and it's cloudy. We'll start then about half-past. Pick your men and get some sandwiches made up in the kitchen. I'll see about the ammunition if you will remember to bring a compass. We meet outside at a quarter past.

[*Exeunt. Enter Kurt and Culley.*]

- K. There's time for a quick one before changing. What's yours?
- C. I'll have a sidecar, thanks.
- K. Zeppel, one sidecar and one C.P.S. I hear Chapman did the lake in eight.
- C. Yes, he is developing a very pretty style. I am not sure though that Pepys won't beat him next year if he can get out of that double kick. Thanks. Prosit.
- K. Cheerio.

[*Enter Walter and Trudy.*]

- W. Two half pints, Zeppel, please. (*To Kurt.*) Can you let me have a match? How is the Rugger going?
- K. All right, thank you. We have not got a bad team this season.

- W. Where do you play yourself?
- K. Wing 3Q.
- W. Did you ever see Warner? No, he'd be before your time. You remember him don't you, Trudy?
- T. He was killed in the fight at Colefangs, wasn't he?
- W. You are muddling him up with Hunter. He was the best three-quarter I have ever seen. His sprinting was marvellous to watch.
- Z. (*producing Christmas turkey*). Not bad eh?
- T. (*feeling it*). Oh a fine one. For to-morrow's dinner?
- Z. Yes. Here, puss . . . gobble, gobble . . .
- T. (*to W.*) What have you got Ingo for Christmas?
- W. A model crane. Do you think he will like it?
- T. He loves anything mechanical. He's so excited he can't sleep.
- K. Come on, Culley, finish your drink. We must be getting along. (*To W.*) You must come down to the field on Monday and see us.
- W. I will if I can.
- [*Exit Kurt and Culley.*]
- T. Is there any news yet?
- W. Nothing has come through. If things are going right they may be back any time now.
- T. I suppose they will get him?
- W. It's almost certain. Nower has waited long enough.

T. I am sick of this feud. What do we want to go on
killing each other for?

We are all the same. He's trash, yet if I cut my
finger it bleeds like his.

But he's swell, keeps double shifts working all
night by flares. His mother squealed like a pig
when he came crouching out.

Sometimes we read a sign, cloud in the sky,
The wet tracks of a hare, quicken the step
Promise the best day. But here no remedy
Is to be thought of, no news but the new death;
A Nower dragged out in the night, a Shaw
Ambushed behind the wall. Blood on the ground
Would welcome fighters. Last night at Hammer-
gill

A boy was born fanged like a weasel. I am old,
Shall die before next winter, but more than once
shall hear

The cry for help, the shooting round the house.

W. The best are gone.

Often the man, alone shut, shall consider
The killings in old winters, death of friends.

Sitting with stranger shall expect no good.

Spring came, urging to ships, a casting off,

But one would stay, vengeance not done; it
seemed

Doubtful to them that they would meet again.

Fording in the cool of the day they rode

To meet at crossroads when the year was over:
Dead is Brody, such a man was Maul.

I will say this not falsely; I have seen
The just and the unjust die in the day,
All, willing or not, and some were willing.

Here they are.

[Enter Nower, George, Sturton and others. The three speak alternately.]

Day was gone Night covered sky
Black over earth When we came there
To Brandon Walls Where Red Shaw lay
Hateful and sleeping Unfriendly visit.
I wished to revenge Quit fully
Who my father at Colefangs valley
Lying in ambush Cruelly shot
With life for life.

Then watchers saw they were attacked
Shouted in fear A night alarm
To men asleep Doomed men awoke
Felt for their guns Ran to the doors
Would wake their master Who lay with woman
Upstairs together Tired after love.
He saw then There would be shooting
Hard fight.

Shot answered shot Bullets screamed
Guns shook Hot in the hand

Fighters lay Groaning on ground
Gave up life Edward fell
Shot through the chest First of our lot
By no means refused fight Stephen was good
His first encounter Showed no fear
Wounded many.

Then Shaw knew We were too strong
Would get away Over the moor
Return alive But found at the ford
Sturton waiting Greatest gun anger
There he died Nor any came
Fighters home Nor wives shall go
Smiling to bed They boast no more.

[*Stephen suddenly gets up.*]

S. A forward forward can never be a backward
backward.

G. Help me put Stephen to bed, somebody. He got
tight on the way back. Hullo, they've caught a
spy.

Voices outside: Look out. There he is. Catch him. Got
you.

[*Enter Kurt and others with prisoner.*]

K. We found this chap hiding in an outhouse.

J. Bring him here. Who are you?

S. I know him. I saw him once at Eickhamp. He's
Seth Shaw's brother.

J. He is, is he. What do you come here for? You

know what we do to spies. I'll destroy the whole lot of you. Take him out.

Spy. You may look big, but we'll get you one day, Nower.

[Exeunt all but John, Stephen following.]

S. Don't go, darling.

[John sits. A shot outside followed by cheers.]

[Enter Zeppel.]

Z. Will you be wanting anything more to-night, Sir?

J. No, that will be all thank you.

Z. Good night, sir.

John. Always the following wind of history
Of others' wisdom makes a buoyant air
Till we come suddenly on pockets where
Is nothing loud but us; where voices seem
Abrupt, untrained, competing with no lie
Our fathers shouted once. They taught us war,
To scamper after darlings, to climb hills,
To emigrate from weakness, find ourselves
The easy conquerors of empty bays:
But never told us this, left each to learn,
Hear something of that soon-arriving day
When to gaze longer and delighted on
A face or idea be impossible.
Could I have been some simpleton that lived
Before disaster sent his runners here;
Younger than worms, worms have too much to
bear.

Yes, mineral were best: could I but see
These woods, these fields of green, this lively
world
Sterile as moon.

Chorus. The Spring unsettles sleeping partnerships,
Foundries improve their casting process, shops
Open a further wing on credit till
The winter. In summer boys grow tall
With running races on the froth-wet sand,
War is declared there, here a treaty signed;
Here a scrum breaks up like a bomb, there troops
Deploy like birds. But proudest into traps
Have fallen. These gears which ran in oil for
week
By week, needing no look, now will not work;
Those manors mortgaged twice to pay for love
Go to another.

O how shall man live
Whose thought is born, child of one farcical
night,
To find him old? The body warm but not
By choice, he dreams of folk in dancing bunches,
Of tart wine spilt on home-made benches,
Where learns, one drawn apart, a secret will
Restore the dead; but comes thence to a wall.
Outside on frozen soil lie armies killed
Who seem familiar but they are cold.

Now the most solid wish he tries to keep
His hands show through; he never will look up,
Say 'I am good'. On him misfortune falls
More than enough. Better where no one feels,
The out-of-sight, buried too deep for shafts.

[*Enter Father Christmas. He speaks to the audience.*]

X. Ladies and Gentlemen: I should like to thank you all very much for coming here to-night. Now we have a little surprise for you. When you go home, I hope you will tell your friends to come and bring the kiddies, but you will remember to keep this a secret, won't you? Thank you. Now I will not keep you waiting any longer.

[*Lights. A trial. John as the accuser. The Spy as accused. Joan as his warder with a gigantic feeding bottle. Xmas as president, the rest as jury, wearing school caps.*]

X. Is there any more evidence?

J. Yes. I know we have and are making terrific sacrifices, but we cannot give in. We cannot betray the dead. As we pass their graves can we be deaf to the simple eloquence of their inscriptions, those who in the glory of their early manhood gave up their lives for us? No, we must fight to the finish.

X. Very well. Call the witness.

[*Enter Bo.*]

B. In these days during the migrations, days
Freshening with rain reported from the mountains,

By loss of memory we are reborn,
For memory is death; by taking leave,
Parting in anger and glad to go
Where we are still unwelcome, and if we count
What dead the tides wash in, only to make
Notches for enemies. On northern ridges
Where flags fly, seen and lost, denying rumour
We baffle proof, speakers of a strange tongue.

[The Spy groans. His cries are produced by jazz instruments at the back of the stage. Joan brandishes her bottle.]

Joan. Be quiet, or I'll give you a taste of this.

X. Next, please.

[Enter Po.]

P. Past victory is honour, to accept
An island governorship, back to estates
Explored as child; coming at last to love
Lost publicly, found secretly again
In private flats, admitted to a sign.
An understanding sorrow knows no more,
Sits waiting for the lamp, far from those hills
Where rifts open unfenced, mark of a fall,
And flakes fall softly softly burying
Deeper and deeper down her loving son.

[The Spy groans. John produces a revolver.]

J. Better to get it over.

Joan. This way for the Angel of Peace.

X. Leave him alone. This fellow is very very ill.
But he will get well.

[The Man-Woman appears as a prisoner of war behind barbed wire, in the snow.]

M-W. Because I'm come it does not mean to hold
An anniversary, think illness healed,
As to renew the lease, consider costs
Of derelict ironworks on deserted coasts.
Love was not love for you but episodes,
Traffic in memoirs, views from different sides;
You thought oaths of comparison a bond,
And though you had your orders to disband,
Refused to listen, but remained in woods
Poorly concealed your profits under wads.
Nothing was any use; therefore I went
Hearing you call for what you did not want.
I lay with you; you made that an excuse
For playing with yourself, but homesick because
Your mother told you that's what flowers did,
And thought you lived since you were bored, not
dead,
And could not stop. So I was cold to make
No difference, but you were quickly meek
Altered for safety. I tried then to demand
Proud habits, protestations called you mind
To show you it was extra, but instead
You overworked yourself, misunderstood,
Adored me for the chance. Lastly I tried
To teach you acting, but always you had nerves
To fear performances as some fear knives.
Now I shall go. No, you, if you come,

Will not enjoy yourself, for where I am
All talking is forbidden. . . .

