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SOME POEMS

by

W. H. AUDEN

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I

PAID ON BOTH SIDES

Joan. 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 lispng time:
There'll be some crying out when he's come there.

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.

* * * *

Trudy. 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 Hammergeill
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.

Walter. 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.

★ ★ ★ ★

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.

2

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-flocks 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.

3

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.

4

1

It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens
Hearing the frogs exhaling from the pond,
Watching traffic of magnificent cloud
Moving without anxiety on open sky——
Season when lovers and writers find
An altering speech for altering things,
An emphasis on new names, on the arm
A fresh hand with fresh power.
But thinking so I came at once
Where solitary man sat weeping on a bench,
Hanging his head down, with his mouth distorted
Helpless and ugly as an embryo chicken.

So I remember *all* of those whose death
Is necessary condition of the season's setting forth,
Who sorry in this time look only back
To Christmas intimacy, a winter dialogue
Fading in silence, leaving them in tears.
And recent particulars come to mind;
The death by cancer of a once hated master,
A friend's analysis of his own failure,
Listened to at intervals throughout the winter
At different hours and in different rooms.
But always with success of others for comparison,
The happiness, for instance, of my friend Kurt Groote,

Absence of fear in Gerhart Meyer
From the sea, the truly strong man.

A bus ran home then, on the public ground
Lay fallen bicycles like huddled corpses:
No chattering valves of laughter emphasised
Nor the swept gown ends of a gesture stirred
The sessile hush; until a sudden shower
Fell willing into grass and closed the day,
Making choice seem a necessary error.

2

Coining out of me living is always thinking,
Thinking changing and changing living,
Am feeling as it was seeing——
In city leaning on harbour parapet
To watch a colony of duck below
Sit, preen, and doze on buttresses
Or upright paddle on flickering stream,
Casually fishing at a passing straw.
Those find sun's luxury enough,
Shadow know not of homesick foreigner
Nor restlessness of intercepted growth.

All this time was anxiety at night,
Shooting and barricade in street.
Walking home late I listened to a friend
Talking excitedly of final war

Of proletariat against police——
That one shot girl of nineteen through the knees
They threw that one down concrete stair——
Till I was angry, said I was pleased.

Time passes in Hessen, in Gutensberg,
With hill-top and evening holds me up,
Tiny observer of enormous world.
Smoke rises from factory in field,
Memory of fire: on all sides heard
Vanishing music of isolated larks:
From village square voices in hymn,
Men's voices, an old use.
And I above standing, saying in thinking:

'Is first baby, warm in mother,
Before born and is still mother,
Time passes and now is other,
Is knowledge in him now of other,
Cries in cold air, himself no friend.
In grown man also, may see in face
In his day-thinking and in his night-thinking
Is wareness and is fear of other,
Alone in flesh, himself no friend.'

He say 'We must forgive and forget,'
Forgetting saying but is unforgiving
And unforgiving is in his living;
Body reminds in him to loving,

Reminds but takes no further part,
Perfunctorily affectionate in hired room
But takes no part and is unloving
But loving death. May see in dead,
In face of dead that loving wish,
As one returns from Africa to wife
And his ancestral property in Wales.

Yet sometimes man look and say good
At strict beauty of locomotive,
Completeness of gesture or unclouded eye;
In me so absolute unity of evening
And field and distance was in me for peace,
Was over me in feeling without forgetting
Those ducks' indifference, that friend's hysteria,
Without wishing and with forgiving,
To love my life, not as other,
Not as bird's life, not as child's,
'Cannot,' I said, 'being no child now nor a bird.'

3

Order to stewards and the study of time,
Correct in books, was earlier than this
But joined this by the wires I watched from train.
Slackening of wire and posts' sharp reprimand,
In month of August to a cottage coming.

Being alone, the frightened soul
Returns to this life of sheep and hay

No longer his: he every hour
Moves further from this and must so move,
As child is weaned from his mother and leaves home
But taking the first steps falters, is vexed,
Happy only to find home, a place
Where no tax is levied for being there.

