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POETRY NOW

POETRY NOW

an anthology

edited by

G. S. FRASER

FABER AND FABER

24 Russell Square

London

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Preface

BY G. S. FRASER

... I remember saying one night at the Cheshire Cheese, when more poets than usual had come, 'None of us can say who will succeed, or even who has or has not talent. The only thing certain about us is that we are too many.'

YEATS: AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

1

The poets represented in this anthology are all British, and are mainly those British poets who either began to write, or who first properly discovered themselves, during or after the Second World War. Compiling the anthology was as difficult a task—certainly it was an extremely long one—as my epigraph from Yeats suggests. When I sat down with a friend, about eighteen months ago, to make a list of poets who had possibly a claim to appear in these pages we very rapidly covered three sheets of foolscap with nearly two hundred names. That list was soon slashed drastically; even so, the work of seventy-four poets appears here, and I have excluded on principle senior poets and even fairly young poets who were already well established before 1959. And there are, even now, omissions that I am unhappy about. The last fifteen years in the history of English poetry have, in fact, a good deal in common with the 18805 and 18905, and perhaps even more with the Caroline period. The writing of poems is perhaps becoming, as in Japan and China, a general social accomplishment of all educated and sensitive persons. The period covered by this anthology has been notable both for an abundant variety of minor talent in poetry, and for the fact that, since the late Dylan Thomas, no new dominating

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poetic personality has appeared. Thus, I could not have made this, even if I had wished to, a 'programme' anthology, of the type of *New Signatures*. Mr. John Heath-Stubbs, Mr. Bernard Spencer, and Mr. John Wain are, for instance, three poets who stand for three sharply contrasting concepts of poetry; of whom, probably, no one very warmly admires the work of the other two; yet it would give a misleading picture, in such an anthology as this, to leave any one of them out. I have put in a few poets—Mr. David Gascoyne, Mr. F. T. Prince, Miss Sheila Wingfield are examples—who had published volumes of verse before 1959, but who seemed to me to have done their best work since then. But, on the whole, the pattern of my selection will make most sense to the reader if he thinks of me as attempting to answer the question: 'What, since 1939, in English poetry, has been *new*?'

2

Even before 1939, a certain reaction had set in, among younger poets, against the prevailing tone of poetry in the 1930s. It is easy, of course, to exaggerate the degree to which this was a unified tone. Yet we can perhaps say that the poet of the 1930s, in so far as he looked to Mr. Auden or Mr. MacNeice for a lead, owed more to the Augustan tradition from Dryden to Byron than either to the Metaphysical tradition from Donne to Cowley or the Romantic tradition from Wordsworth to Yeats. What the poet of the 1930s got from Mr. T. S. Eliot, perhaps the most important near-contemporary influence on him, was rather a feeling for the cadences of the speaking voice and for the tang of urban imagery than an attitude to life, or an experimental boldness in formal invention. Technically, also, the very strong influence of Gerard Manley Hopkins worked against that of Mr. Eliot towards hammered

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emphasis rather than conversational nuance, towards the assertive rather than the doubtful or questioning mood. A third strong influence on the poetry of the 1930s (largely due to the work of Mr. Auden as an anthologist) was the new vogue for light verse—nursery rhymes, folk songs, blues songs. No poet of the 1930s was moved, like Mr. Eliot in *The Waste Land* or Mr. Pound in *The Cantos*, to invent a radically new form. It was typical of Mr. Auden in particular rather to adapt traditional forms—the song, the ballad, the verse epistle, the canzone, the descriptive poem with didactic overtones—to new purposes. Traditional metres and stanzas, flexibly handled, appealed to these poets more than experiments in free verse. Of course, the ordinary reader still found them 'difficult'; and the radicalism of their politics perhaps concealed even from the specialist reader the degree to which their prevailing tone represented not a continuation of, but a reaction against, the experimentalism of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Pound. Perhaps, in seeking for a 'public tone', they often achieved only a *clique* tone; critics of the school of Dr. Leavis, at least, thought so. Augustan poetry cannot, in fact, be written without an Augustan audience. Yet the notion of a new Augustanism was in the air; poetry, said Mr. Geoffrey Grigson, deploring the obscurities of Dylan Thomas, ought to be 'losing its squint'.

Mr. Spender does not fit into these generalisations; he was a subjective poet, of romantic temperament. But the first conscious rebels against the prevailing tone of the 1930s were probably Mr. George Barker and the late Dylan Thomas. For both these writers (and in this they differed from Mr. Auden and Mr. MacNeice) the bricks of which a poem was built were images rather than statements. Dylan Thomas had a massively coherent vision of life; but he did not bother about throwing the reader a plain prose meaning—as one might throw a rubber bone to an angry dog—to keep him busy till the poem

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got to work at a deeper level. Mr. Barker was much more ready than Dylan Thomas to tackle external, social and political, themes and to incorporate in his poems observed detail; but his diction was highly coloured and grandiose, and he ignored the standards of colloquial urbanity which Mr. Grigson had attempted to establish in 'New Verse'. Nor was he afraid of themes that might, by the general standards of the 1930s, seem morbid and self-centred. He was a literary sensationalist, a poet of shock-tactics. His language held one's attention often by a kind of brilliant bad taste.

Among the younger poets, at the universities, a similar reaction against the dominating tone of the 1930s was by 1939 already well under way. In Oxford Mr. John Heath-Stubbs, the late Sidney Keyes, and the late Keith Douglas (a poet whose more mature development, however, was towards a harsh realism) represented a kind of 'back-to-literature' movement, and in particular a return towards sympathy with the great Romantics. Keyes's gods were Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Rilke; aware of the dangers of an excessively 'literary' attitude, he once described himself jokingly in a letter to Mr. Heath-Stubbs as 'Misery's child.' There was, however, more genuine promise in this 'literary' neo-romanticism than in what subsequently became known first as the New Apocalypse and then, when it became a broader movement, as the New Romanticism. Two defects of much of the poetry written under the influence of these two movements were the cults of an extreme subjectivism and an interesting disorder. Critical standards, in the little magazines of the 1940s, almost went by the board.

Much of the best poetry of the Second World War was, however, not neo-romantic and, indeed, sprang from no particular theory. It was, in a good sense, 'occasional' poetry. Much of it was written—by exiled civilians as often as, or perhaps more often than, by soldiers—in the Near East, in particular in Cairo

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and Alexandria. The sense of exile and the stimulation of a strange scene gave, for a time, a certain common tone to poets whose temperaments and gifts were very different, like Mr. Lawrence Durrell, Mr. Bernard Spencer, Mr. Terence Tiller, and the late Keith Douglas. Some of Mr. Roy Fuller's wartime poems, about lush and more barbarous parts of Africa, might be grouped with theirs; and the tradition of the 'poem of place' has been kept alive since the war by younger writers like Mr. Alan Ross and Mr. D. J. Enright. At their weakest, occasional poems of this sort can resemble a tastefully chosen picture post-card or a rather incoherent gossipy letter home. At their best they can shape a mood, a scene, an episode into a justifiably self-contained whole. Such poetry does, however, very much depend on a combination, in the poet, of a lively interest in the novelty of his surroundings with the exile's feeling of loss and stress. Quite a number of writers, therefore, who had begun during the war to make a reputation as poets of place found it hard to go on developing when in 1945 peace transplanted them from the Mediterranean to the drabber and more complex London scene.

3

In 1945, therefore, many of the young poets who had shown promise over the war years seemed to be marking time. In the later 1940s, however, one tendency did seem genuinely new and promising: the tendency towards a revival of symbolism. It was associated particularly with the work of three poets who fall outside the range of this anthology, Mr. Robert Graves, Dr. Edwin Muir, and Miss Kathleen Raine. In the work of all three of these writers—in poems of neat construction and sober diction—a symbolic image becomes not an ornament but the central object which the poem presents. The poem, in fact,

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contains no metaphors, because it is all one metaphor. Thus, in Dr. Edwin Muir's fine poem, 'The Labyrinth', Theseus remembers the labyrinth and wonders if he ever really got out of it. Did he only dream he got out of it, and is he still really struggling along inside? The soliloquy is written in very long and complicated, though intrinsically coherent, blank-verse sentences, which are themselves little labyrinth-patterns. And against the man's-eye image of the labyrinth-pattern—the trapped, striving-up-and-outwards pattern—there is set a god's-eye image of men going peacefully about their traditional tasks on the surface of the earth, looking from above small and simple, like dolls. Studying Dr. Muir's *Autobiography* we can find the source of his tragic man's-eye image of the human struggle in his youth in Glasgow, a city which he specifically compares to a labyrinth; and we can find the source of his serene god's-eye view of the world in his account of his childhood in the bare, beautiful Orkneys. By transforming such raw material to myth, he risks making it seem remote and abstract, but at the same time makes sure that his own personal experiences are related to a universal predicament. The weakness of symbolist poetry, in this sense, is that it may become empty. Its strength is that it is not liable to lose its thread in complications of adventitious detail.

The poet of a younger generation than these who has employed the symbolist method most rigorously, and perhaps with most distinction, is Mr. W. S. Graham. It is a mistake to compare this poet, as critics often do, with Dylan Thomas, who was by no means strictly a symbolist in this sense, and who was always ready to court richness, even at the risk of confusion. Mr. Graham is puzzling not because of a confused richness but because of what might almost seem a monotony of theme; the complexity of his syntax, which does make many readers find him puzzling, is a technical device, like those by which a

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musician can build up an indefinite number of patterns starting from two or three given phrases. In Mr. Graham's latest volume, *The Nightfishing*, one might say that all the poems are built round the relation between two metaphors: 'the sea' for the changing flow of sensational experience: 'the word' for man's attempt to master that flow conceptually, and to build it into thought or art. Here, the basic pattern might seem even more dangerously abstract than the basic pattern in Dr. Muir's 'The Labyrinth'. In fact, it is not so, for the sea for Mr. Graham (brought up on the west coast of Scotland, and familiar with fishing-boats from his childhood) is the actual, 'realized' sea; and similarly 'the word' is not an abstraction, not a mere concept, the notion of the notion, but the actual poem he is struggling to shape.

When, however, the symbolic method is associated (as it often is) with some orthodox system of belief, a consideration of its validity becomes much more complicated. A poem about Hercules could be a symbolic poem on the universal theme of the strong man's weakness⁵ but if a poem about Christ is *merely* a symbolic poem, merely a poem on the universal theme of the good man's sufferings, it ceases to be a properly Christian poem. It is part of the notion of Christianity that it claims to be literally and not merely symbolically true. On the other hand, the poet today knows that when he insists on the literal truth of his Christian symbolism he will arouse an awkward resistance in many readers. This awareness may make his own tone a little awkward. It is one thing to write religious poetry in an age of faith, and another to write it in an age of respectful agnosticism. These factors may account, for instance, for a certain rhetorical stridency in some of the poems of Mr. David Gascoyne and for a certain vagueness of definition in some of the poems of Mr. Vernon Watkins. Mr. John Heath-Stubbs, again, is perhaps at his best as a poet when he presents his religious

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attitudes obliquely and ironically, from the point of view of the Christian sinner. And a poet like Mrs, Anne Ridler who tends on the whole to avoid the symbolist method, but rather to suffuse everyday experiences with her Christian attitudes, can, perhaps, be even firmer and more confident than Mr. Heath-Stubbs in her general handling of tone. It is easier to say in poetry, in an age like our own, 'This is the sort of person I choose to be', than, 'This, in spite of the appearances, is the sort of world it is.'

4

At the turn of the 1940s, two magazines, *Nine* and *Colonnade*, both of which paid particular attention to translation and to reviving interest in the great literature of the past, marked a minor breakaway from the prevailing neo-romantic mood. For the emergence of a really new attitude to poetry, rooted in new social conditions, we had to wait till the early 1950s. Then, the ninepenny pamphlets published by the Fantasy Press in Oxford and the limited small editions of new poets published by the Fine Art Department of Reading University, and chosen by Mr. John Wain, introduced (at first to a small audience) a set of poets too young in most cases either to remember vividly the 1930s, to have had their attitudes fixed by the war years, or to be deeply affected by current London fashions. These young poets had often been influenced by the teachings and writings of Dr. Leavis, and by the poetic example of Mr, Empson. Their arrival on the scene represented what might, perhaps, be described as an ousting of the bohemians by the pedants. Many of these new poets were teachers of English, or sometimes librarians, often in provincial universities. They were more in sympathy with the 'puritan' and 'provincial' strands in the English tradition than their immediate predeces-

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sors, and as practising poets at once more scholarly (with certain reservations, and within certain limits) and also much more cautious. They worked almost entirely in the typical Augustan line, the end-stopped iambic pentameter. Certain metrical forms had an unusual prestige with them, notably two, borrowed from Mr. Empson: the villanelle, with an ironical twist of emphasis in its refrain: and *terza rima*, used for meditative verse, and ending often with a single line hanging in the air. The quatrain was also popular. Mr. Hilary Corke, a young poet not of this school, has a humorously hostile description of some of its more obvious outward characteristics:

'The recipe for this type of poetry is simple. Read five hundred lines of Dryden till you have the "noble, frank, and manly" rhythm pat; choose any theme more proper to critical prose; garnish with two *chic* philosophical terms, three classical references (*minor* writers, please!) and half a dozen rather naughty ones; deluge in an *espagnole* of Total Knowingness, and serve up in *villanelle or terza rima*. ("The Bad Old Style", *Encounter*, June 1955.)'

Mr. Empson, himself, in a broadcast, speaking of these young disciples (and alluding to himself in the third person) observed that Empson no doubt had a narrow talent but not quite so narrow as you might think from reading these young men. Yet what attracted the best of these young poets to Mr. Empson was not, obviously, merely the 'noble, frank, and manly' style which he shares with Dryden but the fashion in which, in his best poems, a mind of the first order can be seen exercising an ironic control over an inner core of passion. The problem about the disciples is whether they have merely the irony, without the core. At the same time, the degree to which Mr. Empson is the sole dominant influence over the newest group of the young can be much exaggerated. One sees his influence clearly in Mr. Wain's earlier poems, much less in his

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later ones; very clearly in Mr. Alvarez's poems, but not unhelpfully, since Mr. Alvarez seems close to Mr. Empson in natural temper of mind} helpfully, on the whole, in Mr. Jonathan Price's poems; unhelpfully, perhaps, in Mr. George MacBeth's poems, who seems to make rococo out of Mr. Empson's baroque. Mr. Donald Davie, on the other hand, owes much more to his favourite late Augustans than to any contemporary model. Mr. Thorn Gunn, one of the best poets of this group, has hammered out for himself a plain, direct style—sometimes slightly awkward and aggressive!—that suggests a general recurrence to some of the standards of the 1930s but no direct personal influence. Mr. Philip Larkin, a poet of deep feeling, of delicacy and restraint, sometimes (as in his beautiful poem about old horses at grass) suggests a chastened Yeats—a Yeats 'done over again' in water-colour. What all these writers do have in common is a new strictness and sobriety. The general standard of their craftsmanship compares very favourably indeed with the slapdash, hit-or-miss methods of the 1940s. The danger that confronts them as poets is, on the other hand, the aridity that comes from always playing safe.

In so far as there does exist a dominant immediately contemporary 'movement' in English poetry, the movement which I have described—or some of whose characteristics I have roughly sketched in—is it. But it is not a movement which by any means has it all its own way. There are young poets of great promise, like Mr. Christopher Logue and Mr. Burns Singer, who will have nothing to do with the new sobriety; they are exuberant, or nothing. There are others, like Mr. Martin Seymour Smith (in some of his best poems apparently a disciple of Mr. Robert Graves), Mr. Richard Murphy, and Mr. Hilary Corke who share the concern of the poets of 'The Movement' with careful craftsmanship but have very different visions of life, technical approaches, admired masters.

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Both Mr. Corke and Mr. Murphy have criticized to me in conversation the monotony of the revived iambic pentameter as a staple line and the too self-conscious sophistication (sometimes concealing callowness) of the neo-Empsonian *tone*. The best of the younger women poets, also, like Miss Elizabeth Jennings and Miss Mairi McInnes, tend (like most good women poets, at most times) to be highly individual, and to fall outside the literary journalist's groupings. These groupings, for that matter, should not be taken for anything more ambitious than they are: convenient pigeon-holes, for documents that deserve individual scrutiny.