[*The Spy groans.*]

J. I can't bear it.

[*Shoots him. Lights out.*]

Voices. Quick, fetch a doctor.

Ten pounds for a doctor.

Ten pounds to keep him away.

Coming, coming.

[*Lights. Xmas, John and the Spy remain. The Jury has gone, but there is a Photographer.*]

X. Stand back there. Here comes the doctor.

[*Enter Doctor and his Boy.*]

B. Tickle your arse with a feather, sir.

D. What's that?

B. Particularly nasty weather, sir.

D. Yes, it is. Tell me, is my hair tidy? One must always be careful with a new client.

B. It's full of lice, sir.

D. What's that?

B. It's looking nice, sir. [*For the rest of the scene the boy fools about.*]

X. Are you the doctor?

D. I am.

X. What can you cure?

D. Tennis elbow, Graves' Disease, Derbyshire neck and Housemaid's knees.

X. Is that all you can cure?

D. No, I have discovered the origin of life. Fourteen months I hesitated before I concluded this diagnosis. I received the morning star for this. My head will be left at death for clever medical analysis. The laugh will be gone and the microbe in command.

X. Well, let's see what you can do.

[*Doctor takes circular saws, bicycle pumps, etc., from his bag.*]

B. You need a pill, sir.

D. What's that.

B. You'll need your skill, sir. O sir you're hurting.

[*Boy is kicked out.*]

[*John tries to get a look.*]

D. Go away. Your presence will be necessary at Scotland Yard when the criminals of the war are tried, but your evidence will not be needed. It is valueless. Cages will be provided for some of the more interesting specimens. [*Examines the body.*] Um, yes. Very interesting. The conscious brain appears normal except under emotion. Fancy it. The Devil couldn't do that. This advances and retreats under control and poisons everything round it. My diagnosis is: Adamant will, cool brain and laughing spirit. Hullo, what's this? [*Produces a large pair of pliers and extracts an enormous tooth from the body.*] Come along, that's better. Ladies and Gentlemen, you see I have

nothing up my sleeve. This tooth was growing ninety-nine years before his great grandmother was born. If it hadn't been taken out to-day he would have died yesterday. You may get up now.

[*The Spy gets up. The Photographer gets ready.*]

P. Just one minute, please. A little brighter, a little brighter. No, moisten the lips and start afresh. Hold it.

[*Photographer lets off his flash. Lights out. Xmas blows a whistle.*]

X. All change.

[*Lights. Spy behind a gate guarded by Xmas. Enter John running.*]

J. I'm late, I'm late. Which way is it? I must hurry.

X. You can't come in here, without a pass.

[*John turns back his coat lapel.*]

X. O I beg your pardon, sir. This way, sir.

[*Exit Xmas. The Accuser and Accused plant a tree.*]

John. Sametime sharers of the same house

We know not the builder nor the name of his son.

Now cannot mean to then; boy's voice among dishonoured portraits

To dockside barmaid speaking

Sorry through wires, pretended speech.

Spy. Escaped

Armies pursuit, rebellion and eclipse

Together in a cart

After all j'ourneys
We stay and are not known.

[*Lights out.*]

Sharers of the same house
Attendants on the same machine
Rarely a word, in silence understood.

[*Lights. John alone in his chair. Enter Dick.*]

D. Hullo. I've come to say good-bye.
Yesterday we sat at table together
Fought side by side at enemies face to face meet-
ing
To-day we take our leave, time of departure.
I'm sorry.

J. Here, give me your knife and take mine. By
these
We may remember each other.
There are two chances, but more of one
Parting for ever, not hearing the other
Though he need help.
Have you got everything you want?

D. Yes, thanks. Good-bye, John.

J. Good-bye.

[*Exit Dick.*]

There is the city,
Lighted and clean once, pleasure for builders
And I
Letting to cheaper tenants, have made a slum
Houses at which the passer shakes his fist
Remembering evil.

Pride and indifference have shared with me, and I
Have kissed them in the dark, for mind has dark,
Shaded commemorations, midnight accidents
In streets where heirs may dine.

But love, sent east for peace
From tunnels under those
Bursts now to pass
On trestles over meaner quarters
A noise and flashing glass.

Feels morning streaming down
Wind from the snows
Nowise withdrawn by doubting flinch
Nor joined to any by belief's firm flange
Refreshed sees all
The tugged-at teat
The hopper's steady feed, the frothing leat.
Zeppel.

[*Enter Zeppel.*]

Z. Sir.

J. Get my horse ready at once, please.

[*Exeunt.*]

Chorus. To throw away the key and walk away
Not abrupt exile, the neighbours asking why,
But following a line with left and right
An altered gradient at another rate
Learns more than maps upon the whitewashed
wall

The hand put up to ask; and makes us well
Without confession of the ill. All pasts
Are single old past now, although some posts
Are forwarded, held looking on a new view;
The future shall fulfil a surer vow
Not smiling at queen over the glass rim
Nor making gunpowder in the top room,
Not swooping at the surface still like gulls
But with prolonged drowning shall develop gills.

But there are still to tempt; areas not seen
Because of blizzards or an erring sign
Whose guessed at wonders would be worth
alleging,
And lies about the cost of a night's lodging.
Travellers may sleep at inns but not attach,
They sleep one night together, not asked to
touch;
Receive no normal welcome, not the pressed
lip,
Children to lift, not the assuaging lap.
Crossing the pass descend the growing stream
Too tired to hear except the pulses' strum,
Reach villages to ask for a bed in
Rock shutting out the sky, the old life done.

[Culley enters right and squats in the centre of the stage, looking left through field glasses. Several shots are heard off. Enter George and Kurt.]

G. Are you much hurt?

K. Nothing much, sir. Only a slight flesh wound.
Did you get him, sir?

G. On ledge above the gully, aimed at, seen moving, fell; looked down on, sprawls in the stream.

K. Good. He sniped poor Billy last Easter, riding to Flash.

G. I have some lint and bandages in my haversack, and there is a spring here. I'll dress your arm.

[Enter Seth, finds Bernard, left.]

S. Did you find Tom's body?

B. Yes, sir. It's lying in the Hangs.

S. Which way did they go?

B. Down there, sir.

[Culley observes them and runs right.]

C. There are twenty men from Nattrass, sir, over the gap, coming at once.

G. Have they seen us?

C. Not yet.

G. We must get out. You go down to the copse and make for the Barbon road. We'll follow the old tramway. Keep low and run like heli.

[Exeunt right. Seth watches through field glasses.]

S. Yes. No. No. Yes, I can see them. They are making for the Barbon road. Go down and cut them off. There is good cover by the bridge. We've got them now.

[A whistle. The back curtains draw, showing John, Anne

and Aaron and the Announcer grouped. Both sides enter left and right.]

Aa. There is a time for peace; too often we
Have gone on cold marches, have taken life,
Till wrongs are bred like flies; the dreamer wakes
Who beats a smooth door, behind footsteps, on
the left
The pointed finger, the unendurable drum,
To hear of horses stolen or a house burned.
Now this shall end with marriage as it ought:
Love turns the wind, brings up the salt smell,
Shadow of gulls on the road to the sea.

Announcer. The engagement is announced of John Nower, eldest son of the late Mr. and Mrs. George Nower of Lintzgarth, Rockhope, and Anne Shaw, only daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Shaw of Natrass, Garrigill.

All. Hurrah.

[George and Seth advance to the centre, shake hands and cross over the stage to their opposite sides. Back curtains close. Exeunt in different directions, talking as they go.]

G. It was a close shave that time. We had a lucky escape. How are you feeling?

K. The arm is rather painful. I owe Bernard one for that.

B. It's a shame. Just when we had them fixed.

S. Don't you worry. You'll get your chance.

B. But what about this peace?

S. That remains to be seen. Only wait. [*Exeunt.*]
[*Back curtains draw. John and Anne alone. John blows on a grass held between the thumbs and listens.*]

J. On Cautley where a peregrine has nested, iced
heather hurt the knuckles. Fell on the ball near
time, the forward stopped. Good-bye now, he
said, would open the swing doors. . . . These I
remember, but not love till now. We cannot tell
where we shall find it, though we all look for it
till we do, and what others tell us is no use to us.
Some say that handsome raider still at large,
A terror to the Marshes, is truth in love;
And we must listen for such messengers
To tell us daily 'To-day a saint came blessing
The huts.' 'Seen lately in the provinces
Reading behind a tree and people passing.'
But love returns;
At once all heads are turned this way, and love
Calls order—silenced the angry sons—
Steps forward, greets, repeats what he has heard
And seen, feature for feature, word for word.

Anne. Yes, I am glad this evening that we are together.
The silence is unused, death seems
An axe's echo.

The summer quickens all,
Scatters its promises
To you and me no less
Though neither can compel.

- J.* The wish to last the year,
 The longest look to live,
 The urgent word survive
 The movement of the air.
- A.* But loving now let none
 Think of divided days
 When we shall choose from ways,
 All of them evil, one.
- J.* Look on with stricter brows
 The sacked and burning town,
 The ice-sheet moving down,
 The fall of an old house.
- A.* John, I have a car waiting. There is time to join
 Dick before the boat sails. We sleep in beds where
 men have died howling.
- J.* You may be right, but we shall stay.
- A.* To-night the many come to mind
 Sent forward in the thaw with anxious marrow
 For such might now return with a bleak face,
 An image pause half-lighted in the door,
 A greater but not fortunate in all;
 Come home deprived of an astonishing end . . .
 Morgan's who took a clean death in the north
 Shouting against the wind, or Cousin Dodd's,
 Passed out in her chair, the snow falling.
 The too-loved clays, born ever by diverse drifts,
 Fallen upon the far side of all enjoyment,
 Unable to move closer, shall not speak
 Out of that grave stern on no capital fault;

Enough to have lightly touchèd the unworthy
thing.