So, insecure, he loves and love
Is insecure, gives less than he expects.
He knows not if it be seed in time to display
Luxuriantly in a wonderful fructification
Or whether it be but a degenerate remnant
Of something immense in the past but now
Surviving only as the infectiousness of disease
Or in the malicious caricature of drunkenness;
Its end glossed over by the careless but known long
To finer perception of the mad and ill.

Moving along the track which is himself,
He loves what he hopes will last, which gone,
Begins the difficult work of mourning,
And as foreign settlers to strange country come,
By mispronunciation of native words
And by intermarriage create a new race
And a new language, so may the soul
Be weaned at last to independent delight.

Startled by the violent laugh of a jay
I went from wood, from crunch underfoot,

Air between stems as under water;
As I shall leave the summer, see autumn come
Focussing stars more sharply in the sky,
See frozen buzzard flipped down the weir
And carried out to sea, leave autumn,
See winter, winter for earth and us,
A forethought of death that we may find ourselves at
 death
Not helplessly strange to the new conditions.

•
4

It is time for the destruction of error.
The chairs are being brought in from the garden,
The summer talk stopped on that savage coast
Before the storms, after the guests and birds:
In sanatoriums they laugh less and less,
Less certain of cure; and the loud madman
Sinks now into a more terrible calm.

The falling leaves know it, the children,
At play on the fuming alkali-tip
Or by the flooded football ground, know it——
This is the dragon's day, the devourer's:
Orders are given to the enemy for a time
With underground proliferation of mould,
With constant whisper and the casual question,
To haunt the poisoned in his shunned house,
To destroy the efflorescence of the flesh,

The intricate play of the mind, to enforce
Conformity with the orthodox bone,
With organized fear, the articulated skeleton.

You whom I gladly walk with, touch,
Or wait for as one certain of good,
We know it, we know that love
Needs more than the admiring excitement of union,
More than the abrupt self-confident farewell,
The heel on the finishing blade of grass,
The self-confidence of the falling root,
Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
Death of the old gang; would leave them
In sullen valley where is made no friend,
The old gang to be forgotten in the spring,
The hard bitch and the riding-master,
Stiff underground; deep in clear lake
The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there.

5

Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will his negative inversion, be prodigal:
Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown virginity.
Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response
And gradually correct the coward's stance;
Cover in time with beams those in retreat
That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great;
Publish each healer that in city lives
Or country houses at the end of drives;
Harrow the house of the dead; look shining at
New styles of architecture, a change of heart.



'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.

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 suburban
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 cafe's
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 w^rere 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.

8

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.

Chorus. Acts of injustice done

Between the setting and the rising sun
In history lie like bones, each one.

Mother. Still the dark forest, quiet the deep,

Softly the clock ticks, Baby must sleep!
The Polestar is shining, bright the Great Bear,
Orion is watching, high up in the air.

Chorus. Memory sees them down there,

Paces alive beside his fear
That's slow to die and still here.

Mother. Reindeer are coming to drive you away

Over the snow on an ebony sleigh,
Over the mountains and over the sea
You shall go happy and handsome and free.

Chorus. The future, hard to mark,

Of a world turning in the dark
Where ghosts are walking and dogs bark.

Mother. Over the green grass pastures there

You shall go hunting the beautiful deer,
You shall pick flowers, the white and the blue,
Shepherds shall flute their sweetest for you.

Chorus. True, Love finally is great,

Greater than all; but large the hate,
Far larger than Man can ever estimate.

Mother. And in the castle tower above

The princess' cheek burns red for your love,

You shall be king and queen of the laud,
Happy for ever, hand in hand.

Chorus. But between the day and night
The choice is free to all, and light
Falls equally on black and white.

10

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 watching
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 fertilising 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
 marvels;
Affectionate people, but crude their sense of glory.

Far-sighted as falcons, they looked down another
 future;
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.

11

(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.

12

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.

13

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.

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.

False; 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 played
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.

15

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.

16

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.

17

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.⁹

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 em-
 ployed 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.

18

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,
Pass 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 mildly 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.'

19

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.