5

Such an essay as this must, nevertheless, be largely devoted to providing the reader with such pigeon-holes. The individual scrutiny is up to him. My last category of poets in this list is that of the poets who can roughly be described as regionalists: Scots, Welsh, and Irish. The Scots, particularly those who write in Scots, have lately been very much under fire; their language has been described as a travesty of any living speech, as something made up from a dictionary. I would refer readers who are impressed by such criticisms to the version, in this volume, by Mr. Robert Garioch, of Hesiod's 'Winter'. Here is a poem written in an imitation of the metre, and very largely in an imitation of the language, of Gawain Douglas's *Aencid*. Will anybody put his hand on his heart and swear that he thinks it could have been done better, or as well, either in diluted colloquial Scots or contemporary English? The language of the Scottish Chaucerians, after all, was itself 'aureate', partly artificial. All literary languages are partly artificial. A case against contemporary poets in Scots cannot be based on the argument that they 'write no language'; but merely on an argument that

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their no-language is a mask for no-poetry, No such problems, fortunately, arise with contemporary Welsh and Irish poets; Mr. R. S. Thomas and Mr. Thomas Kinsella, in particular, are two very good poets whom I am glad to bring before a wider audience than they probably have at home. In both of them, I think, one finds that natural (not exotic) 'sense of place' which the modern metropolitan poet tends to lack.

6

This preface so far has been an historical summary, deliberately almost entirely excluding value-judgments, I shall risk a value judgment now by saying that I think this anthology contains a great many good poems of a surprising variety of sorts, and perhaps no great poem. Moreover, the most assured level of accomplishment seems to me to be rather that of wit or fancy or sensitive description than that of profound or soaring imagination. It may be a mere brute historical fact (or a fact which I at least am not competent to throw any real light on) that some periods produce two or three poets of outstanding genius and other periods a great many poets of respectable talent, It may be that every great period of innovation and experiment in literature (and the first thirty years of this century were certainly such a period) is followed by another period in which literature seems to mark time. A certain dissatisfaction with contemporary British achievement not only in poetry, but in every branch of literature, is undoubtedly widely felt. I myself, as a poet of the same generation as most of the poets in this book, have tended to blame our failure to do more outstanding things on the five or so years of the war, and the five or so years of readjustment after the war, which have made us slow in maturing. I have literary friends in their forties whose attitude to life has, probably, never fundamentally changed since they

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were undergraduates; they have been too busy keeping up with things. There are probably deeper explanations. Sir Herbert Read thinks that we have lost the unifying philosophy of immanentism which the great Romantics had, and that nothing has taken its place; Mr. Spender appears to hold a similar view, and thinks that the poet today feels isolated in a neutral universe; the early theory of Dr. Richards that the language of poetry is purely 'emotive', that the poet cannot in a scientific or philosophic sense 'say' anything significant, represents a tougher attitude to the same problem. Yet I would say myself that poetry is the controlled expression of feeling in words, that we still have feelings, that we still use words, that we can still exercise control, and that many great poets of the past have either had very depressing philosophies (like Leopardi) or (like Catullus) no apparent philosophy at all. I am doubtful also about explanations of the comparative sterility of the past fifteen years or so in terms of the isolation of the poet from his audience. In some ways (broadcasts, subsidised poetry readings, prizes, and so on) he is *less* isolated than he used to be. He is nothing like so isolated as Wordsworth and Coleridge were to start with. One can, I think, merely record a feeling of dissatisfaction, and question it; and wonder, finally, perhaps whether a genuine and lasting relaxation of international tension might not have a very fertilising effect on poetry. Some sense of constriction, indefinable but inhibiting, I think every poet of my own generation must have felt. In that sense, the production of some of the good minor poems in this book may have been, in its quiet way, a more heroic effort than the production of great poems in a more propitious age. With that thought, I leave my poets to the reader's sympathy.

G. S. ERASER

A. Alvarez

THE CATHARSIS

It is the tenderness you feel you know
You may have had the tenderness you miss.

Still in the mask you wear your tongue can go
Raptly to themes the audience won't guess

Creating from those fragments of thin air
Within the head's 0 what you might have been.

You are not less because they cannot share
All that you are and tell what they have seen.

Still they're agog, Your eloquence will flow
Beyond the measure pacing your distress

Till it breaks down the limits of your care
And finally you relish what you seem

And are to your last sense all you forgo.
Love, The particular. No more no less.

WHO 'LL TOLL THE KNELL?

He brandished the two pillars like a spear,
Then killed himself Roman-fashion.
Was this (Manoah's pride) a superb gesture,
Or (Delilah's hesitation) overdone?

A. Alvarez

The Pillars of Hercules support the sky
And guard the Middle Sea like lions' teeth ;
This giant straddles a cosmology,
Yet keeps the puffed-out traders, far beneath.

Dagon and Nessus, half-men half-something else,
Like Sin (their subtle pox was Death's disease),
Felled them at length, though slain themselves of course
By vast straightforward bullies such as these.

Kingsley Amis

DEPARTURE

For one month afterwards the eye stays true,
And sees the other's face held still and free
Of ornament; then tires of peering down
A narrow vista, and the month runs out.

Too young, this eye will crave the merit of
A faithful sentry frozen at his post
And not a movement seen; yet ranges over
Far other tracts, its object lost, corrupt.

Nor should I now swell to halloo the names
Of feelings that no one needs to remember,
Nor caper with my posy of wilted avowals
To clutter up your path I should wish clear.

Perhaps it is not too late to crane the eye
And find you, distant and small, but as you are;
If not, I will retain you honestly blurred,
Not a bland refraction of sweet mirrors.

A DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN

The door still swinging to, and girls revive,
Aeronauts in the utmost altitudes
Of boredom fainting, dive
Into the bright oxygen of my nod;
Angels as well, a squadron of draped nudes,
They roar towards their god.

Kingsley Amis

Militant all, they fight to take my hat,
No more as yet; the other men retire
 Insulted, gestured at;
Each girl presses on me her share of what
Makes up the barn-door target of desire;
 And I am a crack shot.

Speech fails them, amorous, but each one's look,
Endorsed in other ways, begs me to sign
 Her body's autograph-book;
' Me first, Kingsley; I'm cleverest,' each declares,
But no gourmet races downstairs to dine,
 Nor will I race upstairs.

Feigning aplomb, perhaps for half an hour,
I hover, and am shown by each princess
 The entrance to her tower,
Open, in that its tenant throws the key
At once to anyone, but not unless
 That anyone is me.

Now from the corridor their fathers cheer,
Their brothers, their young men; the cheers increase
 As soon as I appear;
From each I win a handshake and sincere
Congratulations; from the chief of police
 A nod, a wink, a leer.

This over, all delay is over too;
The first eight girls (the roster now agreed)
 Leap on me, and undo . . .
But honesty impels me to confess
That this is 'all a dream,' which was, indeed,
 Not difficult to guess.

Kingsley Amis

But wait: not 'just a dream,' because, though good
And beautiful, it is also true, and hence
 Is rarely understood⁵
Who would choose any feasible ideal
In here and now's giant circumference
 If that small room were real?

Only the best; the others find, have found
Love's ordinary distances too great,
 And eager, stand their ground ;
Map-drunk explorers, dry-land sailors, they
See no arrival that can compensate
 For boredom on the way;

And, seeming doctrinaire, but really weak,
Limelighted dolls guttering in their brain,
 They come with me, to seek
The halls of theoretical delight,
The women of that ever-fresh terrain,
 The night after tonight.

W. G. Archer

THE WHITE CURTAINS

What are the tears upon your pleated dress?
What are the creases in your shining frock?
I was weeping at the decay of the white birds
And the crumbling agony of the majestic rock.

What are the fractures in your eye's composure
And the small lines upon your plastered face?
I was thinking of the pink beauty on the mantelpiece
And the lamb she garlands with an easy grace.

Why do your eyes evade a question
And dart to the hanging wires around the room?
They are obsessed with a certain image
And the olive splendours of an ancient tomb.

Why do you still conceal your trouble
And wrap up the sources of the tear?
I regarded the past as an expert method
And did not know the power of a vague fear.

Were you prepared to beat within a shell
And coop the blood under its gritty frame?
I wished to compromise with nature
And wait with my body for a different aim.

What has occurred to break your will
That you fidget with an arrow in the core?
It was a violence that would not brook delay
And brushed the white curtains of the private door.

Patricia Avis

LEPER ISLAND

An ancient fortress sprung between
Rude bluffs of carob arming a meek bay
Is now the island prison
Of a dwindling leper colony.

No devils jangle on these stumps
Shuffling the days in cards and cigarettes,
Their closest saints a bleary glimpse
Of summer trippers circling in boats.

Drachmas and drugs provided daily
With communal kitchens and electric light,
Such a model might well be the envy
Of all the villages in Crete,

Were it not for the notable absence
Of flowers enough to make a field
For here there is only one terrace
Tilled to cover the dead.

Bernard Bergonzi

CHARING CROSS ROAD

Promethean culture here reveals such horrors
that, passing by, the simple soul exudes
inflamed dismay at these, the West's last terrors;
yet should beware too-facile attitudes.

True, daisies sprouted where the wide-boys stand
and shepherds wandered in the Soho fields.
But lepers, too, went limping through the land;
a balanced page is all that History yields.

And Western Man deserves what he expects,
desiring knowledge, or with plain Desire:
twelve million books, and windows filled with sex.
Though God, in time, may send a different fire.

But while no purgatorial torches burn,
the brash and worldly road still must be faced;
until a day when spiv and bookworm turn,
Like new-born men, illiterate and chaste.

Bernard Bergonzi

ANEMONES FOR MISS AUSTEN

Indeed a sweet and knowing lady,
quietly scribbling away her time;
the geographer of a gentle clime
where only the lanes were shady,
the poor kept decently out of sight,
and the neat old-fashioned carriages
manoeuvred the county marriages,
where the curates came off worst, as well they might.

The cool young heroines got their men,
and in due time were suitably wed.
None of the details escaped her pen.

And yet, somehow she never quite said
a word about what happened then,
how they managed with breakfast or bed.

Thomas Blackburn

THE MUSE

After their first brief vernal intercourse,
Young lovers of the Muses soon may find
Their sea-born bride unable to sustain
Such wordy nuptials and know with pain
They lie alone and are both dumb and blind.

Some may deceive themselves and buy a Muse
From the rude traffic of the public street,
Whose pretty lisping ways and flowered conceit
Conceals the nature of their self-abuse.

Others refrain and join a brisker trade,
Less coy of their advances, or become
A great Word-Master who outstares the dumb,
Shy lover of the Abyssinian Maid.

In festering letters at the crowded bar,
Some pristine bridegroom marts his amorous pride
And warms the cold place where she left his side
By ribbons and the academic star.

The Muse abhorred his profile in her glass,
For those who seek her bedroom must undress,
That through their absence and their nakedness,
Her poem's wild silver to the lips may pass.

After each episode, the ardent swain
Must burn the virile pageant of his arms
And to the fire surrender all his charms,
If he would mount his numinous She again.

Thomas Blackburn

It seems her mate is absence ; you but find
The statues of the places where he died
Milestone the poet's journey to his bride,
Their cold stone mouths like gateways through
the mind.

Arthur Boyars

POEM

Supremest fictions grow with fungus speed,
The drunk by lies, the diver knows by art
The blurry wrecks made fairy-tale with weed.

Soon sight confounds the truth-germ in the heart
With a new myth matured with novel ease
From unlived histories which do not smart.

The germ divides, the fictions lunge and squeeze
In the breach pronounced by this division,
The duplicating halves of truth they seize.

Now is forever fable in the vision,
The figures changing every time we check,
The fate which gives safe sail provides collision;

We plunge for vessel and we find the wreck,
A shell and loss before invention sees
The unexpected Angel on its deck.

Alan Brownjohn

RESPECTS

Incapable now of the classical despair,
I cannot truly mourn as the dark wheels
Bear her out solemnly, the wise bell speaks
Requiem, the traffic halts.

Reserved for her, only the tear and gesture,
Sorrow and the clutched flower,
Verses in memory. Her passing
Will not bring sad, undue

Autumn before its time, or wilful rain
At harvest. Only the gaping children
Watching me look at her, lastly,
Think that I love and die

As the dull street's silence
Swallows my wanting with her. And the deep
Quiet of the indifferent city
Follows with dusk her carriage and her sleep.

George Bruce

KINNAIRD HEAD

I go North to cold, to home, to Kinnaird,
Fit monument for our time.

This is the outermost edge of Buchan,
Inland the sea birds range,
The tree's leaf has salt upon it,
The tree turns to the low stone wall.
And here a promontory rises towards Norway,
Irregular to the top of thin grey grass
Where the spindrift in storm lays its beads.
The water plugs in the cliff sides,
The gull cries from the clouds
This is the consummation of the plain.

O impregnable and very ancient rock,
Rejecting the violence of water,
Ignoring its accumulations and strategy,
You yield to history nothing.

Charles Causley

OU PHRONTIS*

To E. M. Forster

The bells assault the maiden air,
The coachman waits with a carriage and pair,
But the bridegroom says *I won't be there,*
I don't care!

Three times three times the banns declare
That the boys may blush and the girls may glare,
But the bridegroom is occupied elsewhere,
I don't care!

Lord, but the neighbours all will stare,
Their temperatures jump as high as a hare,
But the bridegroom says *I've paid my fare,*
I don't care!

The bride she waits by the bed so bare,
Soft as a pillow is her hair,
But the bridegroom jigs with the leg of a chair,
/ don't care!

Say, but her father's a millionaire,
A girdle of gold all night will she wear,
You must your foolish ways forswear.
/ don't care!

* The words *Ou phrontis* were carved by T. E. Lawrence over the door of his cottage at Clouds Hill, Dorset. They come from the story in Herodotus, on which this story is based.

Charles Causley

Her mother will offer, if she dare,
A ring that is rich but not so rare
If you'll keep your friendship in repair.

I don't care!

Her sisters will give you a plum and a pear
And a diamond saddle for your mare.
O bridegroom! for the night prepare!

/ don't care!

Her seven brothers all debonair
Will do your wishes and some to spare
If from your fancy you'll forbear.

I don't care!

Say, but a maid you wouldn't scare
Now that you've got her in your snare?
And what about your son and heir?

I don't care!

She'll leap she'll leap from the highest stair,
She'll drown herself in the river there,
With a silver knife her flesh she'll tear.

J don't care!

Then another will lie in the silken lair
And cover with kisses her springing hair.
Another the bridal bed will share.

/ don't care!

*I shall stand on my head on the table bare,
I shall kick my lily-white legs in the air,
I shall wash my hands of the whole affair,*

I don't care!

Robert Conquest

THE ABOLITIONIST

The clear-cut, alien fault he understood.
Thinking he saw a universe of good
A fruit within his reach
He grabbed, and made the breach.

Upon his rock of faith the Union broke.
Five hundred thousand dead repaired that stroke j
His own obsessions bore
Into the risks of war

War nearly lost at that, upon the free
Bayonets of Pickett's infantry,
And almost worst when won
Than if never begun.

Freedom had soaked too deep to hold apart
From the slow flowering of the decent heart,
The work of Jackson, Lee
Setting his own slaves free.

But he brought on us almost to this day,
The carpet-baggers and the R.K.K.
A running ulcer till
Eased by the South's goodwill.

A sort of saint, and our own times can learn
How deadly such humanity will turn
Which serves to decorate
And justify that hate

Robert Conquest

Till it approve, in cattle-trucks and camps
Or under the interrogator's lamps,
What treads its own first flower
Into the filth of power.

GUIDED MISSILES EXPERIMENTAL
RANGE

Soft sounds and odours brim up through the night
A wealth below the level of the eye
Out of a black, an almost violet sky
Abundance flowers into points of light.

Till from the south-west, as their low scream mars
And halts this warm hypnosis of the dark,
Three black automata cut swift and stark,
Shaped clearly by the backward flow of stars.

Stronger than lives, by empty purpose blinded,
The only thought their circuits can endure is
The target-hunting rigour of their flight

And by that loveless haste I am reminded
Of Aeschylus' description of the Furies:
'O barren daughters of the fruitful night.'

Hilary Corke

EDEN

Four waters out of Eden flow
Whose crystal is most cardinal:
Four angels stand upon the wall.
Heron, one-legged Fisher King,
Pelican with bleeding breast,
Phoenix on her burning nest
And music-drunken nightingale
In their quarters sing.

To the north where reed-beds thrust
Arrows through the rings of ice,
Club-foot in the splintered marsh
On his telescopic shank,
With his poignard beak and harsh
Eye-balls glazed with arctic lust,
Somnolent under the lank
Damp feathering of his mummy-cape
Until he senses fat-thighed fish
And leaps to flash his rusty bill
(Thou must die that I may live),
Heron takes but does not give,
Terrible positive of love.

East, where through the willow-thicket
Water tinkles under root,
Ankle-deep in clotted feathers
Wrenched from her own breast, that mother
Anguished by all-weeping wide

Hilary Corke

Black tunnels into hungry grief
That will not be denied,
The gullets of her flesh and blood
Feeds, who has no other food,
Her flesh and blood
(I must die that Thou may live);
Pelican does not take but give,
Terrible negative of love.