J. We live still.

A. But what has become of the dead? They forget.

J. These. Smilers, all who stand on promontories, slinkers, whisperers, deliberate approaches, echoes, time, promises of mercy, what dreams or goes masked, embraces that fail, insufficient evidence, touches of the old wound.

But let us not think of things which we hope will be long in coming.

Chorus. The Spring will come,
Not hesitate for one employer who
Though a fine day and every pulley running
Would quick lie down; nor save the wanted one
That, wounded in escaping, swam the lake
Safe to the reeds, collapsed in shallow water.
You have tasted good and what is it? For you,
Sick in the green plain, healed in the tundra, shall
Turn westward back from your alone success,
Under a dwindling Alp to see your friends
Cut down the wheat.

J. It's getting cold dear, let's go in.

[*Exeunt. Back curtains close.*]

Chorus. For where are Basley who won the Ten,
Dickon so tarted by the House,
Thomas who kept a sparrow-hawk?

The clock strikes, it is time to go,

The tongue ashamed, deceived by a shake of the
hand.

[*Enter Bridal Party left, guests right.*]

Guests. Ssk.

[*The Chief Guest comes forward and presents a bouquet to the bride.*]

C. G. With gift in hand we come
From every neighbour farm
To celebrate in wine
The certain union of
A woman and a man;
And may their double love
Be shown to the stranger's eye
In a son's symmetry.
Now hate is swallowed down,
All anger put away;
The spirit comes to its own,
The beast to its play.

[*All clap. The Chief Guest addresses the Audience.*]

C. G. Will any lady be so kind as to oblige us with a
dance? . . . Thank you very much. . . . This way
miss. . . . What tune would you like?

[*Gramophone. A dance. As the dance ends, the back curtains draw and the Butler enters centre.*]

Butler. Dinner is served.

[*Aaron goes to the Dancer.*]

Aa. You'll dine with us, of course?

[*Exeunt all except Seth and his Mother.*]

[*Guests, as they go out.*] It will be a good year for them,
I think.

You don't mean that he . . . well, you know
what.

Rather off his form lately.

The vein is showing good in the Quarry Hazel.
One of Edward's friends.

You must come and have a look at the Kennels
some day.

Well it does seem to show.

[*Etc., etc.*]

[*Back curtains close.*]

Mother. Seth.

S. Yes, Mother.

M. John Nower is here.

S. I know that. What do you want me to do?

M. Kill him.

S. I can't do that. There is peace now; besides he is
a guest in our house.

M. Have you forgotten your brother's death . . .
taken out and shot like a dog? It is a nice thing
for me to hear people saying that I have a
coward for a son. I am thankful your father is
not here to see it.

S. I'm not afraid of anything or anybody, but I
don't want to.

M. I shall have to take steps.

S. It shall be as you like. Though I think that much will come of this, chiefly harm.

M. I have thought of that. [*Exit.*]

S. The little funk. Sunlight on sparkling water, its shades dissolved, reforming, unreal activity where others laughed but he blubbed clinging, homesick, and undeveloped form. I'll do it. Men point in after days. He always was. But wrongly. He fought and overcame, a stern self-ruler. You didn't hear. Hearing they look ashamed too late for shaking hands. Of course I'll do it. [*Exit.*]

[*A shot. More shots. Shouting.*]

Voices outside. A trap. I might have known.

Take that, damn you.

Open the window.

You swine.

Jimmy, O my God.

[*Enter Seth and Bernard.*]

B. The Master's killed. So is John Nower, but some of them got away, fetching help, will attack in an hour.

S. See that all the doors are bolted.

[*Exeunt right and left. The back curtains draw. Anne with the dead.*]

Anne. Now we have seen the story to its end.

The hands that were to help will not be lifted,
And bad followed by worse leaves to us tears,
An empty bed, hope from less noble men.

I had seen joy
Received and given, upon both sides, for years.
Now not.

Chorus. Though he believe it, no man is strong.
He thinks to be called the fortunate,
To bring home a wife, to live long.

But he is defeated; let the son
Sell the farm lest the mountain fall;
His mother and her mother won.

His fields are used up where the moles visit,
The contours worn flat; if there show
Passage for water he will miss it:

Give up his breath, his woman, his team;
No life to touch, though later there be
Big fruit, eagles above the stream.

CURTAIN

From
POEMS, 1930

I

Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle.
Upon what man it fall
In spring, day-wishing flowers appearing,
Avalanche sliding, white snow from rock-face,
That he should leave his house,
No cloud-soft hand can hold him, restraint by women;
But ever that man goes
Through place-keepers, through forest trees,
A stranger to strangers over undried sea,
Houses for fishes, suffocating water,
Or lonely on fell as chat,
By pot-holed becks
A bird stone-haunting, an unquiet bird.

There head falls forward, fatigued at evening,
And dreams of home,
Waving from window, spread of welcome,
Kissing of wife under single sheet;
But waking sees
Bird flockꝰ nameless to him, through doorway voices
Of new men making another love.

Save him from hostile capture,
From sudden tiger's spring at corner;
Protect his house,
His anxious house where days are counted
From thunderbolt protect,

From gradual ruin spreading like a stain;
Converting number from vague to certain,
Bring joy, bring day of his returning,
Lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn.

II

Since you are going to begin to-day
Let us consider what it is you do.
You are the one whose part it is to lean,
For whom it is not good to be alone.
Laugh warmly turning shyly in the hall
Or climb with bare knees the volcanic hill,
Acquire that flick of wrist and after strain
Relax in your darling's arms like a stone
Remembering everything you can confess,
Making the most of firelight, of hours of fuss;
But joy is mine not yours—to have come so far,
Whose cleverest invention was lately fur;
Lizards my best once who took years to breed,
Could not control the temperature of blood.
To reach that shape for your face to assume,
Pleasure to many and despair to some,
I shifted ranges, lived epochs handicapped
By climate, wars, or what the young men kept,
Modified theories on the types of dross,
Altered desire and history of dress.

You in the town now call the exile fool
That writes home once a year as last leaves fall,
Think—Romans had a language in their day
And ordered roads with it, but it had to die:
Your culture can but leave—forgot as sure
As place-name origins in favourite shire—

Jottings for stories, some often-mentioned Jack,
And references in letters to a private joke,
Equipment rusting in unweeded lanes,
Virtues still advertised on local lines;
And your conviction shall help none to fly,
Cause rather a perversion on next floor.

Nor even is despair your own, when swiftly
Comes general assault on your ideas of safety:
That sense of famine, central anguish felt
For goodness wasted at peripheral fault,
Your shutting up the house and taking prow
To go into the wilderness to pray,
Means that I wish to leave and to pass on,
Select another form, perhaps your son;
Though he reject you, join opposing team
Be late or early at another time,
My treatment will not differ—he will be tipped,
Found weeping, signed for, made to answer, topped.
Do not imagine you can abdicate;
Before you reach the frontier you are caught;
Others have tried it and will try again
To finish that which they did not begin:
Their fate must always be the same as yours,
To suffer the loss they were afraid of, yes,
Holders of one position, wrong for years.

III

Watch any day his nonchalant pauses, see
His dextrous handling of a wrap as he
Steps after into cars, the beggar's envy.

'There is a free one' many say, but err.
He is not that returning conqueror,
Nor ever the poles' circumnavigator.

But poised between shocking falls on razor-edge
Has taught himself this balancing subterfuge
Of the accosting profile, the erect carriage.

The song, the varied action of the blood
Would drown the warning from the iron wood
Would cancel the inertia of the buried:

Travelling by daylight on from house to house
The longest way to the intrinsic peace,
With love's fidelity and with love's weakness.

IV

What's in your mind, my dove, my coney;
Do thoughts grow like feathers, the dead end of life;
Is it making of love or counting of money,
Or raid on the jewels, the plans of a thief?

Open your eyes, my dearest dallier;
Let hunt with your hands for escaping me;
Go through the motions of exploring the familiar;
Stand on the brink of the warm white day.

Rise with the wind, my great big serpent;
Silence the birds and darken the air;
Change me with terror, alive in a moment;
Strike for the heart and have me there.

V

To ask the hard question is simple;
Asking at meeting
With the simple glance of acquaintance
To what these go
And how these do:
To ask the hard question is simple,
The simple act of the confused will.

But the answer
Is hard and hard to remember:
On steps or on shore
The ears listening
To words at meeting,
The eyes looking
At the hands helping,
Are never sure
Of what they learn
From how these things are done.
And forgetting to listen or see
Makes forgetting easy;
Only remembering the method of remembering,
Remembering only in another way,
Only the strangely exciting lie,
Afraid
To remember what the fish ignored,
How the bird escaped, or if the sheep obeyed.

Till, losing memory,
Bird, fish, and sheep are ghostly,
And ghosts must do again
What gives them pain.
Cowardice cries
For windy skies,
Coldness for water,
Obedience for a master.

Shall memory restore
The steps and the shore,
The face and the meeting place;
Shall the bird live,
Shall the fish dive,
And sheep obey
In a sheep's way;
Can love remember
The question and the answer,
For love recover
What has been dark and rich and warm all over?

From
THE ORATORS
1932

I

PROLOGUE

By landscape reminded once of his mother's figure
The mountain heights he remembers get bigger and
bigger:

With the finest of mapping pens he fondly traces
All the family names on the familiar places.

Among green pastures straying he walks by still
waters;

Surely a swan he seems to earth's unwise daughters,
Bending a beautiful head, worshipping not lying,
'Dear' the dear beak in the dear concha crying.

Under the trees the summer bands were playing;
'Dear boy, be brave as these roots', he heard them
saying:

Carries the good news gladly to a world in danger,
Is ready to argue, he smiles, with any stranger.