20

Fish in the unruffled lakes
The swarming colours wear,
Swans in the winter air
A white perfection have,
And the great lion walks
Through his innocent grove;
Lion, fish, and swan
Act, and are gone
Upon Time's toppling wave.

We till shadowed days are done,
We must weep and sing
Duty's conscious wrong,
The Devil in the clock,
The Goodness carefully worn
For atonement or for luck;
We must lose our loves,
On each beast and bird that moves
Turn an envious look.

Sighs for folly said and done
Twist our narrow days;
But I must bless, I must praise
That you, my swan, who have
All gifts that to the swan

Impulsive Nature gave,
The majesty and pride,
Last night should add
Your voluntary love.

21

(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 cafes, 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 hecarne 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.

22

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 insane;
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.

1. THE SPHINX

Did it once issue from the carver's hand
 Healthy? Even the earliest conquerors saw
 The face of a sick ape, a bandaged paw,
 A Presence in the hot invaded land.

The lion of a tortured stubborn star,
 It does not like the young, nor love, nor learning:
 Time hurt it like a personj it lies, turning
 A vast behind on shrill America,

And witnesses. The huge hurt face accuses,
 And pardons nothing, least of all success.
 The answers that it utters have no uses

To those who face akimbo its distress:
 'Do people like me?' No. The slave amuses
 The lion: 'Am I to suffer always?' Yes.

2

He looked in all His wisdom from the throne
 Down on the humble boy who kept the sheep,
 And sent a dove; the dove returned alone:
 Youth liked the music, but soon fell asleep.

But He had planned such future for the youth:
 Surely His duty now was to compel;
 For later he would come to love the truth,
 And own his gratitude. The eagle fell.

It did not work: his conversation bored
The boy who yawned and whistled and made faces,
And wriggled free from fatherly embraces;

But with the eagle he was always willing
To go where it suggested, and adored
And learnt from it the many ways of killing.

3

And the age ended, and the last deliverer died
In bed, grown idle and unhappy; they were safe:
The sudden shadow of the giant's enormous calf
Would fall no more at dusk across the lawn outside.

They slept in peace: in marshes here and there no
doubt
A sterile dragon lingered to a natural death,
But in a year the spoor had vanished from the heath;
The kobold's knocking in the mountain petered out.

Only the sculptors and the poets were half sad,
And the pert retinue from the magician's house
Grumbled and went elsewhere. The vanquished powers
were glad

To be invisible and free: without remorse
Struck down the sons who strayed into their course,
And ravished the daughters, and drove the fathers mad.

24

Night falls on China; the great arc of travelling shadow
Moves over land and ocean, altering life:

Thibet already silent, the packed Indias cooling,

Inert in the paralysis of caste. And though in Africa
The vegetation still grows fiercely like the young,
And in the cities that receive the slanting radiations

The lucky are at work, and most still know they suffer,
The dark will touch them soon: night's tiny noises
Will echo vivid in the owl's developed ear,

Vague in the anxious sentry's; and the moon look down
On battlefields and dead men lying, heaped like
treasure,
On lovers ruined in a brief embrace, on ships

Where exiles watch the sea: and in the silence
The cry that streams out into the indifferent spaces,
And never stops or slackens, may be heard more clearly,

Above the everlasting murmur of the woods and rivers,
And more insistent than the lulling answer of the
waltzes,
Or hum of printing-presses turning forests into lies;

As now I hear it, rising round me from Shanghai,
And mingling with the distant mutter of guerilla
fighting,

The voice of Man: **O teach me to outgrow my madness.*

*It's better to be sane than mad, or liked than dreaded;
It's better to sit down to nice meals than to nasty;
It's better to sleep two than single; it's better to be happy.*

*Ruffle the perfect manners of the frozen heart.
And once again compel it to be awkward and alive,
To all it suffered once a weeping witness.*

*Clear from the head the masses of impressive rubbish;
Rally the lost and trembling forces of the will,
Gather them up and let them loose upon the earth,*

*Till they construct at last a human justice,
The contribution of our star, within the shadow
Of which uplifting, loving, and constraining power
All other reasons may rejoice and operate.'*