Southward to the naked zenith
Where salt upon the granite gleams
Red third of Eden's streams
Crawls, wears thin, and dies in dust:
But perfumed incredible
Against that swingeing desert-wall
The roaring pyre of spice and myrrh
With the musk-purple claws of fire
That rive the ever-burning heart
In agony of death and birth
(We must die that We may live):
Phoenix must both take and give,
Fell reciprocal of love.

Lastly, where the western cloth
Of night-fall folds the dying eye,
Deep in Broceliande that high
Dark estuary-rooted wood
Whose salmon glide between the boles
Of brine-sapped ilex, owl and moth
Fumble on breathing wings at flowers
But all the moon-drenched midnight pours
With abstract uncompassionate song
On flutes turned of old lovers' bones

Hilary Corke

(You live and die, but I must sing,
I who neither take nor give,
Nightingale the 0 of love).

Four waters out of Eden flow
Whose crystal is most cardinal:
Four angels stand upon the wall.
Within the wall two lovers stand
Beneath the passion-fruited bough,
Are hand in hand, are I and Thou.
The angels nod with kindly faces:
All songs are silent now.

Maurice James Craig

GEORGIAN DUBLIN

'So much to do,' said Turgot, 'and so little
Time to do it.' Civilisation must wait
Impotently crouching over the grate,
Watching to sieze the moment, the boiling kettle;
Must grasp it suddenly, deftly, like a nettle,
Without reluctance, not too early or late,
That in the flawed alembic of the state
Correct precipitates may form and settle.

In the quick sunlight of those thirty years
This Roman Empire waited for Sedan.
Though now their building is a hollow shell,
That sea-worn tracery can move to tears.
This capital is incorruptible.
Doric, Ionic and Corinthian.

Donald Davie

ON BERTRAND RUSSELL'S 'PORTRAITS FROM MEMORY'

Those Cambridge generations, Russell's, Keynes' . . .
And mine? Oh mine was Wittgenstein's, no doubt:
Sweet pastoral, too, when some-one else explains,
Although my memories leave the eclogues out.

The clod's not bowed by sedentary years,
Yet, set by Thyrsis, he's a crippled man:
How singularly naked each appears,
Beside the other on this bosky plan.

Arrangements of the copse and cloister seem,
Although effective, still Utopian,
For groves find room, behind a leafy screen,
For sage and harvester, but not for man.

I wonder still which of the hemispheres
Infects the other, in this grassy globe;
The chumbling moth of Madingley, that blears
The labourer's lamp, destroys the scarlet robe.

It was the Muse that could not make her home
In that too thin and yet too sluggish air,
Too volatile to live among the loam,
Her sheaves too heavy for the talkers there.

Donald Davie

DISSENT. A FABLE

When Bradbury sang, 'The Roast Beef of Old England',
And Watts, 'How doth the little busy bee',
Then Doddridge blessed the pikes of Cumberland,
And plunging sapphics damned eternally.

Said Watts the fox: 'Your red meat is uncouth.
We'll keep the bleeding purchase out of sight.
Arminian honey for the age's tooth!
With so much sweetness, who would ask for light?'

Wolf Bradbury mauled the synod, but the fox
Declared that men were growing more refined;
And honey greased, where blood would rust, the locks
That clicked when Calvin trapped the open mind.

The wolves threw off sheep's clothing once or twice
(For Queen Anne dead, or the Pretender foiled),
But the fox knew that tastes were growing nice,
And unction kept the hinge of dogma oiled.

Foxes however prove their own worst foes⁵
And now their chapel door stands open wide,
Its hinge so clogged with wax it cannot close,
No fish so queer but he can swim inside.

The queerest fishes hunger for the trap
And wish the door would close on them, the rough
Jaws of Geneva and Old England snap;
They think their church not barbarous enough.

Donald Davie

The fable seems extravagant, no doubt.
But Reynard ruled the roosts of heaven then,
And beastly pastors kept true shepherds out,
While pike and barracuda fished for men.

Paul Dehn

FERN HOUSE, KEW

Look! it is as though the sun,
Defrosting every spangled pane,
Should touch the fern engraven there
And turn it green again;
 Till the fronds, uncurling in
 The ice which held them captive, flow
 With water-music from the roof
 To tropic airs below;
And I, the boy who many a night
Fashioned in a jungle dream
The boat that I may never steer
Darkly against the stream,
 Quant the fathomed gangways, now,
 Brushed by all green things that grow.

Pondweed here, without a pond
Wavers on the stagnant air,
Soft beside the trailing hand
Drifts the maidenhair
 And steeply to the lightless stream
 The tributary moonwort flows
 Distilling on the river-bed
 A green light that glows.
Yet, by the cataract, how still
The prehistoric tendrils rise:
Antennae of enormous moth,
Spider with spores for eyes.
 Diluvian images they stand
 Unstirring in an older land.

Keith Douglas

VERGISSMEINICHT

Three weeks gone and the combatants gone,
returning over the nightmare ground
we found the place again, and found
the soldier sprawling in the sun.

The frowning barrel of his gun
overshadowing. As we came on
that day, he hit my tank with one
like the entry of a demon.

Look. Here in the gunpit spoil
the dishonoured picture of his girl
who has put: *Steffi. Fergissmeinicht*
in a copybook gothic script.

We see him almost with content
abased, and seeming to have paid
and mocked at by his own equipment
that's hard and good when he's decayed.

But she would weep to see to-day
how on his skin the swart flies move;
the dust upon the paper eye
and the burst stomach like a cave.

For here the lover and killer are mingled
who had one body and one heart.
And death who had the soldier singled
has done the lover mortal hurt.

Keith Douglas

TIME EATING

Ravenous Time has flowers for his food
in Autumn, yet can cleverly make good
each petal: devours animals and men
but for ten dead he can create ten.

If you enquire how secretly you've come
to mansize from the smallness of a stone
it will appear his effort made you rise
so gradually to your proper size.

But as he makes he eats; the very part
where he began, even the elusive heart,
Time's ruminative tongue will wash
and slow juice masticate all flesh.

That volatile huge intestine holds
material and abstract in its folds:
thought and ambition melt and even the world
will alter, in that catholic belly curled.

But Time, who ate my love, you cannot make
such another ; you who can remake
the lizard's tail and the bright snakeskin
cannot, cannot. That you gobbled in
too quick, and though you brought me from a boy
you can make no more of me, only destroy.

Lawrence Durrell

A BALLAD OF THE GOOD LORD NELSON

The good Lord Nelson had a swollen gland,
Little of the scripture did he understand
Till a woman led him to the promised land
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

Adam and Evil and a bushel of figs
Meant nothing to Nelson who was keeping pigs,
Till a woman showed him the various rigs
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

His heart was softer than a new laid egg,
Too poor for loving and ashamed to beg,
Till Nelson was taken by the dancing Leg
Aboard the Victory, Victory O,

Now he up and did up his little tin trunk
And he took to the ocean on his English junk,
Turning like the hour-glass in his lonely bunk
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

The Frenchman saw him a-coming there
With the one-piece eye and the valentine hair,
With the safety-pin sleeve and occupied air
Aboard the Victory, Victory O,

Now you all remember the message he sent
As an answer to Hamilton's discontent—
There were questions asked about it in the Parliament
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

Lawrence Durrell

Now the blacker the berry, the thicker comes the juice.
Think of Good Lord Nelson and avoid self-abuse,
For the empty sleeve was no mere excuse
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

* England Expects' was the motto he gave
When he thought of little Emma out on Biscay's wave,
And remembered working on her like a galley-slave
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

The first Great Lord in our English land
To honour the Freudian command,
For a cast in the bush is worth two in the hand
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

Now the Frenchman shot him as there he stood
In the rage of battle in a silk-lined hood
And he heard the whistle of his own hot blood
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

Now stiff on a pillar with a phallic air
Nelson stylites in Trafalgar Square
Reminds the British what once they were
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

If they'd treat their women in the Nelson way
There'd be fewer frigid husbands every day
And many more heroes on the Bay of Biscay
Aboard the Victory, Victory O.

Lawrence Durrell

ALEXANDRIA

To the lucky now who have lovers or friends,
Who move to their sweet undiscovered ends,
Or whom the great conspiracy deceives,
I wish these whirling autumn leaves:
Promontories splashed by the salty sea,
Groaned on in darkness by the tram
To horizons of love or good luck or more love—
As for me I now move
Through many negatives to what I am.

Here at the last cold Pharos between Greece
And all I love, the lights confide
A deeper darkness to the rubbing tide;
Doors shut, and we the living are locked inside
Between the shadows and the thoughts of peace:
And so in furnished rooms revise
The index of our lovers and our friends
From gestures possibly forgotten, but the ends
Of longings like unconnected nerves,
And in this quiet rehearsal of their acts
We dream of them and cherish them as Facts.

Now when the sea grows restless as a conscript,
Excited by fresh wind, climbs the sea-wall,
I walk by it and think about you all:
B. with his respect for the Object, and D.
Searching in sex like a great pantry for jars
Marked 'Plum and apple'; and the small, fell
Figure of Dorian ringing like a muffin-bell—

Lawrence Durrell

All indeed whom war or time threw up
On this littoral and tides could not move
Were objects for my study and my love.

And then turning where the last pale
Lighthouse, like a Samson blinded, stands
And turns its huge charred orbit on the sands
I think of you—indeed mostly of you,
In whom a writer would only name and lose
The dented boy's lip and the close
Archer's shoulders; but here to rediscover
By tides and faults of weather, by the rain
Which washes everything, the critic and the lover.

At the doors of Africa so many towns founded
Upon a parting could become Alexandria, like
The wife of Lot—a metaphor for tearsj
And the queer student in his poky hot
Tenth floor room above the harbour hears
The siren shaking the tree of his heart,
And shuts his books, while the most
Inexpressible longings like wounds unstitched
Stir in him some girl's unquiet ghost.

So we, learning to suffer and not condemn
Can only wish you this great pure wind
Condemned by Greece, and turning like a helm
Inland where it smokes the fires of men,
Spins weathercocks on farms or catches
The lovers at their quarrel in the sheets;
Or like a walker in the darkness might,
Knocks and disturbs the artist at his papers
Up there alone, upon the alps of night.

D. J. Enright

THE PHOENIX' THRONE

There it stands, *the flamboyant*, dead or alive we
hardly know,
Unobtrusive, not a notable giver of shade or shelter,
a little too dusty
To be safely leant against, It is simply, a tree
near where the tram stops,
By the coca-cola stand, ambiguously used by passing
Arabs.

And then, one day, the difference: and the dead
yellow leaves,
Caught in a sudden monstrous blaze of scarlet blossom,
are turned to shifting velvet.
The tram is silent now: the Arabs depart in peace.
We call it, in English, the flame-tree,
but it is we who burn.

THE LAUGHING HYENA, BY HOKUSAI

For him, it seems, everything was molten. Court-ladies
flow in gentle streams,
Or, gathering lotus, strain sideways from their curving
boat,
A donkey prances, or a kite dances in the sky, or soars
like sacrificial smoke.

D. J. *Enright*

All is flux: waters fall and leap, and bridges leap and fall.
Even his Tortoise undulates, and his Spring Hat is lively
as a pool of fish.

All he ever saw was sea: a sea of marble splinters—
Long bright fingers claw across his pages, fjords and
islands and shattered trees—

And the Laughing Hyena, cavalier of evil, as volcanic
as the rest:

Elegant in a flowered gown, a face like a bomb-burst,
Featured with fangs and built about a rigid laugh,
Ever moving, like a pond's surface where a corpse has
sunk.

Between the raised talons of the right hand rests an
object—

At rest, like a pale island in a savage sea—a child's head,
Immobile, authentic, torn and bloody—
The point of repose in the picture, the point of move-
ment in us.

Terrible enough, this demon. Yet it is present and perfect,
Firm as its horns, curling among its thick and handsome
hair.

•I find it an honest visitant, even consoling, after all
Those sententious phantoms, choked with rage and
uncertainty.

Who grimace from contemporary pages. It, at least,
Knows exactly why it laughs.

Iain Fletcher

TIME AND MOTION STUDY

What are they? Why, only qualities of light
That once or twice were fractured into form:
Short wisps or rags that sting the touch or sight,
Dancing in famine through a night of stoim:
 Cold images of Heat corrupt within,
 Whose mercies rattle in a bowl of tin.

But being not worshipped, being forgotten, brood
In eyes that fire the night with mysteries
And drag the heart to manufacture good
Where no good thing was ever held to rise:
 What I would do, I do not, doing
 All that I hate; pursued, myself pursuing.

Hunting myself in others, hunting what
Was never life to be quarry, only sired—
Member of darkness—by a swirling phantom, not
That warmth and tenseness have desired,
 Gifts never nourished by my cruel arts:
 A blinding Grace can only crack dry hearts.

But these all breathe out 'illusion', are
Heavily unreal, a drugged metaphysician,
Plotting a marriage of retina and star
At some rare locus that is not position.
 Somewhere to find that sweet duality
 Of mind and flesh the heart would magnify.

Iain Fletcher

My life is after Fall and Flood and Passion,
When Prophets wither into irony;
When the dead cosmos in a formal fashion
Translates all grievings into vanity,
 My life is after Unity, and wanders still
 In penitential valleys of the will.

A cradle swayed under a barren roof,
Or on the waves where Orpheus sowed his faith;
The horned God raging on a bull's black hoof.
My life lies in the diocese of wraith,
 My life lies after wrath, being so unreal
 There are no darker flashes to conceal,

Nor the severities of beauty, nor
The haunting disk of one occulted face;
The moral charm that all too many wore,
Too pertinently confident of Grace,
 My life is after Space and Time and Will,
 My life is always moved, but always still,

None moves me but my weakness, weak
Beyond all judgment, as beyond all law;
How I should ask for witnesses to speak,
Tethered in graves, watchmen who never saw,
 But in their majesty of distance gave
 Me mandate to believe these sighs might save.

Roy Fuller

KNOLE

Inside the sombre walls the neat quadrangles still are green
As though a light shone on them from a sun, grey-masked,
unseen.

And some remoter light leans through the embrasures of the
house
And frees the colours of the hangings—crimson, lime and
mouse.

The firedogs dangerous weapons, beds tents, rooms an insect's
maze,
But nothing burns, loves, spies, through rain- or history-
nervous days,

An ancient painted Sackville down the chamber from the frame
Looks over what has lost its meaning yet is still the same.

He stares and will stare pointlessly, stiff in his mint brocades,
Hair reddish, bearded, white of hand, until our living fades.

His face the worried, capable, Elizabethan face,
He stands with the fresh-created ruler's half self-conscious
grace.

Of savagery, the codpiece in the fairy clothes remains;
All else the civilizing new discovery of gain.

Vestigial organs in their jars his stuffs and filigree:
The capital he started now explodes spontaneously.

Roy Fuller

But still outside upon the deer-striped lawns, the trees are
caught
Spread in the sheltering crystal of the mansion's stored-up
thought.

And like those dreams of treasure only stir to accumulate
Their golden leaves in natural rhythms, endless, sad, sedate.

In this calm magic island in tempestuous seas, the plan
Holds yet: the spirits of earth and air still serve the passionate
man.

THE IMAGE

A spider in the bath. The image noted:
Significant maybe but surely cryptic.
A creature motionless and rather bloated,
The barriers shining, vertical and white:
Passing concern, and pity mixed with spite.

Next day with some surprise one finds it there.
It seems to have moved an inch or two, perhaps.
It starts to take on that familiar air
Of prisoners for whom time is erratic:
The filthy aunt forgotten in the attic.

Quite obviously it came up through the waste,
Rejects through ignorance or apathy
That passage back. The problem must be faced;
And life go on though strange intruders stir
Among its ordinary furniture.

Roy Fuller

One jib^s at murder, so a sheet of paper
Is slipped beneath the accommodating legs.
The bathroom window shows for the escaper
The lighted lanterns of laburnum hung
In copper beeches—on which scene it's flung.

We certainly would like thus easily
To cast out of the house all suffering things-
But sadness and responsibility
For our own kind lives in the image noted:
A half-loved creature, motionless and bloated.

Robert Garioch

THE ANATOMY O WINTER

*(translated frae Hesiod's Warks and Dayis wi the help
o Donald Carne-Ross)*

In Februar come foul days, flee them gin ye may,
wi their felloun frosts, days that wad flype a nowt,
whan Boreas blaws owre Thrace, whaur they breed the
horses,
and brulyies the braid sea, and gars it blawpj
and the winterous warld and the woddis warsle aathegithen
Monie a michtie aik-tree and muckle-heidit pine
it dings till the dirt, our genetrice; wi the dunt as it faas
on the glens and the gowls atween the hills, syne the hale
forest girns.
It gars the bestiall grue; their tails in the grooves
o their hurdies are steekit weill hame, The hairy yins
anaa,
wi coats o gude cleidin, it cuts richt throu themj
the weill-happit hide o an ox, that doesna haud out the
cauld,
And it gangs throu a gait's lang hair. But gimmers and
yowes
wi fouth o fleece, the wund flegs them nocht,
thof it bends an auld man's back, bow'd like a wheel,
and it canna skaith the saft skin o a young lass
wha bienlie bides at hame, beside her dear mither,
onwittand yet the ongauns o maist aureat Aphrodite.
But she weshes weill her flesh, and wycelie anoints it
wi ulyie brocht furth frae beryall olives, syne beddis ben
the hous.