And yet this prophet, homing the day is ended,
Receives odd welcome from the country he so de-
fended:

The band roars, 'Coward, Coward', in his human fever,
The giantess shuffles nearer, cries 'Deceiver'.

II

To Edward Upward, Schoolmaster

What siren zooming is sounding our coming
Up frozen fjord forging from freedom

What shepherd's call
When stranded on hill,
With broken axle
On track to exile?

With labelled luggage we alight at last
Joining joking at the junction on the moor

With practised smile
And harmless tale
Advance to meet
Each new recruit.

Expert from uplands, always in oilskins,
Recliner from library, laying down law,

Owner from shire,
All meet on this shore
Facing each prick
With ginger pluck.

Our rooms are ready, the register signed,
There is time to take a turn before dark,

See the blistering paint
On the scorching front,
Or icicles sombre
On pierhead timber.

To climb the cliff path to the coastguard's point
Past the derelict dock deserted by rats,
 Look from concrete sill
 Of fort for sale
 To the bathers' rocks
 The lovers' ricks.

Our boots will be brushed, our bolsters pummelled,
Cupboards are cleared for keeping our clothes.
 Here we shall live
 And somehow love
 Though we only master
 The sad posture.

Picnics are promised and planned for July
To the wood with the waterfall, walks to find,
 Traces of birds,
 A mole, a rivet,
 In factory yards
 Marked strictly private.

There will be skating and curling at Christmas—in-
 doors
Charades and ragging; then riders pass
 Some afternoons
 In snowy lanes
 Shut in by wires
 Surplus from wars.

In Spring we shall spade the soil on the border
For blooming of bulbs; we shall bow in Autumn
 When trees make passes,
 As high gale pushes,
 And bewildered leaves
 Fall on our lives.

We are here for our health, we have not to fear
The fiend in the furze or the face at the manse;
 Proofed against shock
 Our hands can shake;
 The flag at the golf-house flutters
 And nothing matters.

We shall never need another new outfit;
These grounds are for good, we shall grow no more,
 But lose our colour
 With scurf on collar
 Peering through glasses
 At our own glosses.

This life is to last, when we leave we leave all,
Though vows have no virtue, though voice is in vain,
 We live like ghouls
 On posts from girls
 What the spirit utters
 In formal letters.

Watching through windows the wastes of evening,
The flare of foundries at fall of the year.

The slight despair
At what we are,
The marginal grief
Is source of life.

In groups forgetting the gun in the drawer
Need pray for no pardon, are proud till recalled
By music on water
To lack of stature
Saying Alas
To less and less.

Till holding our hats in our hands for talking
Or striding down streets for something to see
Gas-light in shops
The fate of ships
And the tide-wind
Touch the old wound.

Till the town is ten and the time is London
And nerves grow numb between north and south
Hear last in corner
The pffwungg of burner
Accepting dearth
The shadow of death.

III

To My Pupils

Though aware of our rank and alert to obey orders,
Watching with binoculars the movement of the grass
for an ambush,
The pistol cocked, the code-word committed to
memory;

The youngest drummer
Knows all the peace-time stories like the oldest soldier,
Though frontier-conscious.

About the tall white gods who landed from their open
boat,
Skilled in the working of copper, appointing our feast-
days,
Before the islands were submerged, when the weather
was calm,

The maned lion common,
An open wishing-well in every garden;
When love came easy.

Perfectly certain, all of us, but not from the records,
Not from the unshaven agent who returned to the
camp;

The pillar dug from the desert recorded only
The sack of a city,
The agent clutching his side collapsed at our feet,
'Sorry! They got me!'

Yes, they were living here once but do not now,
Yes, they are living still but do not here;
Lying awake after Lights Out a recruit may speak up:
 'Who told you all this?'

The tent-talk pauses a little till a veteran answers
 'Go to sleep, Sonny!'

Turning over he closes his eyes, and then in a moment
Sees the sun at midnight bright over cornfield and
 pasture,

Our hope. . . . Someone jostles him, fumbling for
 boots,

 Time to change guard:

Boy, the quarrel was before your time, the aggressor
 No one you know.

Your childish moments of awareness were all of our
 world,

At five you sprang, already a tiger in the garden,
At night your mother taught you to pray for our
 Daddy

 Far away fighting,

One morning you fell off a horse and your brother
 mocked you:

 'Just like a girl!'

You've got their names to live up to and questions
 won't help,

You've a very full programme, first aid, gunnery,
 tactics,

The technique to master of raids and hand-to-hand
fighting;

Are you in training?

Are you taking care of yourself? are you sure of passing
The endurance test?

Now we're due to parade on the square in front of the
Cathedral,

When the bishop has blessed us, to file in after the
choir-boys,

To stand with the wine-dark conquerors in the roped-
off pews,

Shout ourselves hoarse:

'They ran like hares; we have broken them up like
firewood;

They fought against God'.

While in a great rift in the limestone miles away

At the same hour they gather, tethering their horses
beside them;

A scarecrow prophet from a boulder foresees our judg-
ment,

Their oppressors howling;

And the bitter psalm is caught by the gale from the
rocks:

'How long shall they flourish?'

What have we all been doing to have made from Fear
That laconic war-bitten captain addressing them now?

'Heart and head shall be keener, mood the more

As our might lessens':

To have caused their shout 'we will fight till we lie
down beside

The Lord we have loved'.

There's Wrath who has learnt every trick of guerilla
warfare,

The shamming dead, the night-raid, the feinted re-
treat;

Envy their brilliant pamphleteer, to lying

As husband true,

Expert Impersonator and linguist, proud of his power

To hoodwink sentries.

Gluttony living alone, austerer than us,

Big simple greed, Acedia famed with them all

For her stamina, keeping the outposts, and somewhere

Lust

With his sapper's skill,

Muttering to his fuses in a tunnel 'Could I meet here
with Love,

I would hug him to death'.

There are faces there for which for a very long time

We've been on the look-out, though often at home we
imagined,

Catching sight of a back or hearing a voice through a
doorway,

We had found them at last;

Put our arms round their necks and looked in their
eyes and discovered

We were unlucky.

And some of them, surely, we seem to have seen
before:

Why, that girl who rode off on her bicycle one fine
summer evening

And never returned, she's there; and the banker we'd
noticed

Worried for weeks;

Till he failed to arrive one morning and his room was
empty,

Gone with a suitcase.

They speak of things done on the frontier we were
never told,

The hidden path to their squat Pictish tower

They will never reveal though kept without sleep, for
their code is

'Death to the squealer':

They are brave, yes, though our newspapers mention
their bravery

In inverted commas.

But careful; back to our lines; it is unsafe there,

Passports are issued no longer; that area is closed;

There's no fire in the waiting-room now at the climbers'
Junction,

And all this year

[60]

Work has been stopped on the power-house; the wind
whistles under

The half-built culverts.

Do you think that because you have heard that on
Christmas Eve

In a quiet sector they walked about on the skyline,
Exchanged cigarettes, both learning the words for 'I
love you'

In either language:

You can stroll across for a smoke and a chat any
evening?

Try it and see.

That rifle-sight you're designing; is it ready yet?
You're holding us up; the office is getting impatient;
The square munition works out on the old allotments
Needs stricter watching;

If you see any loiterers there you may shoot without
warning,

We must stop that leakage.

All leave is cancelled to-night; we must say good-bye.
We entrain at once for the North; we shall see in the
morning

The headlands we're doomed to attack; snow down to
the tide-line:

Though the bunting signals

'Indoors before it's too late; cut peat for your fires',

We shall lie out there.

IV

EPILOGUE

'O where are you going?' said reader to rider,
'That valley is fatal when furnaces burn,
Yonder's the midden whose odours will madden,
That gap is the grave where the tall return.'

'O do you imagine,' said fearer to farer,
'That dusk will delay on your path to the pass,
Your diligent looking discover the lacking
Your footsteps feel from granite to grass?'

'O what was that bird,' said horror to hearer,
'Did you see that shape in the twisted trees?
Behind you swiftly the figure comes softly,
The spot on your skin is a shocking disease?'

'Out of this house'—said rider to reader
'Yours never will'—said farer to fearer
'They're looking for you'—said hearer to horror
As he left them there, as he left them there.

From

THE DOG BENEATH THE SKIN

1935

I

CHORUS

The Summer holds: upon its glittering lake
Lie Europe and the islands; many rivers
Wrinkling its surface like a ploughman's palm.
Under the bellies of the grazing horses
On the far side of posts and bridges
The vigorous shadows dwindle; nothing wavers.
Calm at this moment the Dutch sea so shallow
That sunk St Pauls would ever show its golden cross
And still the deep water that divides us still from Nor-
way.

We would show you at first an English village: You
shall choose its location

Wherever your heart directs you most longingly to
look; you are loving towards it:

Whether north to Scots Gap and Bellingham where the
black rams defy the panting engine:

Or west to the Welsh Marches; to the lilting speech and
the magicians' faces:

Wherever you were a child or had your first affair
There it stands amidst your darling scenery:

A parish bounded by the wreckers' cliff; or meadows
where browse the Shorthorn and the maplike
Frisian

As at Trent Junction where the Soar comes gliding;
out of green Leicestershire to swell the ampler
current.

Hiker with sunburn blisters on your office pallor,
Cross-country champion with corks in your hands,
When you have eaten your sandwich, your salt and
your apple,
When you have begged your glass of milk from the
ill-kept farm,
What is it you see?

I see barns falling, fences broken,
Pasture not ploughland, weeds not wheat.
The great houses remain but only half are inhabited,
Dusty the gunrooms and the stable clocks stationary.
Some have been turned into prep-schools where the
diet is in the hands of an experienced matron,
Others into club-houses for the golf-bore and the top-
hole.

Those who sang in the inns at evening have departed;
they saw their hope in another country,
Their children have entered the service of the subur-
ban areas; they have become typists, mannequins
and factory operatives; they desired a different
rhythm of life.

But their places are taken by another population,
with views about nature,
Brought in charabanc and saloon along arterial roads;
Tourists to whom the Tudor cafés
Offer Bovril and buns upon Breton ware
With leather work as a sideline: Filling stations
Supplying petrol from rustic pumps.

Those who fancy themselves as foxes or desire a special
setting for spooning

Erect their villas at the right places,

Airtight, lighted, elaborately warmed;

And nervous people who will never marry

Live upon dividends in the old-world cottages

With an animal for friend or a volume of memoirs.

Man is changed by his living; but not fast enough.

His concern to-day is for that which yesterday did not
occur.

In the hour of the Blue Bird and the Bristol Bomber,
his thoughts are appropriate to the years of the
Penny Farthing:

He tosses at night who at noonday found no truth.

Stand aside now: The play is beginning

In the village of which we have spoken; called Pressan
Ambo:

Here too corruption spreads its peculiar and emphatic
odours

And Life lurks, evil, out of its epoch.

Leader of Semi-Chorus I.

The young men in Pressan to-night

Toss on their beds

Their pillows do not comfort

Their uneasy heads.

The lot that decides their fate

Is cast to-morrow,

One must depart and face
Danger and sorrow.

Voices. Is it me? Is it me? Is it . . . me?

Leader of Semi-Chorus II.

Look in your heart and see:
There lies the answer.
Though the heart like a clever
Conjuror or dancer
Deceive you often into many
A curious sleight
And motives like stowaways
Are found too late.

Voices. What shall he do, whose heart
Chooses to depart?

Leader of Semi-Chorus I.

He shall against his peace
Feel his heart harden
Envy the heavy birds
At home in a garden.
For walk he must the empty
Selfish journey
Between the needless risk
And the endless safety.

Voices. Will he safe and sound
Return to his own ground?

Leader of Semi-Chorus II.

Clouds and lions stand
Before him dangerous
And the hostility of dreams.
Oh let him honour us
Lest he should be ashamed
In the hour of crisis,
In the valleys of corrosion
Tarnish his brightness.

Voices. Who are you, whose speech
Sounds far out of reach?

Both Leaders [singing].

You are the town and we are the clock.
We are the guardians of the gate in the rock.
The Two.
On your left and on your right
In the day and in the night,
We are watching you.

Wiser not to ask just what has occurred
To them who disobeyed our word;
To those
We were the whirlpool, we were the reef,
We were the formal nightmare, grief
And the unlucky rose.

Climb up the crane, learn the sailor's words
When the ships from the islands laden with birds
Come in.

Tell your stories of fishing and other men's wives:
The expansive moments of constricted lives
 In the lighted inn.

But do not imagine we do not know
Nor that what you hide with such care won't show
 At a glance.

Nothing is done, nothing is said,
But don't make the mistake of believing us dead:
 I shouldn't dance.

We're afraid in that case you'll have a fall.
We've been watching you over the garden wall
 For hours.

The sky is darkening like a stain,
Something is going to fall like rain
 And it won't be flowers.

When the green field comes off like a lid
Revealing what was much better hid:
 Unpleasant.
And look, behind you without a sound
The woods have come up and are standing round
 In deadly crescent.

The bolt is sliding in its groove,
Outside the window is the black removers' van.

And now with sudden swift emergence
Come the woman in dark glasses and the hump-
backed surgeons
And the scissor man.

This might happen any day
So be careful what you say
Or do.

Be clean, be tidy, oil the lock,
Trim the garden, wind the clock,
Remember the Two.

II

CHORUS

You with shooting-sticks and cases for field-glasses,
your limousines parked in a circle: who visit the
public games, observing in burberries the feats of
the body:

You who stand before the west fronts of cathedrals
appraising the curious carving:

The virgin creeping like a cat to the desert, the trum-
peting angels, the usurers boiling:

And you also who look for truth: alone in tower:

Follow our hero and his escort on his latest journey:
From the square surrounded by Georgian houses,
take the lurching tram eastward

South of the ship-cranes, of the Slythe canal: Stopping
at Fruby and Drulger Street,

Past boys ball-using: shrill in alleys.

Passing the cinemas blazing with bulbs: bowers of bliss
Where thousands are holding hands: they gape at the
tropical vegetation, at the Ionic pillars and the
organ solo.

Look left: The moon shows locked sheds, wharves by
water,

On your right is the Power House: its chimneys fume
gently above us like rifles recently fired.

Look through the grating at the vast machinery: at the
dynamos and turbines

Grave, giving no sign of the hurricane of steam within
their huge steel bottles,
At the Diesel engines like howdahed elephants: at the
dials with their flickering pointers:
Power to the city: where loyalties are not those of the
family.

And now, enter:

O human pity, gripped by the crying of a captured
bird wincing at sight of surgeon's lance,
Shudder indeed: that life on its narrow littoral so lucky
Can match against eternity a time so cruel!
The street we enter with setts is paved: cracked and
uneven as an Alpine glacier,
Garbage chucked in the gutters has collected in the
hollows in loathsome pools,
Back to back houses on both sides stretch: a dead-
straight line of dung-coloured brick
Wretched and dirty as a run for chickens.
Full as a theatre is the foul throughfare: some sitting
like sacks, some slackly standing,
Their faces grey in the glimmering gaslight: their eye-
balls drugged like a dead rabbit's,
From a window a child is looking, by want so fretted
his face has assumed the features of a tortoise:
A human forest: all by one infection cancelled.
Despair so far invading every tissue has destroyed in
these the hidden seat of the desire and the intelli-
gence.

A little further, and now: Enter the street of some of
your dreams:

Here come the untidy jokers and the spruce who love
military secrets

And those whose houses are dustless and full of Ming
vases:

Those rebels who have freed nothing in the whole uni-
verse from the tyranny of the mothers, except a
tiny sensitive area:

Those who are ashamed of their baldness or the size of
their members,

Those suffering from self deceptions necessary to life
And all who have compounded envy and hopelessness
into desire

Perform here nightly their magical acts of identifica-
tion

Among the Chinese lanterns and the champagne
served in shoes.

You may kiss what you like; it has often been kissed
before.

Use what words you wish; they will often be heard
again.

III

CHORUS

Now through night's caressing grip
Earth and all her oceans slip,
Capes of China slide away
From her fingers into day
And the Americas incline
Coasts towards her shadow line.
Now the ragged vagrants creep
Into crooked holes to sleep:
Just and unjust, worst and best,
Change their places as they rest:
Awkward lovers lie in fields
Where disdainful beauty yields:
While the splendid and the proud
Naked stand before the crowd
And the losing gambler gains
And the beggar entertains:
May sleep's healing power extend
Through these hours to our friend.
Unpursued by hostile force,
Traction engine, bull or horse
Or revolting succubus;
Calmly till the morning break
Let him lie, then gently wake.

IV

SEMI-CHORUS

Love, loath to enter
The suffering winter
Still willing to rejoice
With the unbroken voice
At the precocious charm
Blithe in the dream
Afraid to wake, afraid
To doubt one term
Of summer's perfect fraud,
Enter and suffer
Within the quarrel
Be most at home,
Among the sterile prove
Your vigours, love.

From
THE ASCENT OF F6
1936

I

Michael, you shall be renowned,
When the Demon you have drowned,
A cathedral we will build
When the Demon you have killed.
When the Demon is dead,
You shall have a lovely clean bed.

You shall be mine, all mine,
You shall have kisses like wine,
When the wine gets into your head
Mother will see that you're not misled;
A saint am I and a saint are you
It's perfectly, perfectly, perfectly true.

II

Death like his is right and splendid;
That is how life should be ended!
He cannot calculate nor dread
The mortifying in the bed,
Powers wasting day by day
While the courage ebbs away.
Ever-charming, he will miss
The insulting paralysis,
Ruined intellect's confusion,
Ulcer's patient persecution,
Sciatica's intolerance
And the cancer's sly advance;
Never hear, among the dead,
The rival's brilliant paper read,
Colleague's deprecating cough
And the praises falling off;
Never know how in the best
Passion loses interest;
Beauty sliding from the bone
Leaves the rigid skeleton.

From
LOOK, STRANGER!
1936

I

PROLOGUE

O love, the interest itself in thoughtless Heaven,
Make simpler daily the beating of man's heart; within
There in the ring where name and image meet,

Inspire them with such a longing as will make his
thought

Alive like patterns a murmur of starlings
Rising in joy over wolds unwittingly weave;

Here too on our little reef display your power,
This fortress perched on the edge of the Atlantic scarp,
The mole between all Europe and the exile-crowded
sea;

And make us as Newton was, who in his garden watch-
ing

The apple falling towards England, became aware
Between himself and her of an eternal tie.

For now that dream which so long has contented our
will,

I mean, of uniting the dead into a splendid empire,
Under whose fertilizing flood the Lancashire moss

Sprouted up chimneys, and Glamorgan hid a life
Grim as a tidal rock-pool's in its glove-shaped valleys,
Is already retreating into her maternal shadow;

Leaving the furnaces gasping in the impossible air,
The flotsam at which Dumbarton gapes and hungers;
While upon wind-loved Rowley no hammer shakes

The cluster of mounds like a midget golf course, graves
Of some who created these intelligible dangerous mar-
vels;

Affectionate people, but crude their sense of glory.

Far-sighted as falcons, they looked down another fu-
ture;

For the seed in their loins were hostile, though afraid
of their pride,

And, tall with a shadow now, inertly wait.