Robert Garioch

The Baneless Yin bites his fute, tholin bad weather,
wi nae hearth till his hous, dowie for want o heat.
The sun sairs him nocht to seek his food outbye;
he swees owre the cities o swart savage folk
but frae his saitt celestial is sweirt to shine on the Greekis.
The hirsle o hameless beasts, and the hornit kye
wend throu the woddis; wearily they grind their teeth,
thirlit in aefald thocht, to find in their need
a bield to bide in, or a boss cave.
Trauchlit in siccan times, they traivel about
like luttaird loons wha limp on three legs
wi lumbago in the lunyie, aye leukand on the grund;
hirple hobland about, hap-schackellit they seem;
hainand their bodies heat, haud awa frae white snaw-
wreaths.
Sae pit on, I pree ye, as protection for your flesh,
a saft gown and a sark stretchin to your feet;
lat it be woven wi muckle weft til a puckle warp,
that the hairs o your bodie may be at rest, no birssy wi
the cauld.
Mak yourself a kid-skin cape to keep out the rain,
and a felt hat wi laced lappits, syne your lugs will be
dry;
for your neb will be nithert whan the nor-wund blaws.
At day-daw the hairst-nourissand haar, frae the hevin
o sterns,
blankets the braid yird, bieldin the parks o the rich.
The haar soukit in steam frae ever-bounteous stremis
is blawn heich abune the yird by blaisters o wund.
At dirknin it whiles draws to rain; whiles the blast
derays
the thwankan cluddis thruschit forenenst him by
Thracian Boreas.

David Gascoyne

THE GRAVEL-PIT FIELD

Beside the stolid opaque flow
Of rain-gorged Thames; beneath a thin
Layer of early evening light
Which seems to drift, a ragged veil
Upon the chilly March air's tide:
Upwards in shallow shapeless tiers
A stretch of scurfy pock-marked waste
Sprawls laggardly its acres till
They touch a raw brick-villa'd rim.

Amidst this nondescript terrain
Haphazardly the gravel-pits'
Rough-hewn rust-coloured hollows yawn.
Their steep declivities away
From the field-surface dropping down
Towards the depths below where rain-
Water in turbid pools stagnates
Like scraps of sky decaying in
The sockets of a dead man's stare.

The shabby coat of coarse grass spread
Unevenly across the ruts
And humps of lumpy soil; the bits
Of stick and threads of straw; loose clumps
Of weeds with withered stalks and black
Tatters of leaf and scorched pods: all
These intertwined minutiae
Of Nature's humblest growths persist
In their endurance here like rock.

David Gascoyne

As with untold intensity
On the far edge of Being, where
Life's last faint forms begin to lose
Name and identity and fade
Away into the void, endures
The final thin triumphant flame
Of all that's most despoiled and bare:
So these least stones, in the extreme
Of their abasement might appear

Like rare stones such as could have formed
A necklet worn by the dead queen
Of a great Pharaoh, in her tomb . . .
So each abandoned snail-shell strewn
Among these blotched dock-leaves might seem
In the pure ray shed by the loss
Of all man-measured value, like
Some priceless pearl-enamelled toy
Cushioned on green silk under glass.

And who in solitude like this
Can say the unclean mongrel's bones
Which stick out, splintered, through the loose
Side of a gravel-pit, are not
The precious relics of some saint,
Perhaps miraculous? Or that
The lettering on this Woodbine—
Packet's remains ought not to read:
Mene mene tekel upharsin?

Now a breeze gently breathes across
The wilderness's cryptic face;
The meagre grasses scarcely stir;

David Gascoyne

But when some stronger gust sweeps past,
Seeming as though an unseen swarm
Of sea-birds had disturbed the air
With their white wings* wide stroke, a gleam
Of freshness hovers everywhere
About the field: and tall weeds shake,

Leaves wave their tiny flags to show
That the wind blown about the brow
Of this poor plot is nothing less
Than the great constant draught the speed
Of Earth's gyrations makes in Space . . . ,
As I stand musing overhead
The zenith's stark light thrusts a ray
Down through dusk's rolling vapours, casts
A last lucidity of day

Across the scene: and in a flash
Of insight I behold the field's
Apotheosis: No-man's-land
Between this world and the beyond,
Remote from men and yet more real
Than any human dwelling-place:
A tabernacle where one stands
As though within the empty space
Round which revolves Lao Tse's wheel.

Sidney Goodsir Smith

SAAGIN

A demon bides in the breist in dern, *[in secret*
In the unkent airt *[unknown quarter*
That's neither saul nor mynd nor hert;
And, whiles, like a bairn

Warslan to be born, *[wrestling*
Hauds the haill man tense,
His genie struckmin the suspense
O' onwyte, dumb at his tide's turn. *[expectation*

Like the globe swings throu equinox
And for a moment spins
Atween twa suns,
Nou in saagin my weird rocks. *[slack-water: fate*

EXILE

I saw my luvè in black velvet
And breistit hiech was she,
Wi' Mary's hair and the gait o' a queen
— It wasna she.

I saw my luvè in green and gowd
And white, white, her blee, *[complexion*
A lire o milk and ivorie *[skin*
— It wasna she.

Sidney Goodsir Smith

I saw my luve in lamplicht stand
And braw in crammasie, *[crimson*
Fair Cressid walked upo the Strand
— It wasna she.

I saw my luve in fire and silk
And midnight in her ee,
I saw the wale o womanheid— *[choice, pick*
Her I didna see.

Thrang, O thrang thir broukit streets *[crowded: grimy*
But tuim, tuim, for me— *[empty*
O, Saturn, swing this turnan world!
—Till her I see.

W. S. Graham

LETTER V

Lie where you fell and longed
Broken to fall to from
Grace in your maidenhooded
Cage. And further fall.
Lie down where in a word
That blinding greying bard,
Earl of an armed uprising,
Lifted his head to you
And made you right of way
To the silence-felling prow,
And tonight listen under
The watch kept by the height
Sailed and its gazing host.
Winter sits on the gable.

From where these words first fell
Fall to me now. Fall through
This high browbeating night
And slowly, my dear, loving
Take breath for both of us
In this poem in this house
Awake. Your name is long
A byword on my tongue.
You long remember me.
This room. The narrow lamp
Casting the net of light
On this element. The table
Scrubbed with salt and become
For me the grave's table.

W. S. Graham

And that same voice listening
And blindly trying the latch.
And listen, my love, almost
I hear the quay night bell
Strike on the sea wall.

Anyhow tonight here all
Is again almost at one
With us, and no, there's not
The least sorrow to shade
Or fear to fall. Dearly
Make haste now in the sweet
Oil-wending light keeping
Us endlessly for a moment.
Changing becomes you. Dress
In your loved best. Put on
Your roomy cramasie
And gloves of the wild fox.
Nor fear, you've been undone
By myriads everywhere always.
And here slip on your emerald
Deeps and your frilled shallows.
The dark befrend you. The first
Of light shall know you by
Your snares of the bright dew.
Even wear your herring bells
To ring the changes and your
Jingling sea-charms along
Your tongue. To find your sea-thighs
Sail where the metaphor flies.
To find your best for me
Spring all your maiden locks.
I stand by what I see.

W. S. Graham

The blush like new. You're shy
The same. What nets and beds
We've drifted on. It's tides
And tides ago. And here,
Here's where you wept the first
Time and me with only
A few words to my name.
Lie longing down, my dear
Again. Cast in this gold
Wicklight this night within
This poem, we two go down
Roaring between the lines
To drown. Who hears? Who listens?

I entered. Enter after
Me here and encounter
Dimensions of a grave.
Sometimes night sinks its shaft
And I am crossed with light
Here where I lie in language
Braced under the immense
Weight of dumb founded silence.

I heard voices within
The empty lines and tenses.

The tiller takes my hand
In a telling grip, We drive
On in the white soaring
Meantime of fair morning
Happy the threshold whetted
Blade that lays us low
Each time forever. My sweet

W. S. Graham

Sea-singer shearing the wave
Engrave us where we fall.
Under the wanderlusting
Sky of morning waked
And worded beyond itself
By me to you, who leans
Down through the fanfared lists
To listen? A day to gladden.
A sight to unperish us from
The flashing wake unwinding
Us to our end. And quick,
Take hold, the quick foam blooms
And combs to our side. And now
Rounding the Rhinns, keep hold
And watch as the fisher flies
With beaks in the netting gale
That veers to the kill, and now
As you sail here look the word's
Bright garment from your eyes.
Be for me still, steering
Here at my keeling trade
Over the white heathering
Foam of the tide-race.
Who asks to listen? And who
Do these words listen to
In some far equivalent?
Through me they read you through.
Present your world. Reply
Now at the growing end
As words rush to become
You changing at your best.
Stand by me here. The roar
Is rising. The old defender

W. S. Graham

Towers. His head soars.
He stands like downfall over
The high gables of morning
In kindling light. Under
His eye that blinds us now
We go down dazzled into
The crowded scroll of the wake.
As silence takes me back
Changed to my last word,

Reply. Present your world.
Gannet of God, strike.

Thorn Gunn

HELEN'S RAPE

Hers was the last authentic rape:
From forced content of common breeder
Bringing the violent dreamed escape
Which came to her in different shape
Than to Europa, Danae, Leda:

Paris, He was a man. And yet
That Aphrodite brought this want
Found too implausible to admit:
And so against this story set
The story of a stolen aunt.

Trust man to prevaricate and disguise
A real event when it takes place:
And Romans stifling Sabine cries
To multiply and vulgarise
What even Trojans did with grace.

Helen herself could not through flesh
Abandonflesh\$ she felt surround
Her absent body, never fresh
The mortal context, and the mesh
Of the continual battle's sound.

Thorn Gunn

LIGHT SLEEPING

John could not sleep, though swaddled from the cold;
He heard the hours pass, sea on the shore,
And lay in the power of light which rolled, unrolled,
Working, a white hypnosis on the floor,
Towards the other side, the moving breath.

Stalking devotion, so, with piercing aim
A god will lay a blessing on the head.
Reading the pillow; it struck its cold claim;
His friend that had been easy in the bed
Heaved bolt upright, rigid and open-eyed.

John had not moved to warn, now watched appalled,
The other fixed his gaze through upward frost
—One knowing where to look as soon as called—
And witnessed, clear and unfamiliar voiced:
* Inside the moon I see a hell of love.

'There love is all, and no one is alone.
The song of passion deafens, as no choice
Of individual word can hold its own
Against the rule of that anonymous noise.
And wait, I see more clearly: craters, canals

'Are smothered by two giant forms of mist
So that no features of the land remain.
Two humming clouds of moisture intertwist
Agreed so well, they cannot change to rain
And serve to clean the solid ground beneath.

Thorn Gunn

* Singing there fell, locked in each other's arms,
Cursed with content, pair by possessive pair:
Committed centuries to lie in calms
They stayed to rot into that used-up air
No wind can shift, it is so thick, so thick!

The ringing voice stopped but, as if one must
Finish in moral, stumbled on and said:
'In that still fog all energy is lost/
The moonlight slunk on, darkness touched his head
He fell back, then he turned upon the pillow.

WAR

Going about our business day by day
We think, deluded heart, that we forget
The peril that besets us—and beset
Our fathers once, when they too turned away
To watch our childish games and dreamt that all
Our innocence could prevent the heaven's fall.

But heaven fell. Virtue and wealth and power
All fell; and we, too young to understand
Such waste of heritage, ran out to stand
Proud in our fathers' presence in their hour
Of victory—for some had called it so:
Victory or defeat, we were too young to know.

Only we knew a strangeness in their arms
And on their lips a tang of bitter words,
As though in putting up their weary swords
They found not peace, but greater strife that harms
With deeper wounds, being more deeply bred.
Escaping death they came home to the dead.

Thereafter in the shadow of their guilt
We grew, a lonely generation born
Out of violence, into violence thrown,
Till all the sacrificial blood they spilt
To save our blood seemed only shed in vain.
The murderous ritual had begun again.

I. C. Hall

To-day I go about the busy street
And know whoever walks beside me there
Walks in a treadmill of returning fear
Wherein once more the generations meet
And cry: 'O Man! from tyrannous war release
Our troubled hearts and grant our children peace!'

Michael Hamburger

SPRING SONG IN WINTER

Too long, too long
I gathered icicles in spring
To thread them for a melting song;
And in midsummer saw the foliage fall,
Too foolish then to sing
How leaf and petal cling
Though wind would bear them to the root of all

Now winter's come, and winter proves me wrong:
Dark in my garden the dead,
Great naked briars, have spread,
So vastly multiplied
They almost hide
The single shrub to share whose blossoming
Blood on cold thorns my fingers shed.

EMBLEM

Only for love of love
High up this hunter shot
And missed the snow-white dovej

Then, descending to the plain,
Entered a pitch-black wood
And, blindly, shot again.

For the sake of the dove, of mountain sunlight and snow
Deep in dark woods he seeks a wounded doe.

Jacquetta Hawkes

MOON DAISIES

Moon daisies in the midnight field
Float high above the standing grass,
Unmoving wonder at the moon
And watch her pass.

Beneath the frigid lunar stare
Day's known colours are all fled ;
The buttercup has yielded gold,
The clover, red.

Alone these countenances pale
Reflecting a reflected light
Against the darkness can prevail
To glimmer white.

They know not what mute misery
What mystery, they would impart,
As shrinking silly souls they bare
To a cold heart.

The fummy tractor drones at noon
Plangent across the shimmering field;
Before the onrush of its blades
All life must yield.

Swathe after swathe, like clouts of hair,
Hay falls sideways from the share ;
The clover and the buttercup
Their severed heads hold stiffly up.

Jacquetta Hawkes

There with them all
Moon daisies make their greater fall,
Then in the sun
Dying through a July day
Wilt and wither one by one
Unregarded in the hay.

John Heath Stubbs

EPITAPH

Mr. Heath-Stubbs as you must understand
Came of a gentleman's family out of Staffordshire
Of as good blood as any in England
But he was wall-eyed and his legs too spare.

His elbows and finger-joints could bend more ways
 than one
And in frosty weather would creak audibly
As to delight his friends he would give demonstration
Which he might have done in public for a small fee,

Amongst the more learned persons of his time
Having had his schooling in the University of Oxford
In Anglo-Saxon Latin ornithology and crime
Yet after four years he was finally not preferred.

Orthodox in beliefs as following the English Church
Barring some heresies he would have for recreation
Yet too often left these sound principles (as I am told)
 in the lurch
Being troubled with idleness, lechery, pride and
 dissipation.

In his youth he would compose poems in prose and
 verse
In a classical romantic manner which was pastoral
To which the best judges of the Age were not averse
And the public also but his profit was not financial.

John Heath Stubbs

Now having outlived his friends and most of his
reputation
He is content to take his rest under these stones and
grass
Not expecting but hoping that the Resurrection
Will not catch him unawares whenever it takes
place.

QUATRAINS

The Dog Star now, negating all desires,
Hurls through the atmosphere destructive fires ;
In mute indifference heart and pen must lie,
Though Fame still tarries, and though love expires.

For we have seen the rage of Time consume
Those Temples which the Muses ' lamps illumine ;
If their resplendent torches gutter down,
To smoulder on shall burnt-out stubs presume?

Some verses still unpublished I avow;
A sausage-roll, a pint of beer—but Thou?
The Thou whose image prompts my midnight tears
Is ash of Mortlake Crematorium now.

The leaves made languid under August Skies
In Bloomsbury Square reproach my life ; and cries
The voice Verlaine within his prison heard,
And 'Qu'as tu fait de ta jeunesse?' it sighs.

John Heath Stubbs

Sweet-scented, possibly, the manuscript
Of half my span is closed, and better skipped;
 We slumber in hope's lap an hour or two
An unquiet sleep—and wake to find we're gypped.

There was a time when the enchanting bird
Of poetry was in my orchards heard—
 The green boughs whitened with ideas in bloom
And easy on my lips lighted the word.

Fate's discords soon unharmonised those tunes,
And blank abstractions blotted out the runes;
 Each finds his loneliness; FitzGerald knew
Like impotence among the Suffolk dunes.

Time with unpitying and iron feet
Bears down upon us all; we learn to greet
 Without despair the inevitable void,
Whether in Nishapur or Russell Street.

Geoffrey Hill

GENESIS

I

Against the burly air I strode,
Where the tight ocean heaves its load,
Crying the miracles of God.

And first I brought the sea to bear
Upon the dead weight of the land;
And the waves flourished at my prayer,
The rivers spawned their sand.

And where the streams were salt and full
The tough pig-headed salmon strove,
Curling the ebb and the tide's pull,
To reach the steady hills above.

II

The second day I stood and saw
The osprey plunge with triggered claw,
Feathering blood along the shore,
To lay the living sinew bare.

And the third day I cried: ' Beware
The soft-voiced owl, the ferret's smile,
The hawk's deliberate stoop in air,
Cold eyes, and bodies hooped in steel,
Forever bent upon the kill,'

Geoffrey Hill

III

And I renounced, on the fourth day,
This fierce and unregenerate clay,

Building as a huge myth for man
The watery Leviathan,
And made the glove-winged albatross
Scour the ashes of the sea
Where Capricorn and Zero cross,
A brooding immortality—
Such as the charmed phoenix has
In the unwithering tree.

IV

The phoenix burns as cold as frost;
And, like a legendary ghost,
The phantom-bird goes wild and lost,
Upon a pointless ocean tossed.

So, the fifth day, I turned again
To flesh and blood and the blood's pain.

V

On the sixth day, as I rode
In haste about the works of God,
With spurs I plucked the horse's blood.

By blood we live, the hot, the cold,
To ravage and redeem the world:
There is no bloodless myth will hold.

Geoffrey Hill

And by Christ's blood are men made free
Though in close shrouds their bodies lie
Under the rough pelt of the sea;

Though Earth has rolled beneath her weight
The bones that cannot bear the light.

John Holloway

GALE

In this sudden tempest at the night's heart
Among the remotest revolutions of the clock,
I see that from an hour before the fall of dark
We have watched an archetype and been tempest-
taught

Something we forgot because we needed to forget.

I see that for many years we have been stone-blind
To what was waiting as close as at our hand
The abrupt entry of this mounting wind
That in the crescendo of one night has turned
Autumn's blue plain to a sea's hills of sound.

Sometimes a low sometimes a louder noise
Troubles the formless corners of that haze
Unseen to self-preoccupying eyes
Tonight there is a cancelling of averages,
Burst of a wind, scattering of paper days.

In a dumb flood from Pole and northern Bear
Swift tide of cloud undercut moon and star
And I have heard the first scream tumbling roar
Tree of the forest torn up light as a hair
And perceive that the archetype of peace is war.

This gale's normality is not to observe
The normality of any trim sine-curve,
It is like infatuation not like love:
There is no great pattern into which it can weave,
It fits only the great pattern we live.

John Holloway

A monster is the pitch of all likelihood.

A lowland river is the one to flood.

A germless table is to make us bleed.

A whole year sober then one bare night mad.

What the trim pattern had made one thread destroyed.

Elizabeth Jennings

SONG AT THE BEGINNING OF AUTUMN

Now watch this autumn that arrives
In smells. All looks like summer still ;
Colours are quite unchanged, the air
On green and white serenely thrives.
Heavy the trees with growth and full
The fields. Flowers flourish everywhere.

Proust who collected time within
A child's cake would understand
The ambiguity of this—
Summer still raging while a thin
Column of smoke stirs from the land
Proving that autumn gropes for us.

But every season is a kind
Of rich nostalgia. We give names—•
Autumn and summer, winter, spring—
As though to unfasten from the mind
Our moods and give them outward forms.
We want the certain, solid thing.

But I am carried back against
My will into a childhood where
Autumn is bonfires, marbles, smoke ;
I lean against my window, fenced
From evocations in the air.
When I said autumn, autumn broke.

Elizabeth Jennings

AFTERNOON IN FLORENCE

This afternoon disturbs within the mind
No other afternoon, is out of time
Yet lies within a definite sun to end
In night that is in time. Yet hold it here
Our eyes, our minds, to make the city clear.

Light detains no prisoner here at all
In brick or stone but sends a freedom out
Extends a shadow like a deeper thought,
Makes churches move, or ice still,
Rocking in light as music rocks the bell.

So eyes make room for light and minds
 make room
For image of the city tangible.
We look down on the city and a dream
Opens to wakefulness, and waking on
This peace perpetuates this afternoon.

Peter Johnson

SONNET

Out of this world's imperial terror
I rise half-naked from the casual tombs,
Awaiting the battle, and his pleasure
Who has me by the neck and opens my wounds.
He has us by the guts, this Babylon boy!
Oh, watch his cunning as he twists our dreams!
You, the horned half of me that is my brother,
Hold the lie to my lips—tempt my memory,
it seems!
For who can say what is holiest in a man
That floods up vital to the eye that proves?
Who dares to worship a Bird or the Trinity
Across this desolation where nothing moves?
My long-tailed tempter knows St. Thomas' sins,
Who spreads his doubts throughout this blood,
these veins.

Sidney Reyes

ROME REMEMBER

The bright waves scour the wound of Carthage.
The shadows of gulls run spiderlike through Carthage.
The cohorts of the sand are wearing Cartage
Hollow and desolate as a turning wave;
But the bronze eagle has flown east from Rome.

Rome remember, remember the seafowls' sermon
That followed the beaked ships westward to their
triumph.

O Rome, you city of soldiers, remember the singers
That cry with dead voices along the African shore.

Rome remember, the courts of learning are tiled
With figures from the east like running nooses.
The desolate bodies of boys in the blue glare
Of falling torches cannot stir your passion.
Remember the Greeks who measured out your doom.
Remember the soft funereal Etruscans.

O when the rain beats with a sound like bells
Upon your bronze-faced monuments, remember
This European fretful-fingered rain
Will turn to swords in the hand of Europe's anger.
Remember the Nordic snarl and the African sorrow.

The bronze wolf howls when the moon turns red.
The trolls are massing for their last assault.
Your dreams are full of claws and scaly faces
And the Gothic arrow is pointed at your heart.

Sidney Keyes

Rome remember your birth in Trojan chaos.
O think how savage will be your last lamenters:
How alien the lovers of your ghost.

THE EXPECTED GUEST

The table is spread, the lamp glitters and sighs ;
Light on my eyes, light on the high curved iris
And springing from glaze to steel, from cup to knife
Makes sacramental my poor midnight table,
My broken scraps the pieces of a god.

O when they bore you down, the grinning soldiers,
Was it their white teeth you could not forget?
And when you met the beast in the myrtle wood,
When the spear broke and the blood broke out on
your side
What Syrian Veronica above you
Stooped with her flaxen cloth as yet unsigned?
And either way, how could you call your darling
To drink the cup of blood your father filled?

We are dying to-night, you in the aged darkness
And I in the white room my pride has rented.
And either way, we have to die alone.

The laid table stands hard and white as to-morrow
The lamp sings. The West wind jostles the door.

Sidney Keyes

Though broken the bread, the brain, the brave body
There cannot now be any hope of changing
The leavings to living bone, the bone to bread:
For bladed centuries are drawn between us.
The room is ready, but the guest is dead.

Thomas Kinsella

BAGGOT STREET DESERTA

Lulled, at silence, the spent attack.
The will to work is laid aside.
Tussle of syllables in the lilac
Breathes to a halt. The window is wide
On a pelvic arch of stars, and the night
Reacts faintly to the mathematic
Passion of a cello suite
Plotting the quiet of my attic.
A mile away the river wheels
Its buttressed fathoms out to sea.
Tucked in the mountains, many miles
Away from the matter in hands, a wee
Belch of waters in the gorse
Is sonnetting origins. Dreamers' heads
Lie mesmerised in Dublin's beds
Deducting images at source.
A medium heart is lying still.
How hard the small hours are to kill!
A cigarette. The moon. A sigh
Of educated boredom. What,
Dear world, is the matter? What's to be thought,
What's to be done? All that I
Am sure of in this jaded night
Is the slow explosion of my pulse
In a wrist with poet's cramp, a tight
Beat tapping out endless calls
Into the dark, as the alien
Garrison in my own blood

Thomas Kinsella

Keeps constant contact with the main
Mystery, not to be understood.
A curlew-call of exile, half-
Buried longing, half-serious
Anger and the rueful laugh—
Dangerously near the spurious,
Commonplace, played out, as dry
A dose for the discriminating
As the lonely bird's threadbare cry,
As wild, as lost, as desolating.

My goddess who had light for thighs
Grows feet of dung and takes to bed
Before my horror-stricken eyes
The marsh bird that children dread.

James Kirkup

WREATH MAKERS: LEEDS MARKET

A cocksure boy in the gloom of the gilded market bends
With blunt fingers a bow of death, and the flowers work
with him.

They fashion a grave of grass with dead bracken and fine
ferns.

An old woman with a mouthful of wires and a clutch of
irises

Mourns in perpetual black, and her fists with the sunken
rings

Rummage in the fragrant workbasket of a wreath,

A laughing Flora dangles a cross between her thighs

Like a heavy child, feeds it with pale plump lilies, crimson
Roses, wraps it in greenery and whips it with wires.

And here a grieving flower god with a lyre in his arms

Fumbles mute strings in the rough-gentle machine of his
fingers,

His eyes wet violets, and in his mouth a last carnation. , ..

Mourners all, they know not why they mourn,

But work and breathe the perfumes of their trade

(Those flower-voices, through which death more keenly
speaks)

With suitable dispassion; though they know their emblems
fade,

And they at last must bear a yellowed wreath

That other hands, and other harvesters have made,

Philip Larkin

AT GRASS

The eye can hardly pick them out
From the cold shade they shelter in,
Till wind distresses tail and mane;
Then one crops grass and moves about
•—The other seeming to look on—
And stands anonymous again.

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
Two dozen distances sufficed
To fable them: faint afternoons
Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
Whereby their names were artficed
To inlay faded, classic Junes—

Silks at the start: against the sky
Numbers and parasols: outside,
Squadrons of empty cars, and heat,
And littered grass: then the long cry
Hanging unhushed till it subside
To stop-press columns on the street.

Do memories plague their ears like flies?
They shake their heads. Dusk links the shadows.
Summer by summer all stole away,
The starting-gates, the crowds and cries—
All but the unmolested meadows.
Almanacked, their names live; they

Philip Larkin

Have slipped their names, and stand at ease,
Or gallop for what must be joy,
And not a field-glass sees them home,
Or curious stop-watch prophecies:
Only the groom, and the groom's boy,
With bridles in the evening come.

LINES ON A YOUNG LADY'S
PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM

At last you yielded up the album, which,
Once open, sent me distracted. All your ages
Matt and glossy on the thick black pages!
Too much confectionery, too rich:
I choke on such nutritious images.

My swivel eye hungers from pose to pose—
In pigtails, clutching a reluctant cat;
Or furred yourself, a sweet girl-graduate ;
Or lifting a heavy-headed rose
Beneath a trellis, or in a trilby hat

(Faintly disturbing, that, in several ways)—
From every side you strike at my control,
Not least through these disquieting chaps who loll
At ease about your earlier days:
Not quite your class, I'd say, dear, on the whole.

But o, photography! as no art is,
Faithful and disappointing! that records

Philip Larkin

Dull days as dull, and hold-it smiles as frauds,
And will not censor blemishes
Like washing-lines, and Halls-Distemper boards,

But shows the cat as disinclined, and shades
A chin as doubled when it is, what grace
Your candour thus confers upon her face!
How overwhelmingly persuades
That this is a real girl in a real place,

In every sense empirically true!
Or is it just *the past*? Those flowers, that gate,
These misty parks and motors, lacerate
Simply by being over; you
Contract my heart by looking out of date.

Yes, true; but in the end, surely, we cry
Not only at exclusion, but because
It leaves us free to cry. We know *what was*
Won't call on us to justify
Our grief, however hard we yowl across

The gap from eye to page. So I am left
To mourn (without a chance of consequence)
You, balanced on a bike against a fence;
To wonder if you'd spot the theft
Of this one of you bathing: to condense,

In short, a past that no one now can share,
No matter whose your future; calm and dry,
It holds you like a heaven, and you lie
Unvariably lovely there,
Smaller and clearer as the years go by.

Laurie Lee

WINTER 1939-1940

A gentle dove the icicle is now,
shells cannot pierce
the arctic plating of the wind,
tanks are admonished by the snow.

Let me embrace this friendly cold,
it is the final glance of love ;
no more, this century, may I
have eyes or blood to know it by,

Let me with vaporizing breath
speak to my woman, while the frost
makes up a grim metallic bed
for me, and summer's broken head.

For soon the primrose sun will show
and burn with sparking trumpet flowers
this winter's flag of truce;
and passion, then, will have another use.

SUNKEN EVENING

The green light floods the city square—
A sea of fowl and feathered fish,
Where squalls of rainbirds dive and splash
And gusty sparrows chop the air.

Laurie Lee

Submerged, the prawn-blue pigeons feed
 In sandy grottoes round the Mall,
 And crusted lobster-buses crawl
Among the fountains' silver weed.

There, like a wreck, with mast and bell,
 The torn church settles by the bow,
 While phosphorescent starlings stow
Their mussel shells along the hull.

The oyster-poet, drowned but dry,
 Rolls a black pearl between his bones ;
 The mermaid, trapped by telephones,
Gazes in bubbles at the sky.

Till, with the dark, the shallows run,
 And homeward surges tide and fret—
 The slow night trawls its heavy net
And hauls the clerk to Surbiton.

Alun Lewis

ALL DAY IT HAS RAINED

All day it has rained, and we on the edge of the moors
Have sprawled in our bell-tents, moody and dull as boors,
Groundsheets and blankets spread on the muddy ground.
And from the first grey wakening we have found
No refuge from the skirmishing fine rain
And the wind that made the bell-tents heave and flap
And the taut wet guy ropes ravel out and snap.
All day the rain has glided, wave and mist and dream,
Drenching the gorse and heather, a gossamer stream
Too light to move the acorns that suddenly
Snatched from their cups by the wild southwesterly
Pattered against the tent and our up-turned dreaming
faces.

And we stretched out, unbuttoning our braces,
Smoking a woodbine, darning dirty socks,
Reading the Sunday papers—I saw a fox
And mentioned it in the note I scribbled home—
And we talked of girls and dropping bombs on Rome
And thought of the quiet dead and the loud celebrities
Exhorting us to slaughter and the herded refugees ;
Yet thought softly, morosely of them, and as indifferently
As of ourselves and those whom we for years
Have loved and will again
Tomorrow maybe love:—but now it is the rain
Possesses us, the darkness and the rain.

And I can remember nothing dearer or more to my
heart
Than the children I watched in the woods on Saturday

Alun Lewis

Shaking down burning chestnuts for the school-yard's
merry play,
Or the shaggy patient dog who followed me
Through Sheet and Steep and up the wooded scree
To the Shoulder o'Mutton where Edward Thomas
brooded long
On death and beauty till a bullet stopped his song.

Christopher Logue

SEVEN SONNETS

Monday's child is full of grace,

The cherubim tune up their instruments.
Our dance begins; with eyes, and after, words.
And soon our limbs are moving round a core,
And we are loved, who were unloved before.
The cherubim tune up their instruments.
She moves her lips: I give her words to sing.
Thus on her tongue my tongue may gently swear,
Love, poetry is my body speaking.

The cherubim tune up their instruments.
I start this sentence on a Winter's day,
To fit our love, and finish it in August.
Mindful, that where she danced and I held say,
Could bring catastrophes that hell repents,
Where cherubim tune up their instruments.

Tuesday's child is fair offace,

Seek her. Find out her mouth. Kiss her red mouth.
With your devotions satisfy her mouth.
And in these fresh collisions loose your mouth,
As a bright instant, throbbing everywhere:
No less between her limbs than in the South,
Her dark voice tasting like a Hemisphere
Before known only by its songs and fruit.

In what condition do you find yourself?
Dumb-tongued and sick for joy, while brain is mute?

Christopher Logue

Your marrow bones and the heart's red cellar
Swarmed to adore the motion of her youth?
Quick particles of blood make hive her mouth,
Whose lips are midnight darlings, and seek out
The origin of kisses in her mouth.

Wednesday's child has far to go,

Our desire moves in a lewd orbit;
Together we may make a planet.

Her belly is like a jug of white wine
The lip of it is ferned and darkling,
Into the gentle hummock of her loin.

Where her divided breast is tentative,
Behind coarse silk clustered and pouted,
My lips disturb, and smally, under webs,
Of endless tendernesses moved to give.

And in the measure of her walk, tip-toe—
Girls do in love, this girl in love walks so—
Is apprehended by the rest of you
All the momentous secrets of us two.
In such has lust expression and runs true.

Thursday's child is full of woe,

William, though great, was wrong. Love is time's fool.
But worse is separation. He, left alone
Grinds out his love between the round here-stone,
And the white horizon's rim; for she is there,

Christopher Logue

Her force taken from others, unaware
That he turns on and on, not only a fool,
But Tom against the World, crouched on his fear
In a dark lobby, Bedlam's Senator,
Mumbling unreasonable means. Who said,
'How could I be so wrong?' But waits to hear,
'Tush, it is little—why, she might be dead!'
Better perhaps? Stop up your mouth and swear
Love grinds your bones *Fe Fi* to make his bread ;
You read the crust *Fo Fum* of a lover's head.