In bar, in netted chicken-farm, in lighthouse,
Standing on these impoverished constricting acres,
The ladies and gentlemen apart, too much alone,

Consider the years of the measured world begun,
The barren spiritual marriage of stone and water.
Yet, O, at this very moment of our hopeless sigh

When inland they are thinking their thoughts but are
watching these islands,

As children in Chester look to Moel Fammau to decide
On picnics by the clearness or withdrawal of her tree-
less crown,

Some possible dream, long coiled in 'the ammonite's
slumber

Is uncurling, prepared to lay on our talk and kindness
Its military silence, its surgeon's idea of pain;

And out of the Future into actual History,
As when Merlin, tamer of horses, and his lords to whom
Stonehenge was still a thought, the Pillars passed

And into the undared ocean swung north their prow,
Drives through the night and star-concealing dawn
For the virgin roadsteads of our hearts an unwavering
keel.

II

To Geoffrey Hoyland

Out on the lawn I lie in bed,
Vega conspicuous overhead
 In the windless nights of June;
Forests of green have done complete
The day's activity; my feet
 Point to the rising moon.

Lucky, this point in time and space
Is chosen as my working place;
 Where the sexy airs of summer,
The bathing hours and the bare arms,
The leisured drives through a land of farms,
 Are good to the newcomer.

Equal with colleagues in a ring
I sit on each calm evening,
 Enchanted as the flowers
The opening light draws out of hiding
From leaves with all its dove-like pleading
 Its logic and its powers.

That later we, though parted then
May still recall these evenings when
 Fear gave his watch no look;
The lion griefs loped from the shade
And on our knees their muzzles laid,
 And Death put down his book.

Moreover, eyes in which I learn
That I am glad to look, return
 My glances every day;
And when the birds and rising sun
Waken me, I shall speak with one
 Who has not gone away.

Now North and South and East and West
Those I love lie down to rest;
 The moon looks on them all:
The healers and the brilliant talkers,
The eccentrics and the silent walkers,
 The dumpy and the tall.

She climbs the European sky;
Churches and power stations lie
 Alike among earth's fixtures:
Into the galleries she peers,
And blankly as an orphan stares
 Upon the marvellous pictures.

To gravity attentive, she
Can notice nothing here; though we
 Whom hunger cannot move,
From gardens where we feel secure
Look up, and with a sigh endure
 The tyrannies of love:

And, gentle, do not care to know,
Where Poland draws her Eastern bow,

What violence is done;
Nor ask what doubtful act allows
Our freedom in this English house,
Our picnics in the sun.

The creepered wall stands up to hide
The gathering multitudes outside
Whose glances hunger worsens;
Concealing from their wretchedness
Our metaphysical distress,
Our kindness to ten persons.

And now no path on which we move
But shows already traces of
Intentions not our own,
Thoroughly able to achieve
What our excitement could conceive,
But our hands left alone.

For what by nature and by training
We loved, has little strength remaining:
Though we would gladly give
The Oxford colleges, Big Ben,
And all the birds in Wicken Fen,
It has no wish to live.

Soon through the dykes of our content
The crumpling flood will force a rent,

And, taller than a tree,
Hold sudden death before our eyes
Whose river-dreams long hid the size
And vigours of the sea.

But when the waters make retreat
And through the black mud first the wheat
In shy green stalks appears;
When stranded monsters gasping lie,
And sounds of riveting terrify
Their whorled unsubtle ears:

May this for which we dread to lose
Our privacy, need no excuse
But to that strength belong;
As through a child's rash happy cries
The drowned voice of his parents rise
In unlamenting song.

After discharges of alarm,
'All unpredicted may it calm
The pulse of nervous nations;
Forgive the murderer in his glass,
Tough in its patience to surpass
The tigress her swift motions.

III

Our hunting fathers told the story
Of the sadness of the creatures,
Pitied the limits and the lack
Set in their finished features;
Saw in the lion's intolerant look,
Behind the quarry's dying glare,
Love raging for the personal glory
That reason's gift would add,
The liberal appetite and power,
The rightness of a god.

Who nurtured in that fine tradition
Predicted the result,
Guessed love by nature suited to
The intricate ways of guilt?
That human ligaments could so
His southern gestures modify,
And make it his mature ambition
To think no thought but ours,
To hunger, work illegally,
And be anonymous?

IV

Look, stranger, at this island now
The leaping light for your delight discovers,
Stand stable here
And silent be,
That through the channels of the ear
May wander like a river
The swaying sound of the sea.

Here at the small field's ending pause
Where the chalk wall falls to the foam, and its tall
 ledges
Oppose the pluck
And knock of the tide,
And the shingle scrambles after the suck-
ing surf, and the gull lodges
A moment on its sheer side.

Far off like floating seeds the ships
Diverge on urgent voluntary errands;
And the full view
Indeed may enter
And move in memory as now these clouds do,
That pass the harbour mirror
And all the summer through the water saunter.

V

Hearing of harvests rotting in the valleys,
Seeing at end of street the barren mountains,
Round corners coming suddenly on water,
Knowing them shipwrecked who were launched for
islands,

We honour founders of these starving cities,
Whose honour is the image of our sorrow.

Which cannot see its likeness in their sorrow
That brought them desperate to the brink of valleys;
Dreaming of evening walks through learned cities,
They reined their violent horses on the mountains,
Those fields like ships to castaways on islands,
Visions of green to them that craved for water.

They built by rivers and at night the water
Running past windows comforted their sorrow;
Each in his little bed conceived of islands
Where every day was dancing in the valleys,
And all the year trees blossomed on the mountains,
Where love was innocent, being far from cities.

But dawn came back and they were still in cities;
No marvellous creature rose up from the water,
There was still gold and silver in the mountains,
And hunger was a more immediate sorrow;
Although to moping villagers in valleys
Some waving pilgrims were describing islands.

‘The gods’, they promised, ‘visit us from islands,
Are stalking head-up, lovely through the cities;
Now is the time to leave your wretched valleys
And sail with them across the lime-green water;
Sitting at their white sides, forget their sorrow,
The shadow cast across your lives by mountains.’

So many, doubtful, perished in the mountains
Climbing up crags to get a view of islands;
So many, fearful, took with them their sorrow
Which stayed them when they reached unhappy cities;
So many, careless, dived and drowned in water;
So many, wretched, would not leave their valleys.

It is the sorrow; shall it melt? Ah, water
Would gush, flush, green these mountains and these
valleys,
And we rebuild our cities, not dream of islands.

VI

Now the leaves are falling fast,
Nurse's flowers will not last;
Nurses to the graves are gone,
And the prams go rolling on.

Whispering neighbours, left and right,
Pluck us from the real delight;
And the active hands must freeze
Lonely on the separate knees.

Dead in hundreds at the back
Follow wooden in our track,
Arms raised stiffly to reprove
In false attitudes of love.

Starving through the leafless wood
Trolls run scolding for their food;
And the nightingale is dumb,
And the angel will not come.

Cold, impossible, ahead
Lifts the mountain's lovely head
Whose white waterfall could bless
Travellers in their last distress.

VII

The earth turns over, our side feels the cold,
And life sinks choking in the wells of trees;
The ticking heart comes to a standstill, killed,
The icing on the pond waits for the boys.
Among the holly and the gifts I move,
The carols on the piano, the glowing hearth,
All our traditional sympathy with birth,
Put by your challenge to the shifts of love.

Your portrait hangs before me on the wall
And there what view I wish for, I shall find,
The wooded or the stony—though not all
The painter's gifts can make its flatness round—
Through the blue irises the heaven of failures,
The mirror world where logic is reversed,
Where age becomes the handsome child at last,
The glass sea parted for the country sailors.

Where' move the enormous comics, drawn from life;
My father as an Airedale and a gardener,
My mother chasing letters with a knife:
You are not present as a character.
—Only the family have speaking parts—
You are a valley or a river bend,
The one an aunt refers to as a friend,
The tree from which the weasel racing starts.

Fálse; but no falser than the world it matches,
Love's daytime kingdom which I say you rule,
The total state where all must wear your badges,
Keep order perfect as a naval school:
Noble emotions organized and massed
Line the straight flood-lit tracks of memory
To cheer your image as it flashes by;
All lust at once informed on and suppressed.

Yours is the only name expressive there,
And family affection the one in cypher;
Lay-out of hospital and street and square
That comfort to the homesick children offer:
As I, their author, stand between these dreams,
Son of a nurse and doctor, loaned a dream,
Your would-be lover who has never come
In the great bed at midnight to your arms.

Such dreams are amorous; they are indeed:
But no one but myself is loved in these,
And time flies on above the dreamer's head,
Flies on, flies on, and with your beauty flies.
All things he takes and loses but conceit,
The Alec who can buy the life within,
License no liberty except his own,
Order the fireworks after the defeat.

Language of moderation cannot hide;
My sea is empty and the waves are rough:

Gone from the map the shore where childhood play'd
Tight-fisted as a peasant, eating love;
Lost in my wake the archipelago,
Islands of self through which I sailed all day,
Planting a pirate's flag, a generous boy;
And lost the way to action and to you.

Lost if I steer. Gale of desire may blow
Sailor and ship past the illusive reef,
And I yet land to celebrate with you
Birth of a natural order and of love;
With you enjoy the untransfigured scene,
My father down the garden in his gaiters,
My mother at her bureau writing letters,
Free to our favours, all our titles gone.

VIII

A shilling life will give you all the facts:
How Father beat him, how he ran away,
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts
Made him the greatest figure of his day:
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,
Though giddy, climbed new mountains; named a sea:
Some of the last researchers even write
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

With all his honours on, he sighed for one
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still
Or potter round the garden; answered some
Of his long marvellous letters but kept none.

IX

May with its light behaving
Stirs vessel, eye, and limb;
The singular and sad
Are willing to recover,
And to the swan-delighting river
The careless picnics come,
The living white and red.

The dead remote and hooded
In their enclosures rest; but we
From the vague woods have broken,
Forests where children meet
And the white angel-vampires flit;
We stand with shaded eye,
The dangerous apple taken.