Friday's child must work for a living,

Me to slay, out of abominable
Compassion upon I. Conceited grief
May fluently persuade its own brief
Pandemonium of misery, all
Reasons for self-sake lie in your will
To her: they are imperfectly bequeathed
Within a testament that robs of sleep

Even the memory of possession.
Becoming we, the child of thou and I
Continued, till a dangerous bethlehem
Sawed up its manger to suit calvary,
And cut divine obsessive melody.
The wisest do not love but guard their kin.
I have been saved perhaps to die again.

Saturday's child is loving and giving,

For God's sweet sake give me back part of that
I gave. Part of a part? One loving jot?

Christopher Logue

Child, I am no Elizabethan hack
Spicing his dalliance in a sonnet's pot,

But a most recent ape on his bald knees,
Head down, with cup in hand, eagerly wrong,
And aptly pleading for—you know my rage—
Brass farthings of reconciliation,

Dismissed: I held palaver with Venus
And other mythic governors of love.
Why? Why in God's name? Silence, Concluded thus,
Your anguish is not meaningful to Gods.

Her it may touch; but is not best to win.
If you must love, she must give back again.

*But the child that is born on the Sabbath day,
Is bonny and bright and good alway.*

Who will, if I do not, remember her?
Cast me again—as King: and then again—
A beggarman; and then again and when
I have been crying through a dozen selves,
Leaf, flesh, the changing air or mineral,
Shall I come home upon her name? Me, me,
A Christopher who must be borne not bear?
I will. What's left of my three score and ten
Is mostly work work, wages of my sin,
And the paraphernalia of love.
The best, some active memories that move
Her to be compass while I twist and turn
Waiting bone-idle for her self's return,
Prepared to let all other lovers burn.

Rob Lyle

FIREWORKS AT THE REDENTORE

To Emmanuele di Castelbarco

The clouds have spouted orange leaves,
And burn with blossoms made of light
The wind is harvesting the sheaves
Of flame, across the plains of night.

A forest whistles into being
With smoke for foliage, flames for flowers;
And fire-birds from the branches fleeing
Are spangled with vermilion showers.

Mimosa-shells of golden thunder
Explode above the breathless quays,
And orchards of the fruits of wonder
Invert the green Hesperides.

Out of a sound, a star is born;
Out of a star, a galaxy;
Until the blue tiaras dawn
Between the midnight and the sea.

While here, where gondolas go wending
On the Giudecca's gentle breast,
(Black petals of dead stars descending)
The ash of beauty comes to rest.

George MacEeth

THOUGHTS ON CHOOSING

When sense of Taste controls the route
Plain Choice, avoiding paradox,
Derives its metaphor from fruit,

Most men who govern life by clocks
Like apples to be ripe and sweet
So choose the Worcester, shun the Cox.

But some who pause before they eat
Without a dash of cream in June
Scorn strawberries as incomplete.

And some born with a silver spoon
Surrender all their dates to chance
Or stone plums at the plenilune,

Some praise tradition, some advance
The prior claims of fashion, some
Favour a superstitious trance.

The mob still works by rule of thumb.
Dependent on their speed of grab
The strong survive, the weak succumb

But private cliques condemn the drab
And emphasising taste acquired
Strike out obliquely like the crab.

George MacBeth

'The walnut has been much admired.
The shell is tight, the kernel warm,
The fibres neatly braced and wired.'

Is this applause for classic form
Or simple scientific pride
Applying physics to the storm?

Since either case proves choice denied
Bad rules of conduct clearly may
Result in mental suicide.

Preventing this, reform today.
Reject the sharp convenient knife
And prize the connoisseur's delay.

Facing the diametric strife
Between the quick gulp and the slow
Reflective savouring of life

Settle your views and strike your blow.
The flavour of the tangerine
Will show you to which side to go.

Shop therefore, criticise, be keen.
Walk round the stall and ask the price
Even of goods that look too green.

With daring you may soon entice
Desires extravagant or mean.
But first learn how to shake the dice.

Norman MacCaig

DOUBLE LIFE

This wind from Fife has cruel fingers, scooping
The heat from streets with salty finger-tips
Crusted with frost; and all Midlothian,
Stubborn against what heeled the sides of ships
Off from the Isle of May, stiffens its drooping
Branches to the south, Each man
And woman put their winter masks on, set
In a stony flinch, and only children can
Light with a scream an autumn fire that says
With the quick crackle of its smoky blaze,
'Summer's to burn and it's October yet'.

My Water of Leith runs through a double city;
My city is threaded by a complex stream.
A matter for regret. If these cold stones
Could be stones only, and this watery gleam
Within the chasms of tenements and the pretty
Boskage of Dean could echo the groans
Of cart-wheeled bridges with only water's voice,
October would be just October. The bones
Of rattling winter would lie still underground,
Summer be less than ghost, I be unbound
From all the choking folderols of choice.

A loss of miracles—or an exchange
Of one sort for another. When the trams
Lower themselves like bugs on a branch down
The elbow of the Mound, they'd point the diagrams
Buckled between the New Town and the range

Norman MacCaig

Of the craggy Old: that's all. A noun
Would so usurp all grammar no doing word
Could rob his money-bags or clap a crown
On his turned head, and all at last would be
Existence without category—free
From demonstration except as hill or bird.

And then no double-going stream would sing
Counties and books in the symbolic air,
Trundling my forty years to the Port of Leith.
But now, look around, my history's everywhere
And I'm my own environment. I cling
Like a cold limpet underneath
Each sinking stone and am the changing sea.
I die each dying minute and bequeath
Myself to all Octobers and to this
Damned flinty wind that with a scraping kiss
Howls that I'm winter, coming home to me.

Mairi MacInnes

FOR A SIAMESE CAT

Cat do not die
losing life as you've lost levity,
spite and athletic wit; and unaccustomed beauty
as when like a lonely queen you watched through
 windows birds flying from tree to tree.
Black-eared woman, do not lose your will and lie
recklessly slackened on your owners' bed,
resisting love and medicine alike with the blue of
 your sunken eyes.
Primitive creatures may lightly die,
lightly relinquishing hope. O do not go from this
 foreign town
where your grace is wilder and urged by more scorn
than its people can afford.
So I wrote and you died;
first looking for the dark,
feeble and faltering, bones jutting through grey hide,
lids shutting; then cried,
fearfully, baring teeth and claw, with a great green
coming into your look at the last,
until it seemed the lake and wood had come into
 the room
and taken you where you had never gone.

It is not only that you were beautiful
as treasures seldom are
but that you did not care;
were a perpetual surprise; clean, clever, quick;
fantastic clown, mocking your cat shape ;

Mairi MacInnes

but sometimes frightened and so human.
We freely grieve. Time is no closer, not incapacity.
We have known wars, expect the usual alarms,
have not been believed when honest ;
but we are incredibly shaken by the extra loss
of your perfection taken from us,
to an unknown, unknowable degree.
We sit together in a quiet house.
The fullness of your life and pain
has scarred a reality that did not take you into
account,
and we can never explain
how we have become more vulnerable
and wish to go away.

Ewart Milne

THE ARTIFICER

Happy is he returning from abroad
Whose heart can slide to rest in his recovered meadows,
Happy, too, is he whose home thoughts while abroad
Are of faces soothing as old ale, exciting as young
apples.

Unhappy, then, is he who always everywhere is abroad,
Who must attune himself to foreign worlds and ways
Knowing he has nowhere to return and whatever he
may win
He'll always hear an orphaned silence through the
praise.

Beyond happy or unhappy, at home or abroad,
Is he in whom time's opposite forces come together,
Nor delays to wring a blessing from a father's stony
face,
Or to search the stubble field for corn as for a mother.

In him an epoch ends, an epoch opens ;
Destroyer and preserver, Shelley said—but persistent
over all
When crowds gather like rooks bawling his day too's
unhappy,
And how in a little wind his house like any other
would fall.

Richard Murphy

THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE BIRDS

(In memory of Wittgenstein at Rossroe)

A solitary invalid in a fuchsia garden
Where time's rain eroded the root since Eden,
He became for a tenebrous epoch the stone.

Here wisdom surrendered the don's gown
Choosing for Cambridge two deck chairs,
A kitchen table, undiluted sun.

He clipped with February shears the dead
Metaphysical foliage. Bold, in fieldfares
Fantasies rebelled though annihilated.

He was haunted by gulls beyond omega shade,
His nerve tormented by terrified knots
In pin-feathered flesh. But all folly repeats

Is worth one snared robin his fingers untied
He broke prisons, beginning with words,
And at last tamed by talking wild birds.

Through accident of place, now by belief
I follow his love which bird-handled thoughts
To grasp growth's terror or death's leaf.

He last on this savage promontory shored
His logical weapon. Genius stirred
A soaring intolerance to teach a blackbird.

Richard Murphy

So before alpha you may still hear sing
In the leaf-dark dusk some descended young
Who exalt the evening to a wordless song.

His wisdom widens: he becomes worlds
Where thoughts are wings. But at Rossroe hordes
Of village cats have massacred his birds.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF LOVE

You have netted this dawn
From a sea of night
By the moon risen
To find what we forgot,
The palace where
A good prince walked
And a young leopard
Couched on the trees
While suns of oranges
Rose in the orchard.

In less than an hour's
Eternal defeat
By galleys grooving
On the water hate
And oil of peace
In the cruse blazing,
Home became for us
The burning sea
And language a hiss
In the wood of oars.

Richard Murphy

Through the gorge of fate
We climbed one by one
To a scorpion plain
Dry with poppies
To bury the gold
They gave for our bodies,
And I passed those years
Dumb below pines
To barter freedom
In the land of quince.

By the nets of your grace
I am brought from ash
Of time's shopkeepers
Under the wave
To this island garden
Airy with asphodel,
Your moon raking
My early corn
As the spades ring
On our lost foundation.

I have grown to restore
From dust each room
The earthquakes lower
In a spring of doom,
To piece beyond the fire
That cypress court
With gryphons basking,
Wander in the snow
Of almonds just before
Those petals were wasting.

Richard Murphy

You have taken this night
From sea a vase
Of that dawn in spring,
And the script resolves
To a phrase we love,
You have cut in me
A gypsum sky
Happy with harvesters
Fluting the day
Into orange flowers.

You have turned for ever
A generation
Of solitude
Into this field of dawn,
Though doom in waves
Will always march over,
Where I have stood
Dumb below pines
You have brought the dead
To a grove of suns.

Crete.

Norman Nicholson

THE UNDISCOVERED PLANET

Out on the furthest tether let it run
Its hundred-year-long orbit, cold
As solid mercury, old and dead
Before this world's fermenting bread
Had got a crust to cover it; landscape of lead
Whose purple voes and valleys are
Lit faintly by a sun
No nearer than a measurable star.

No man has seen it; the lensed eye
That pin-points week by week the same patch
of sky
Records not even a blur across its pupil; only
The errantry of Saturn, the wry
Retarding of Uranus, speak
Of the pull beyond the pattern:
The unknown is shown
Only by a bend in the known.

Kathleen Nott

LINES TO A FUTURE HISTORIAN

* The dead hand of reaction now
personified by Metternich
for several decades closed upon
the policies of Europe/ (*Sic.*)

But Metternich had nothing on
the deader hand that wrote the tale,
and waived a pullulating world,
pulled the plug and drew the veil.

Isaiahs of a backward gift
we need for this millennium—
O Clio, guard our gates of life
and scrutinise all scribes to come,

and reconsigri to timeless shades
those embryos which may grow to think
the only instruments they need
are peace and paper, quiet and ink:

who talks of Man, instead of men,
of Nations, which can Think or Rage:
who never stoop to rummage in
the coral lives that built an age.

If prayer in its embodiments
finger those distant cells at all,
let it give oracle thus—Our fates
were briefly written on a wall,

Kathleen Nott

in fragments on demolished walls,
half-slogan and truncated smut,
with We Want Watney's—just as much
through hair and rag and blood and gut.

Let those who read a people's soul
best in antiquities of stone,
appraise our blood and tungsten first,
our amalgam of pain and bone.

The picking painter, narrowing now,
his eyes so cruel, wide and kind,
lets out mad cats of love and truth
from his bright disfigured find.

Our callous cameras reel us off
chance winks that we can understand—
the languorous loveliness that haunts
the waving of a severed hand.

Our century cities overnight
submerge in lava and in mire,
but our Meccano streets have last
and huge inhabitants of fire.

Our lives are writ in broken Things
whose mana history dare not slander.
Stubborn and pitiful and foul
our tokens be our memoranda.

Philip Oakes

LOVE IN HUNGER

She feeds the starveling love, with hands
More naked than the body of another girl,
Asking no questions, making no demands,
Assured in time of absolute control.

She is big where the others were delicate,
With nursing breasts and friendly useful thighs.
Her nerves are buried deep for comfort,
She offers understanding and responsibilities.

Lazy and blind to her purpose
All that she offers he accepts
Without suspicion, seeing no use
To her sufficiency of any greedy bankrupt.

They marry into clean sheets, love
Is their bed and board until his appetite
Pines for variety. He tries, but cannot move
And she, his jailer, fattens on his surfeit.

Jonathan Price

A FORKED RADISH

Small men make love on stilts, and hold their poise
A step or two; then tumble heavily.
Others dream up frail ladders to the stars:
They teeter at the end in empty sky,

Who strains the laces of his boots will fly
Sprawling to earth, lace broken, balance gone.
All fool themselves who wink at gravity,
And later hit the ground they should have won.

Wise to a body's pull, a few have done
Nothing but stand still, both feet on the ground.
These lovers grew together in the sun,
While a dark root a dark root gripped and bound.

TAY TOY BABILARDE ARONDELLE

(from Ronsard]

You, Swallow, quit your twitterings.
Believe me, I shall pluck your wings
If I can catch you, or I'll take
A knife to cut away that tongue
Which has each morning sung and sung
Until my brain begins to ache.

Jonathan Price

You have my chimney-stack where you
May perch and prate the whole day through.
Then do not with these dawn alarms
Jolt me awake, but rather keep
A decent silence while I sleep
With my Cassandra in my arms.

F. T. Prince

SOLDIERS BATHING

The sea at evening moves across the sand.
Under a reddening sky I watch the freedom of a band
Of soldiers who belong to me, Stripped bare
For bathing in the sea, they shout and run in the
 warm air;
Their flesh, worn by the trade of war, revives
And my mind towards the meaning of it strives.

All's pathos now. The body that was gross,
Rank, ravenous, disgusting in the act or in repose,
All fever, filth and sweat, its bestial strength
And bestial decay, by pain and labour grows at length
Fragile and luminous. 'Poor bare forked animal/
Conscious of his desires and needs and flesh that rise
 and fall,
Stands in the soft air, tasting after toil
The sweetness of his nakedness: letting the sea-waves
 coil
Their frothy tongues about his feet, forgets
His hatred of the war, its terrible pressure that begets
A machinery of death and slavery,
Each being a slave and making slaves of others: finds
 that he
Remembers lovely freedom in a game,
Mocking himself, and comically mimics fear and shame,

He plays with death and animality.
And reading in the shadows of his pallid flesh, I see
The idea of Michelangelo's cartoon

F. T. Prince

Of soldiers bathing, breaking off before they were half
done
At some sortie of the enemy, an episode
Of the Pisan wars with Florence. I remember now he
showed
Their muscular limbs that clamber from the water,
And heads that turn across the shoulder, eager for the
slaughter,
Forgetful of their bodies that are bare,
And hot to buckle on and use the weapons lying there.
And I think too of the theme another found
When, shadowing men's bodies on a sinister red ground,
Another Florentine, Pollaiuolo,
Painted a naked battle: warriors, straddled, hacked the foe,
Dug their bare toes into the ground and slew
The brother-naked man who lay between their feet
and drew
His lips back from his teeth in a grimace,
They were Italians who knew war's sorrow and
disgrace
And showed the thing suspended, stripped: a theme
Born out of the experience of war's horrible extreme
Beneath a sky where even the air flows
With *lacrimae Christi*. For that rage, that bitterness,
those blows,
That hatred of the slain, what could it be
But indirectly or directly a commentary
On the Crucifixion? And the picture burns
With indignation and pity and despair by turns,
Because it is the obverse of the scene
Where Christ hangs murdered, stripped, upon the
Cross. I mean,
That is the explanation of its rage.

Henry Reed

A MAP OF VERONA

*Quelle belle heure, quels bons bras me rendront ces regions
d'ou viennent mes sommeils et mes moindres mouvements?*

A map of Verona is open, the small strange cityj
With its river running round and through, it is river-
embraced,
And over this city for a whole long winter season,
Through streets on a map my thoughts have hovered
and paced.

Across the river there is a wandering suburb,
An unsolved smile on a now familiar mouth ;
Some enchantments of earlier towns are about you:
Once I was drawn to Naples in the south.

Naples I know now, street and hovel and garden,
The look of the islands from the avenue,
Capri and Ischia, like approaching drum-beats—
My youthful Naples, how I remember you!

You were an early chapter, a practice in sorrow,
Your shadows fell, but were only a token of pain,
A sketch in tenderness, lust, and sudden parting,
And I shall not need to trouble with you again.

But I remember, once your map lay open,
As now Verona's under the still lamp-light.
I thought, are these the streets to walk in in the
mornings,
Are these the gardens to linger in at night?

Henry Reed

And all was useless that I thought I learned:
Maps are of place, not time, nor can they say
The surprising height and colour of a building,
Nor where the groups of people bar the way.

It is strange to remember these thoughts and try to
catch

The underground whispers of music beneath the years,
The forgotten conjectures, the clouded, forgotten vision,
Which only in vanishing phrases reappears.

Again it is strange to lead a conversation
Round to a name, to a cautious questioning
Of travellers who talk of Juliet's tomb and fountains
And a shining smile of snowfall, late in Spring.

Their memories calm this winter of expectation,
Their talk restrains me, for I cannot flow
Like your impetuous river to embrace you;
Yet you are there, and one day I shall go,

The train will bring me perhaps in utter darkness
And drop me where you are blooming, unaware
That a stranger has entered your gates, and a new
devotion
Is about to attend and haunt you everywhere.

The flutes are warm: in to-morrow's cave the music
Trembles and forms inside the musician's mind,
The lights begin, and the shifting crowds in the cause-
ways
Are discerned through the dusk, and the rolling river
behind.

Henry Reed

And in what hour of beauty, in what good arms,
Shall I those regions and that city attain
From whence my dreams and slightest movements
 rise?
And what good Arms shall take them away again?

CHARD WHITLOW

(Mr. Eliot's Sunday Evening Postscript)

As we get older we do not get any younger.
Seasons return, and today I am fifty-five,
And this time last year I was fifty-four,
And this time next year I shall be sixty-two.
And I cannot say I should care (to speak for myself)
To see my time over again—if you can call it time,
Fidgeting uneasily under a draughty stair,
Or counting sleepless nights in the crowded Tube.

There are certain precautions—though none of them
 very reliable—
Against the blast from bombs, or the flying splinter,
But not against the blast from Heaven, *vento dei*
 venti,
The wind within a wind, unable to speak for wind;
And the frigid burnings of purgatory will not be
 touched
By any emollient.

 I think you will find this put,
Far better than I could ever hope to express it,

Henry Reed

In the words of Kharma: 'It is, we believe,
Idle to hope that the simple stirrup-pump
Can extinguish hell.'

Oh listeners,
And you especially who have switched off the wireless,
And sit in Stoke or Basingstoke, listening
appreciatively to the silence
(Which is also the silence of Hell), pray not for
yourselves but your souls.
And pray for me also under the draughty stair.
As we get older we do not get any younger.

And pray for Kharma under the holy mountain.

Anne Ridler

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

The body is not fallen like the soul:
For these are godlike, being
Wholly of flesh, and in that being whole.
Founded on earth, they seem to be built not
painted—
These huge girls, the mountain marble and
The valleys clay were mixed for them,
The cleanness of lavender and the coolness of
sand,
Also the tints of the deep sea;
And from the sea were made
The shell-like apse, and the pillars that echo
each other
As waves do, in the Virgin's grey colonnade.

This gentle Jerome, with his Christ nailed
To the brown hill behind his head,
In speech with a stolid Donor, could not be
(Surely) by Manichaeian doubts assailed;
In bodily peace this Solomon is wise:
Nothing is tortured, nothing ethereal here,
Nor would transcend the limits of material
Being, for in the flesh is nothing to fear
And nothing to despise.
The singing choir is winged, but who would wish
To fly, whose feet may rest on earth?
Christ with his banner, Christ in Jordan's water,
Not humbled by his human birth.

Anne Kidler

ON A PICTURE
BY MICHELE DA VERONA

Of Arion as a Boy riding upon a Dolphin

Here is the foreign cliff and the fabled sea,
But where is the wealthy youth we read of,
Whose music charmed the dolphins, that they bore
him

Out of the reach of murderous men
To Taenarus (green-marbled Matapan)?

When he played, surely the waves he filled
With music froze, and common time was stilled
As at the intricate measure of Orpheus' song.
Past in a flash and yet a lifetime long.

But here is no frozen trance: a naked urchin
Shouting dissolves the world in waves of sound ;
The cavern of the winds is in his throat,
And all comes pouring out of that primal cave
In notes that harden into hills or seas.

Out of one source, brown billows and brown land;
The gondola darts like a fish, the spiny men
Are vertebrates of sea or shore, and the castle
Caught on the cliff-top like an ark is stranded.

Astride upon a winking dolphin's neck
Arion shouts and sings, his yellow cloak
Fills with the wind;
His viol is carved with the head of a rakish cat;
He is a little noisy brat;
Also, he has the world at his command.

W. R. Rodgers

SPRING-DANCE

Late, late. But lift now the diffident fiddle and fill
The dancing bed with light and the bud-room with thunder
Till all the walls fall in and walls laugh under
The envious knockings of neighbours, and over the sill
The daffodil day looks in. You who are standing,
Yes you—kick up your kilt of legs like a gawky foal
And fling away there! On every leaf-landing
The lovers are forking, on every stair-air
They are larking: the dog-days are barking
In all the backyards, So off with your careful sark
And lift the diffident fiddle. O the lilt's not difficult, if
You have soil in your soul. God in the clod, then, begin
And cloud into powder your foot and fetlock of clay
As you clout the floor and claw your next-of-skiri
In a fug of guffaws. Ah there's never a fog
That fails to ivy and over the wall of its huff
And hangover. Not even a gruff one who won't
Give a heave- -and a fig for all leaves!—and have after,
(How the daft words proliferate in me like laughter!)
As Jack after Jill So off with your careful sark and lift
The diffident fiddle. Can no one cajole you
To hyphenate hands in the dance, and piece out its pauses
With passes? Listen! The night-cocks are throwing their
 crowing
Far beyond sight of their own height and knowing
Into the light. You, only, are lacking
The jocular glow. Look how the gales brag arid bring
Surprises of birds all paradised-over by Spring.

W. R. Rodgers

THE NET

Quick, woman, in your net
Catch the silver I fling!
O I am deep in your debt,
Draw tight, skin-tight, the string,
And rake the silver in.
No fisher ever yet
Drew such a cunning ring.

Ah, shifty as the fin
Of any fish this flesh
That, shaken to the shin,
Now shoals into your mesh,
Bursting to be held in;
Purse-proud and pebble-hard,
Its pence like shingle showered.

Open the haul, and shake
The fill of shillings free,
Let all the satchels break
And leap about the knee
In shoals of ecstasy.
Guineas and gills will flake
At each gull-plunge of me.

Though all the Angels, and
Saint Michael at their head,
Nightly contrive to stand
On guard about your bed,
Yet none dare take a hand,
But each can only spread
His eagle-eye instead.

W. R. Rodgers

But I, being man, can kiss
And bed-spread-eagle too;
All flesh shall come to this,
Being less than angel is,
Yet higher far in bliss
As it entwines with you.
Come, make no sound, my sweet;
Turn down the candid lamp
And draw the equal quilt
Over our naked guilt.

Alan Ross

PORTOFERRAIO

The afternoon like dead skin; now heat bores
Relentlessly through shutters ; you turn, half-pause
In combing salt out from your hair.

Outside, steps hesitate, continue on stone stair.
Beneath us, boats seem stuck over glass; walls
The colour of pollen crumble by water; a child calls
The harbour looks oiled and heavy; lines of palms,
Dusty and stiff, stretch under churches gaunt with
psalms.

Now I watch you move against the mirror, beyond
The silver of your hairbrush see flies stalk
Across the bedspread; and when you talk
Our eyes meet in the glass, in the glass grow fond.

E. J. Scovell

CHILD WAKING

The child sleeps in the daytime,
With his abandoned, with his jetsam look,
On the bare mattress, across the cot's corner;
Covers and toys thrown out, a routine labour.

Relaxed in sleep and light,
Face upwards, never so clear a prey to eyes ;
Like a walled town surprised out of the air
—All life called in, yet all laid bare

To the enemy above—
He has taken cover in daylight, gone to ground
In his own short length, his body strong in bleached
Blue cotton and his arms outstretched.

Now he opens eyes but not
To see at first; they reflect the light like snow,
And I wait in doubt if he sleeps or wakes, till I see
Slight pain of effort at the boundary,

And hear how the trifling wound
Of bewilderment fetches a caverned cry
As he crosses out of sleep—at once to recover
His place and poise, and smile as I lift him over.

But I recall the blue-
White snowfield of his eyes empty of sight
High between dream and day, and think how there
The soul might rise visible as a flower.

E. J. Scovell

THE MIDSUMMER MEADOW

The child's hair falls in hay-pale ribbons.
Her fair face bird's-egg-freckled, brooded warm by
 sun,
As I lie in the meadow, is
Printed above me on the poplar trees,
Subdued clear flame; like flame, seen after gone.

Warm apparition, living ghost,
How well you fit and like one of its fountains rise
Out of the silver flux of day,
Out of the watery, always far away
Light on the poplar leaves, out of the sky's

Intensity that seems darkness
Beyond the leaves; while from the grass its flowers
 of brome,
Of oat and cocksfoot, rising single
Each in its garden of clear space, dissolve and
 mingle
To under-water shadow run with light of foam.

Tom Scott

THE PRAYER, MADE IN BALLAT FORM BI VILLON FOR HIS MITHER

Heivenly Leddy, earthly sovereign,
Empress o the ill-reekin bogs o hell,
Receive ye me, your humble Christian,
Whase dearest wish is wi your saunts tae dwell,
Though no for aucht o worth she's duin hersel.
Mistress o ma saul, sich Grace as Thine
Can faur ootweigh the grettest sin o mine;
Waantin that Grace, nae saul, ye will agree,
Can e'er win through tae Heiven, as I weill ken.
In this sweet faith I'll willin live an dee.

Tell yir Son tae coont me as his ain,
That aa ma sins he nicht forgie as weill,
Juist as yon Egyptian's were forgien,
Or Theophil's, the scriever chiel wha fell
Intil the horny fingers o the deil,
Fair lost, until ye intercedit syne.
Sae, pit in a word for this auld quean
Virgin Mither o the Son that we
Aa celebrate at Mass as the Divine.
In this sweet faith, I'll willin live an dee.

Aye, weill I ken I'm juist a puir carlin
Wha's nevir larnt tae scribe her name, or spell.
In oor bit pairish kirk though, I hae seen
Picters o Heiven, whaur angels hairp, an swell
The luth ... an o the Pit whaur sinners byle.

Tom Scott

Yin turned me seick, the tither weill again.
Whan I am daid, lat Heiven alane be mine
Goddess, tae whase arms aa sinners flee,
Trim you ma lamp o draid, au lat it shine,
For in this faith I'd willin live an dee.

Virgin wha bore, maist worthy sovereign,
lesu, wha has owre us eternal reign,
Lord o Lords, wha took oor waikness on,
Leain Heiven fore aa oor sins tae dree,
Offerein his bricht youth tae daith an pain.
Nae Ither Lord hae we, Fll aye maintain;
In this sweet faith I'll willin live an dee.

John Short

LANDMARK

(For Desiderius Erasmus: 1466-1536)

Boys mount the mossy branches of this tree,
And lean like figure-heads into the gulf,
Sprawl recklessly upon the vapid sky,
Or hang by ankles mocking the dim turf.

But down below this dizzy growth of sap,
Notice the skulls and clavicles approach,
Bearing the hangman's noose, the blades to chop,
Saws to dissever every limb and branch.

Boys who have poised as birds, and laughed like
leaves,
We warn you, roots will bleed, and grass grow sourj
Although this tree drew vigour from your veins,
Its impotence will vitiate your power.

Jon Silkin

DEATH OF A SON

(who died in a mental hospital aged one)

Something has ceased to come along with me;
Something like a person: something very like one.
And there was no nobility in it
Or anything like that.

Something was there like a one year
Old house, dumb as stone. While the near buildings
Sang like birds and laughed
Understanding the pact

They were to have with silence. But he
Neither sang nor laughed. He did not bless silence
Like bread, with words.
He did not forsake silence.

But rather, like a house in mourning
Kept the eye turned in to watch the silence while
The other houses like birds
Sang around him.

And the breathing silence neither
Moved nor was still.

I have seen stones: I have seen brick
But this house was made up of neither bricks nor stone
But a house of flesh and blood
With flesh of stone

Jon Silkin

And bricks for blood. A house
Of stones and blood in breathing silence with the other
Birds singing crazy on its chimneys.
But this was silence,

This was something else, this was
Hearing and speaking though he was a house drawn
Into silence, this was
Something religious in his silence,

Something shining in his quiet,
This was different this was altogether something else:
Though he never spoke, this
Was something to do with death.

And then slowly the eye stopped looking
Inward. The silence rose and became still.
The look turned to the outer place and stopped,
With the birds still shrilling around him.
As if he could speak

He turned over on his side with his one year
Red as a wound
He turned over as if he could be sorry for this
And out of his eyes two great tears rolled, like stones,
And he died.

Burns Singer

MARCUS ANTONINUS cui cognomenerat AURELIUS

The world is Rome, Carnutum, on the Danube.

A man seated, a tent, three thousand tents, a man,
His skin sponged brown by the Italian summer,
Darkened by shadows and the sun of Egypt,
A face tugged out by winds of the desert, tight from
sea-plod,

Contrary to innocence, and gentle:

The posture harsh; the mind alone is active.

Respectfully his, a boy at the back of him squats:

In front, a skeleton enters

(Epictetus, the wise slave, walks):

Then an Immortal

Staggering upwards painfully under

Bundles, for burden,

Of brown sackcloth wings.

The boy and the skeleton grin and are earnest.

That is their nature. His, the duty;

His, the decision; decide.

There is an army and an enemy,

And one in ten, but from which century?

He tallies purposes and hears them hold

Clamour raised upon clamour,

Rattle of armour, death squeals.

Burns Singer

A mind erratic within
His decent body carries
Piecemeal a soul which cannot live outside,
Looks out and vanishes ahead of him.
The boy squats pleasant: truthfully he is blind.
The articulated bones are hollow and unkind.
That is the nature of things. His the Empire.
His is the duty. Decide.

The boy, a curt word ;
The skeleton vanishes.
There, instead of it, stands
(Alive in that curious negligent flesh
He fears for his own)
No master now but his quiet servant.
Words, and an officer,
Words, and a name; it is done,
And the hum of despatches begun,
Two secretaries scribbling, the couriers off,
And a cold walk in the camp,
And a hot meal, and his duty.

Two hours alone he must sit with the truth,
That bitter gentleman all made of teeth,
Listens to cauldrons and the clank of torture,
Screams from the innocent and the unholy;
Then, hearing this he must resign himself,
Prepare himself for action and forget
Warmth, with its quiet
Noise of a woman
Who once breathed beside him,
Cold, with its quiet
Clink of his skeleton's

Burns Singer

Vertebrae in him.
It must be done and it is difficult,
Difficult while soldiers
Aloud about
Tent, bed and table
Query, quip, react
To orders given ;
Difficult in his tent,
Difficult in his empire:
It is difficult to forget and threadbare follow
The thin mind of a slave compelled by masters
To move through all of it without the world.
Beyond all this, he must not ask for comfort.
Others have owned the universe before him
And his destiny yet
Will, fleetfoot, overtake many.

Thus ends his meditation.
Noise, and the tent-flap opens.
Noise, and his name,
He must go out, go sit in judgment,
And he must not make haste.
He ponders quietly and asks quick questions.
Mercy must not itself become unjust.
This can have suicide, but that the gallows,
And one is loaded with new innocence.
He breaks a sword and pushes out in silence.
He had no right to judge them, but a duty.

Officially a banquet, therefore sit
Above the ambassadors and drink wine.
Dim memories recur that take time in
But must be battened or constricted for safeguard

Burns Singer

Of his immediate purposes in war.
He smiles attentively. He makes a joke.
A long way gone, but not a long way back
To the boy squatting over difficult sums.
Politely he refuses, makes a promise, then
Singling his enemy confronts the issue.

His empire is about him. His, the duty.