The real world lies before us;
Animal motions of the young,
The common wish for death,
The pleased and the haunted;
The dying master sinks tormented
In the admirers' ring,
The unjust walk the earth.

And love that makes impatient
The tortoise and the roe, and lays
The blonde beside the dark,

Urges upon our blood,
Before the evil and the good
How insufficient is
The endearment and the look.

X

Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand,
A fathom of earth, alive in air,
Aloof as an admiral on the old rocks,
 England below me:
Eastward across the Midland plains
An express is leaving for a sailor's country;
 Westward is Wales
Where on clear evenings the retired and rich
From the french windows of their sheltered mansions
See the Sugarloaf standing, an upright sentinel
 Over Abergavenny.

When last I stood here I was not alone; happy
Each thought the other, thinking of a crime,
And England to our meditations seemed
 The perfect setting:
But now it has no innocence at all;
It is the isolation and the fear,
 The mood itself;
It is the body of the absent lover,
An image to the would-be hero of the soul,
The little area we are willing to forgive
 Upon conditions.

For private reasons I must have the truth, remember
These years have seen a boom in sorrow;

The presses of idleness issued more despair
And it was honoured,
Gross Hunger took on more hands every month,
Erecting here and everywhere his vast
Unnecessary workshops;
Europe grew anxious about her health,
Combines tottered, credits froze,
And business shivered in a banker's winter
While we were kissing.

To-day no longer occupied like that, I give
The children at the open swimming pool
Lithe in their first and little beauty
A closer look;
Follow the cramped clerk crooked at his desk,
The guide in shorts pursuing flowers
In their careers;
A digit of the crowd, would like to know
Them better whom the shops and trams are full of,
The little men and their mothers, not plain but
Dreadfully ugly.

Deaf to the Welsh wind now, I hear arising
From lanterned gardens sloping to the river
Where saxophones are moaning for a comforter,
From Gaumont theatres
Where fancy plays on hunger to produce
The noble robber, ideal of boys,
And from cathedrals,

Luxury liners laden with souls,
Holding to the east their hulls of stone,
The high thin rare continuous worship
Of the self-absorbed.

Here, which looked north before the Cambrian align-
ment,

Like the cupped hand of the keen excavator
Busy with bones, the memory uncovers
The hopes of time;

Of empires stiff in their brocaded glory,
The luscious lateral blossoming of woe
Scented, profuse;

And of intercalary ages of disorder
When, as they prayed in antres, fell
Upon the noblest in the country night
Angel assassins.

Small birds above me have the grace of those who
founded

The civilization of the delicate olive,
Learning the laws of love and sailing
On the calm Aegean;

The hawk is the symbol of the rule by thirst,
The central state controlling the canals;
And the blank sky

Of the womb's utter peace before
The cell, dividing, multiplied desire,
And raised instead of death the image
Of the reconciler.

And over the Cotswolds now the thunder mutters:
‘What little of the truth your seers saw
They dared not tell you plainly but combined
 Assertion and refuge
In the common language of collective lying,
In codes of a bureau, laboratory slang
 And diplomats’ French.
The relations of your lovers were, alas, pictorial;
The treasure that you stole, you lost; bad luck
It brought you, but you cannot put it back
 Now with caresses.

‘Already behind you your last evening hastens up
And all the customs your society has chosen
Harden themselves into the unbreakable *
 Habits of death,
Has not your long affair with death
Of late become increasingly more serious;
 Do you not find
Him growing more attractive every day?
You shall go under and help him with the crops,
Be faithful to him, and to your friends
 Remain indifferent.’

And out of the turf the bones of war continue;
‘Know then, cousin, the major cause of our collapse
Was a distortion in the human plastic by luxury pro-
 duced,

‘Never higher than in our time were the vital advantages;
To matter entire, to the unbounded vigours of the instrument,
To all logical precision we were the rejoicing heirs.

‘But pompous, we assumed their power to be our own,
Believed machines to be our hearts’ spontaneous fruit,
Taking our premises as shoppers take a tram.

‘While the disciplined love which alone could have employed these engines
Seemed far too difficult and dull, and when hatred promised
An immediate dividend, all of us hated.

‘Denying the liberty we knew quite well to be our destiny,
It dogged our steps with its accusing shadow
Until in every landscape we saw murder ambushed.

‘Unable to endure ourselves, we sought relief
In the insouciance of the soldier, the heroic sexual pose
Playing at fathers to impress the little ladies,

‘Call’ us not tragic; falseness made farcical our death:
Nor brave; ours was the will of the insane to suffer
By which since we could not live we gladly died:
And now we have gone for ever to our foolish graves.’

The Priory clock chimes briefly and I recollect
I am expected to return alive
My will effective and my nerves in order
To my situation.

'The poetry is in the pity,' Wilfred said,
And Kathy in her journal, 'To be rooted in life,
That's what I want.'

These moods give no permission to be idle,
For men are changed by what they do;
And through loss and anger the hands of the unlucky
Love one another.

XI

Easily, my dear, you move, easily your head
And easily as through the leaves of a photograph album
I'm led

Through the night's delights and the day's impressions,
Past the tall tenements and the trees in the wood;
Though sombre the sixteen skies of Europe
And the Danube flood.

Looking and loving our behaviours pass
The stones the steels and the polished glass;
Lucky to Love the new pansy railway,
The sterile farms where his looks are fed,
And in the policed unlucky city
Lucky his bed.

He from these lands of terrifying mottoes
Makes worlds as innocent as Beatrix Potter's;
Through bankrupt countries where they mend the roads
Along the endless plains his will is
Intent as a collector to pursue
His greens and lilies.

Easy for him to find in your face
The pool of silence and the tower of grace,
To conjure a camera into a wishing rose;
Simple to excite in the air from a glance
The horses, the fountains, the sidedrum, the trombone
And the dance, the dance.

Summoned by such a music from our time,
Such images to audience come
As vanity cannot dispel nor bless:
Hunger and love in their variations
Grouped invalids watching the flight of the birds
And single assassins.

Ten thousand of the desperate marching by
Five feet, six feet, seven feet high:
Hitler and Mussolini in their wooing poses
Churchill acknowledging the voter's greeting
Roosevelt at the microphone, Van der Lubbe laughing
And our first meeting.

But love, except at our proposal,
Will do no trick at his disposal;
Without opinions of his own, performs
The programme that we think of merit,
And through our private stuff must work
His public spirit.

Certain it became while we were still incomplete
There were certain prizes for which we would never
compete;
A choice was killed by every childish illness,
The boiling tears among the hothouse plants,
The rigid promise fractured in the garden,
And the long aunts.

And every day there bolted from the field
Desires to which we could not yield;
Fewer and clearer grew the plans,
Schemes for a life and sketches for a hatred,
And early among my interesting scrawls
 Appeared your portrait.

You stand now before me, flesh and bone
These ghosts would like to make their own.
Are they your choices? O, be deaf
When hatred would proffer her immediate pleasure,
And glory swap her fascinating rubbish
 For your one treasure.

Be deaf too, standing uncertain now,
A pine tree shadow across your brow,
To what I hear and wish I did not;
The voice of love saying lightly, brightly—
'Be Lubbe, Be Hitler, but be my good
 Daily, nightly'.

The power that corrupts, that power to excess
The beautiful quite naturally possess:
To them the fathers and the children turn:
And all who long for their destruction,
The arrogant and self-insulted, wait
 The looked instruction.

Shall idleness ring then your eyes like the pest?
O will you unnoticed and mildy like the rest,

Will you join the lost in their sneering circles,
Forfeit the beautiful interest and fall
Where the engaging face is the face of the betrayer,
And the pang is all?

Wind shakes the tree; the mountains darken;
And the heart repeats though we would not hearken:
'Yours is the choice, to whom the gods awarded
The language of learning and the language of love,
Crooked to move as a moneybug or a cancer
Or straight as a dove.'

XII

For Benjamin Britten

Underneath the abject willow,
 Lover, sulk no more;
Act from thought should quickly follow:
 What is thinking for?
Your unique and moping station
 Proves you cold;
 Stand up and fold
Your map of desolation.

Bells that toll across the meadows
 From the sombre spire,
Toll for those unloving shadows
 Love does not require.
All that lives may love; why longer
 Bow to loss
 With arms across?
Strike and you shall conquer.

Geese in flocks above you flying
 Their direction know;
Brooks beneath the thin ice flowing
 To their oceans go;
Coldest love will warm to action,
 Walk then, come,
 No longer numb,
Into your satisfaction.

XIII

O for doors to be open and an invite with gilded edges
To dine with Lord Lobcock and Count Asthma on the
platinum benches,

With the somersaults and fireworks, the roast and the
smacking kisses—

Cried the cripples to the silent statue,
The six beggared cripples.

And Garbo's and Cleopatra's wits to go astraying,
In a feather ocean with me to go fishing and playing
Still jolly when the cock has burst himself with crow-
ing—

Cried the six cripples to the silent statue,
The six beggared cripples.

And to stand on green turf among the craning yelling
faces,

Dependant on the chestnut, the sable, and Arabian
horses,

And me with a magic crystal to foresee their places—

Cried the six cripples to the silent statue,
The six beggared cripples.

And this square to be a deck, and these pigeons sails
to rig

And to follow the delicious breeze like a tantony pig
To the shaded feverless islands where the melons are
big—

Cried the six cripples to the silent statue,
The six beggared cripples.

And these shops to be turned to tulips in a garden bed,
And me with my stick to thrash each merchant dead
As he pokes from a flower his bald and wicked head—
Cried the six cripples to the silent statue,
The six beggared cripples.

And a hole in the bottom of heaven, and Peter and Paul
And each smug surprised saint like parachutes to fall,
And every one-legged beggar to have no legs at all—
Cried the six cripples to the silent statue,
The six beggared cripples.

XIV

To Christopher Isherwood

August for the people and their favourite islands.
Daily the steamers sidle up to meet
The effusive welcome of the pier, and soon
The luxuriant life of the steep stone valleys,
The sallow oval faces of the city
Begot in passion or good-natured habit,
Are caught by waiting coaches, or laid bare
Beside the indiscriminating sea.

Lulled by the light they live their dreams of freedom;
May climb the old road, twisting to the moors,
Play leap frog, enter cafés, wear
The tigerish blazer and the dove-like shoe.
The yachts upon the little lake are theirs,
The gulls ask for them, and to them the band
Makes its tremendous statements; they control
The complicated apparatus of amusement.

All types that can intrigue the writer's fancy,
Or sensuality approves, are here.
And I, each meal-time with the families,
The animal brother and his serious sister,
Or after breakfast on the urned steps watching
The defeated and disfigured marching by,
Have thought of you, Christopher, and wished beside
me
Your squat spruce body and enormous head.

Nine years ago, upon that southern island
Where the wild Tennyson became a fossil,
Half-boys, we spoke of books and praised
The acid and austere, behind us only
The stuccoed suburb and expensive school.
Scented our turf, the distant baying
Nice decoration to the artist's wish;
Yet fast the deer was flying through the wood.

Our hopes were set still on the spies' career,
Prizing the glasses and the old felt hat,
And all the secrets we discovered were
Extraordinary and false; for this one coughed
And it was gasworks coke, and that one laughed
And it was snow in bedrooms; many wore wigs,
The coastguard signalled messages of love,
The enemy were sighted from the Norman tower.

Five summers pass and now we watch
The Baltic from a balcony: the word is love.
Surely one fearless kiss would cure
The million fevers, a stroking brush
The insensitive refuse from the burning core.
Was there a dragon who had closed the works
While the starved city fed it with the Jews?
Then love would tame it with his trainer's look.

Pardon the studied taste that could refuse
The golf-house quick one and the rector's tea;

Pardon the nerves the thrushes could not soothe,
Yet answered promptly the no-subtler lure
To private joking in a panelled room,
The solitary vitality of tramps and madmen;
Believed the whisper in the double bed:
Pardon for these and every flabby fancy.

For now the moulding images of growth
That made our interest and us, are gone.
Louder to-day the wireless roars
Its warnings and its lies, and it's impossible
Among the well-shaped cosily to flit,
Or longer to desire about our lives
The beautiful loneliness of the banks, or find
The stoves and resignations of the frozen plains.

The close-set eyes of mother's boy
Saw nothing to be done; we look again:
See Scandal praying with her sharp knees up,
And Virtue stood at Weeping Cross,
The green thumb to the ledger knuckled down,
And Courage to his leaking ship appointed,
Slim Truth dismissed without a character,
And gaga Falsehood highly recommended.

Greed showing shamelessly her naked money,
And all Love's wondering eloquence debased
To a collector's slang, Smartness in furs,
And Beauty scratching miserably for food,

Honour self-sacrificed for Calculation,
And Reason stoned by Mediocrity,
Freedom by Power shockingly maltreated,
And Justice exiled till Saint Geoffrey's Day.

So in this hour of crisis and dismay,
What better than your strict and adult pen
Can warn us from the colours and the consolations,
The showy arid works, reveal
The squalid shadow of academy and garden,
Make action urgent and its nature clear?
Who give us nearer insight to resist
The expanding fear, the savaging disaster?
◀

This then my birthday wish for you, as now
From the narrow window of my fourth floor room
I smoke into the night, and watch reflections
Stretch in the harbour. In the houses
The little pianos are closed, and a clock strikes.
And all sway forward on the dangerous flood
Of history, that never sleeps or dies,
And, held one moment, burns the hand.

XV

EPILOGUE

Certainly our city—with the byres of poverty down to
The river's edge, the cathedral, the engines, the dogs;
Here is the cosmopolitan cooking
And the light alloys and the glass.

Built by the conscious-stricken, the weapon-making,
By us. The rumours woo and terrify the crowd,
Woo us. The betrayers thunder at, blackmail
Us. But where now are They

Who without reproaches shewed us what our vanity
has chosen,
Who pursued understanding with patience like a sex,
had unlearnt
Our hatred, and towards the really better
World had turned their face?

There was Nansen in the north, in the hot south
Schweitzer, and the neat man
To their east who ordered Gorki to be electrified;
There were Freud and Groddeck at their candid
studies
Of the mind and body of man.

Nor was every author both a comforter and a liar;
Lawrence revealed the sensations hidden by shame,

The sense of guilt was recorded by Kafka,
There was Proust on the self-regard.

Who knows? The peaked and violent faces are exalted,
The feverish prejudiced lives do not care, and lost
Their voice in the flutter of bunting, the glittering
Brass of the great retreat,

And the malice of death. For the wicked card is dealt,
and
The sinister tall-hatted botanist stoops at the spring
With his insignificant phial, and looses
The plague on the ignorant town.

Under their shadows the pitiful subalterns are sleeping;
The moon is usual; the necessary lovers touch:
The river is alone and the trampled flower,
And through years of absolute cold

The planets rush towards Lyra in the lion's charge.
Can
Hate so securely bind? Are They dead here? Yes.
And the wish to wound has the power. And to-
morrow
Comes. It's a world. It's a way.

From
LETTERS FROM ICELAND
1937

I

JOURNEY TO ICELAND

A letter to Christopher Isherwood, Esq.

And the traveller hopes: 'Let me be far from any
Physician'; And the ports have names for the sea;
The citiless, the corroding, the sorrow;
And North means to all: 'Reject!'

And the great plains are for ever where the cold fish
is hunted,
And everywhere; the light birds flicker and flaunt;
Under the scolding flag the lover
Of islands may see at last,

Faintly, his limited hope; and he nears the glitter
Of glaciers, the sterile immature mountains intense
In the abnormal day of this world, and a river's
Fan-like polyp of sand.

Then let the good citizen here find natural marvels:
The horse-shoe ravine, the issue of steam from a cleft
In the rock, and rocks, and waterfalls brushing the
Rocks, and among the rocks birds.

And the student of prose and conduct, places to visit;
The site of a church where a bishop was put in a bag,
The bath of a great historian, the rock where
An outlaw dreaded the dark.

Remember the doomed man thrown by his horse and
crying;

‘Beautiful is the hillside, I will not go’;

The old woman confessing: ‘He that I loved the
Best, to him I was worst’,

For Europe is absent. This is an island and therefore
Unreal. And the steadfast affections of its dead may
be bought

By those whose dreams accuse them of being
Spitefully alive, and the pale

From too much passion of kissing feel pure in its
deserts.

Can they? For the world is, and the present, and the
lie.

And the narrow bridge over the torrent,
And the small farm under the crag

Are the natural setting for the jealousies of a province;
And the weak vow of fidelity is formed by the cairn;
And within the indigenous figure on horseback
On the bridle path down by the lake

The blood moves also by crooked and furtive inches,
Asks all your questions: ‘Where is the homage? When
Shall justice be done? O who is against me?
Why am I always alone?’

Present then the world to the world with its mendicant
shadow;
Let the suits be flash, the Minister of Commerce in-
sane;
Let jazz be bestowed on the huts, and the beauty's
Set cosmopolitan smile.

For our time has no favourite suburb; no local features
Are those of the young for whom all wish to care;
The promise is only a promise, the fabulous
Country impartially far.

Tears fall in all the rivers. Again the driver
pulls on his gloves and in a blinding snowstorm starts
Upon his deadly journey; and again the writer
Runs howling to his art.

II

'O who can ever gaze his fill',
Farmer and fisherman say,
'On native shore and local hill,
Grudge aching limb or callus on the hand?
Fathers, grandfathers stood upon this land,
And here the pilgrims from our loins shall stand.'
So farmer and fisherman say
In their fortunate heyday:
But Death's soft answer drifts across
Empty catch or harvest loss
Or an unlucky May.

*The earth is an oyster with nothing inside it
Not to be born is the best for man
The end of toil is a bailiff's order
Throw down the mattock and dance while you can.*

'O life's too short for friends who share',
Travellers think in their hearts,
'The city's common bed, the air,
The mountain bivouac and the bathing beach,
Where incidents draw every day from each
Memorable gesture and witty speech.'
So travellers think in their hearts,
Till malice or circumstance parts
Them from their constant humour:
And shyly Death's coercive ruin
In the silence starts.

*A friend is the old old tale of Narcissus
Not to be born is the best for man
An active partner in something disgraceful
Change your partner, dance while you can.*

‘O stretch your hands across the sea,’
The impassioned lover cries,
‘Stretch them towards your harm and me.
Our grass is green, and sensual our brief bed,
The stream sings at its foot, and at its head
The mild and vegetarian beasts are fed.’
So the impassioned lover cries
Till his storm of pleasure dies:
From the bedpost and the rocks
Death’s enticing echo mocks,
And his voice replies.

*The greater the love, the more false to its object
Not to be born is the best for man
After the kiss comes the impulse to throttle
Break the embraces, dance while you can.*

‘I see the guilty world forgiven,’
Dreamer and drunkard sing,
‘The ladders let down out of heaven;
The laurel springing from the martyrs’ blood;
The children skipping where the weepers stood;
The lovers natural, and the beasts all good.’

So dreamer and drunkard sing
Till day their sobriety bring:
Parrotwise with death's reply
From whelping fear and nesting lie,
Woods and their echoes ring.

*The desires of the heart are as crooked as corkscrews
Not to be born is the best for man
The second best is a formal order
The dance's pattern, dance while you can.
Dance, dance, for the figure is easy
The tune is catching and will not stop
Dance till the stars come down with the rafters
Dance, dance, dance till you drop.*