But then go back, and he must be alone,
Prepare for sleep; and it is an emperor's duty
Not to be weary lest he waste his empire:
Barbarians, past the number of sleep,
Wait with long swords for civilisation to nod.
To sleep, and not to dream, for in dreams too
Hordes gather against him
And against him bring
That sickness for slaughter
Which history has
Leached into his lineage,
The rattle of armour, death squeals:
And, in his bed, lean hungry longings taunt him,
Pinprick and bite him ;
Deep dreams of goodness keep him from sleep.
Why have the heavens not elected him
To be impoverished, alone, unheeded,
Taken all from him but his own mind only
And given him freedom, made him a slave?
O, Epictetus! Corpses are moving!
The slave he ambitions
Walks and with humble lessons
Proves the futility of all desire⁵
Fades in the act, accepting happiness,

Burns Singer

The red earth round the oblong of his coffin.
Again the emperor shuts his eyes, and sleeps.

Let no scream from the tortured,
No prim innocence of the reprieved,
No cry against the cupidity of his time,
No pity for men in battle nor for his ancestors
 under the earth,
No lingering on the loveliness of the flesh,
No hunger after good honour,
Not a single prayer,
Not a hope of mercy
Corrupt the darkness in which he is resting
Let him lie easily until the morning.
Then, to rise up, punctual not previous,
He puts on dignity like a suit of sack-cloth,
Walks in the weather that is sharp and sad,
He calls his commanders to council.
It is time to prepare
Another ambush.

Robin Skelton

TWICKENHAM GROTTTO

(For Bonamy Dobrde)

Quartz cut of diamond, rose and sea-wrack green,
onyx and jasper, sardonyx and jade,
the myriad masks rock wields to watch the scene
play out its balladries of fern and wand,
perceive within these alabastered shades
the crowding mirrors round the lonely hand,

and grace his ghost with emblems. Wheeling dust
swerved onwards over this enraptured room
that led its tortured courtier from the lust
and powder of decorums to the glide
of air through vineyards' roped and twisted gloom
and acrid orange blossoms scattering wide

on paths and lawns of ease. The triune hills
there offered grace, the silvered obelisk
a reminiscent sorrow, but the rills
and rivulets were subtler in this shade
than sunlight in the garden, and his mask
smiled gentlier where their cruel sweetness played

and art enhanced their airs. The secret cell,
water-wimpled, lapidary, formed
a world where no bright blossoms mocked his shell,
no vine hissed serpent in its scaly bark,
but where, a bright artificer, he strayed
among perfections born of his own dark,

Robin Skelton

and shared their courtesies. Here his white flame
could burn unshadowed and unceasing through
the twisted alabaster of his frame,
and here the savage corals and the bright
miraculous mirrors made at last their true
imagination, fashioned by his light

to unities of splendour. Though the years
carved cruel facets, scarred his flawless glass,
made wry his vision and enforced his fears,
here glass and gem and flame were poised in art,
and here he found his rest, here made his peace
with all the twisted toyshops of the heart.

Martin Seymour Smith

ALL DEVILS FADING

All her devils here tonight,
Duly expected: a sour mouth,
And ache in the head, and her voice
Ceaseless in anger. In blurred sight
Angels on her wall rejoice
At a sudden end of drouth ;
But here, still this blight,

There were no easy years:
Always, in glut, a vague hunger
At spring. 'You were never divine',
She says, 'and over your affairs
The shadows will always incline,
Closing in. It is your anger
At nature,' she says, and stares.

Why then, with her slight smile,
All devils fading, does she give
Me her hand? and close her eyes,
Thus in her sorrow to beguile
My death. It must be she too dies,
But with no love to forgive
Me for her own betrayal.

Bernard Spencer

DELOS

Wealth came by water to this farmless island ;
Dolphins with backs like bows swam in mosaic
Floors where the Greek sea-captains piled up moneyj
And the jagged circular patterns spin with the rush of
The impetus and fling of waves.

Steps go down to the port. And in this area
You could buy corn and oil or men and women.
Above on the windy hill Leto the human
Bore her birth pains, gave two gods to a legend
Glittering and loveless like the sea.

Slavery, we know, was not of the market only.
Here especially were rich and poor, priests and
 their pennies.
Imperial slavery we know. But the salt Aegean
Rolled waves of flame and killing, quarrels of aliens,
Till life here burst and was quiet.

In the boulevards of these dead you will think of
 violence,
Holiness and violence, violence of sea that is bluer
Than blue eyes are; violence of sun and its worship;
Of money and its worship. And it was here by the
 breakers
That strangers asked for the truth.

Bernard Spencer

NOTES BY A FOREIGNER

Their opaque, restless eyes,
the last place you will find a clue to this town;
eyes that face yours or hunger past you,
darknesses cut from a woman's evening gown.

Encounters with frequent phantoms,
women whose beauty lays a hand on your gut,
the sound of the impetuous language,
blurred as if the tongue still savoured fruit.

Your wish to build them all
into one vision, with traffic bells, the fine
knives of the whistles, and the blind,
tapping to the world like caught souls down
a mine.

The shuffle of evening crowds
past cinema lights; each sixteenth-century square
where the bronze kings and heroes rein
their grave war-stallions back; and everywhere

Blocks without hope going up,
windowless brick down two gaunt sides, that back
on wastes of sand and dazing lion-light
through which walk women in their mourning black.

Illusion, your old failure
to see except as a foreigner. There is just
a sense in which your town never
was true, for all its trams and banks and dust

Bernard Spencer

—doomed sunsets like the hell
over a town bombarded, and for all
that light that stays a half hour more
as though mad cocks had given the dawn a call,

The echo-light no town
(of this at least you are sure,) can parallel;
when things mean more yet fade, like places
you half remember, a now-not-beating bell.

AFFINITY

Consider this man in the field beneath,
Gaitered with mud, lost in his own breath.
Without joy, without sorrow,
Without children, without wife,
Stumbling insensitively from furrow to furrow,
A vague somnambulist; but hold your tears,
For his name also is written in the Book of Life.

Ransack your brainbox, pull out the drawers
That rot in your heart's dust, and what
 have you to give
To enrich his spirit or the way he lives?
From the standpoint of education or caste or creed
Is there anything to show that your essential need
Is less than his, who has the world for church,

And stands bare-headed in the woods' wide porch
Morning and evening to hear God's choir
Scatter their praises? Don't be taken in
By stinking garments or an aimless grin
He also is human, and the same small star,
That lights you homeward, has inflamed his
 mind
With the old hunger, born of his kind.

R. S. Thomas

THE WELSH HILL COUNTRY

Too far for you to see
The fluke and the foot-rot and the fat maggot
Gnawing the skin from the small bones,
The sheep are grazing at Bwlch-y-Fedwen,
Arranged romantically in the usual manner
On a bleak background of bald stone.

Too far for you to see
The moss and the mould on the cold chimneys,
The nettles growing through the cracked doors,
The houses stand empty at Nant-yr-Eira,
There are holes in the roofs that are thatched
 with sunlight,
And the fields are reverting to the bare moor.

Too far, too far to see
The set of his eyes and the slow phthisis
Wasting his frame under the ripped coat,
There's a man still farming at Ty'n-y-Fawnog,
Contributing grimly to the accepted pattern,
The embryo music dead in his throat.

Terence Tiller

BEGGAR

Old as a coat on a chair; and his crushed hand,
as unexpressive as a bird's face, held
out like an offering, symbol of the blind,
he gropes our noise for charity. You could build
his long-deserted face up out of sand,
or bear his weakness as a child,

Shuffling the seconds of a drugged watch, he
attends no answer to his rote; for soul's
and body's terrible humility,
stripped year by year a little barer, wills
nothing, he claims no selfhood in his cry:
his body is an age that feels.

As if a mask, a tattered blanket, should
live for a little before falling, when
the body leaves it: so briefly in his dead
feathers of rags, and rags of body, and in
his crumpled mind, the awful and afraid
stirs and pretends to be a man.

Earth's degradation and the voice of earth;
colour of earth and clothed in it; his eyes
white pebbles blind with deserts; the long growth
of landscape in his body: as if these
or these dead acres horribly gave birth:
here will fall from him like disguise.

Terence Tiller

Only a sad and humble motion keeps
the little space he is, himself: to row
his mindless caves with ritual hands and lips,
and wonder dimly at his guilt: with no
memory of it now: it was perhaps
too fearful, or too long ago.

EUROPA

Fierce from the stoking lech of spring,
dark bulls charge bellowing
their criss-cross night of owls and ghosts;
trains; or like planets curve and swing
with the sounds of stormy coasts.

Lackaday, lully lullay

A dragon hath borne my make away.

Sweet her body and most warm,
her scent of rose-geranium;
bitter the blue-lit shed, the smells
of cinder and of ghostly steam;
the empty ladder of the rails.

Lackaday, lully lullay

A dragon hath borne my make away.

His burly humming wheels are hands,
tell in the arches of their winds
a dim rosary of towns;
the symbol of their urgent wands
an iron mockery of man's.

Lackaday, lully lullay

A dragon hath borne my make away

Terence Tiller

Little wonder if he could
but pause to snatch her maidenhood:
they found another continent.
Zeus himself had hardly stood
against so nice a form and quaint.
Lackaday, lully, lullay
My make doth bear the bull away.

Charles Tomlinson

NINE VARIATIONS IN A CHINESE WINTER SETTING

I

Warm flute on the cold snow
Lays amber in sound⁵

II

Against brushed cymbal
Grounds yellow on green,
Amber on tinkling ice.

III

The sage beneath the waterfall
Numbers the blessing of a flute^j
Water lets down
Exploding silk.

IV

The hiss of raffia,
The thin string scraped with the back
of the bow
Are not more bat-like
Than the gusty bamboos
Against a flute.

V

Pine-scent
In snow-clearness
Is not more exactly counterpoised
Than the creak of trodden snow
Against a flute

Charles Tomlinson

VI

The outline of the water-dragon
Is not embroidered with so intricate a
thread
As that with which the flute
Defines the tangible borders of a mood.

VII

The flute in summer makes streams of
ice:
In winter it grows hospitable.

VIII

In mist, also, a flute is cold
Beside a flute in snow.

IX

Degrees of comparison
Go with differing conditions:
Sunlight mellows lichens
Whereas snow mellows the flute.

Constantine Trypanis

THEONICHOS AND MNESARETE

Theonichos, Mnesarete,
Each name carved on a plain stone stele,
A cross under the boy's name, nothing more.
What does it matter if in life they never met?

Closed in the dark sheath of death,
Where the hopes, the fashions and the fears of all
Ages fuse, the Christian boy and the pagan girl
Made friends.

For nearly two thousand years
They lay side by side in a necropolis, where marble
Epebes bid good-bye to thinking friends,
And proud women, watching their jewels with wide,
Blank eyes, restrain regret.

Over their graves
The angry life poured rubble, but long vicinity and
Leisure made them undo their hearts, and, as only
The silent can tell the silent, they said everything
To one another.

At first the boy spoke about Christ,
A god who was willing to die, about agape,
The resurrection, but the girl could not understand.

She asked if love and the trees still blossomed with
Attica's Spring, if the swallows still fled from the eaves
Of the sharp-shadowed, sculptured temples, when

Autumn,
Soft like a song of Euripides, moved through the

Constantine Trypanis

Turning leaves.

So through their closeness they talked—
They had plenty of time—and they touched on a
closeness

Of heart, although they knew they belonged to two
Different worlds, split by one span of earth:
There was no cross, no vine carved on the girl's coffin,
No silver coin in the boy's mouth, for the shaggy
Ferryman's fare.

Silently those two agreed
That if (he said 'when') the sun's leaf of gold were to
Brighten again their forms, they would not turn to see
Each other's face. For they knew that only in blind
Silence unambiguous truth can be told.

And they have kept
Their promise. They never turned to look, when the
warm

Light flowed into the opened graves of the still,
Dusty necropolis.

John Wain

LETTER TO SANTA GLAUS

Leap, Santa, down our chimney
With all-embracing fervour
In boots and beard so comely
Be now the red-cheeked saviour,
Volcano out your lava

Where mixed with father's braces
And box of chocs for mother
Meccano sets build kisses
Where gliders love each other
And sister flatters brother.

Dish out a world where tinsel
Spells laughter out in streamers
And gift propelling-pencil
Makes poems up for dreamers
And writes all wrong for schemers.

The chance we had the feeling
Was ours just for the knocking
Before we started quailing
At warnings old and shocking—
Just leave it in the stocking.

Give, Santa, give! Our needs
Have grown too great to measure:
Give thoughts, give words, give deeds,
Give tricycles, give pleasure,
Give Mother, God, and Leisure.

John Wain

We promise in return
To bless your boots and whiskers
And always to confirm
Reports of your existence,
And be your careless friskers:
Heed, Santa, our insistence,
No longer keep your distance!

EIGHTH TYPE OF AMBIGUITY

'Love is too young to know what conscience is,
Yet who knows not, conscience is born of love?'
It seems a meaning we could hardly miss.

Yet even such pellucid lines may prove
Unwilling to be readily construed ;
Their needle travels in a double groove.

For love we find both delicate and crude ;
And poets long ago began to ask
'Love rules the world, but is the world subdued?'

So understanding love is quite a task ;
And Shakespeare was no more than being wise
In fitting out his statement with a mask;

For love is always seen with bleary eyes
And conscience (meaning 'consciousness') defines
The fire that blazes in a gale of sighs.

John Wain

But still for love the silly spirit pines
In searching for the logic of its dream,
In pacing endlessly those dark confines.

When love as germ invades the purple stream
It splashes round the veins and multiplies
Till objects of desire are what they seem;

Then all creation wears a chic disguise,
And consciousness becomes a clever changer
Turning a punishment into a prize.

And so to every type love is a danger.
Some think it means no more than saying Yes,
And some turn canine when they reach the manger.

It seems a meaning we could hardly guess.

John Waller

OSCAR WILDE AND AUBREY BEARDSLEY

The elderly roue and the fantastic boy—
'A villain,' cried Wilde—lean and lanky
Who nevertheless wept when Whistler praised him—
'But deserted me in my great agony.'

The fact of meeting could be only harmful
But 'Salome' in hand they stumbled through
The end of an age of aesthetic discovery
Before the black came down on the blue.

The jaunty adventure was emotionally ending,
Decked out with china and farthing victories,
When Beardsley painted the plush and pomegranate perils
And no one could see the devil for all the pear trees.

Beardsley the scrupulous etcher of careful images
Found home in this land of delicate perverted pastures;
Butterflies, powder-puffs, princes, and peacocks alluringly
Pricking at passion sharp-pointed the threatening postures.

Wilde all too wonderful evaded the sense of the problem,
Failing at last to see where the beaks were pointing,
Missed the stark truth of Aubrey's caricature, the Sun,
And ended up as a spectacle at the bright burning.

Neither of these was each other's friend or admirer,
Wilde delighted to pose, Beardsley was sick

John Waller

Of the season's disease, in the main an unhealthy art form
Like imitation lilies enveloping the confined quick.

Lord Alfred Douglas remained the ultimate puzzle
Whose father let loose the hounds from the bolting hutch,
But Lord Alfred knew that defeat was bitterly approaching
With the setting of a youthful glory, the period's luck.

Devoured in their own passion were Wilde and Beardsleyj
Escaping from it, Swinburne, a gnome at Putney,
Led the puritan retreat towards bad poetry
And careful life on Watts-Dunton's beer and chutney.

Who else were harmed? Moore, I suppose, and Whistler
In losing the splendid Paris they always wanted.
So James, alas, missed painting his greatest pictures
And George, grown empty of writing, talked and taunted.

This was an age that might have proved so famous
With wealth to spend and actors who were able,
But somehow it blazed quite out in a swirl of tinsel
And naphtha lights and scandalous talk at table.

Harlots danced in the streets at Wilde condemned
And Wilde's heart died after writing 'Reading Gaol'.
The sunflower and the perilous posture now
Were locked in books that wept to find a sale.

Poor Beardsley died consumptive in Southern France—
'Destroy the bad and obscene' were his last chores.
And only Lord Alfred was left to tell the story
So many times that he nearly survived two wars.

Vernon Watkins

MUSIC OF COLOURS: THE BLOSSOM SCATTERED

O, but how white is white, white from shadows come,
Sailing white of clouds, not seen before
On any snowfield, any shore ;
Or this dense blue, delivered from the tomb,
White of the risen body, fiery blue of sky,
Light the saints teach us, light we learn to adore;
Not space revealed it, but the needle's eye
Love's dark thread holding, when we began to die.
It was the leper's, not the bird's cry,
Gave back that glory, made that glory more.

I cannot sound the nature of that spray
Lifted on wind, the blossoms falling away,
A death, a birth, an earthy mystery,
As though each petal stirring held the whole tree
That grew, created on the Lord's day.
There is no falling now. Yet for time's sake
These blossoms are scattered, They fall, How still they
are.

They drop, they vanish, where all blossoms break.
Who touches one dead blossom touches every star.

So the green earth is first no colour and then green.
Spirits who walk, who know
All is untouchable, and, knowing this, touch so,
Who know the music by which white is seen,
See the world's colours in flashes come and go.

Vernon Watkins

The marguerite's petal is white, is wet with rain,
Is white, then loses white, and then is white again
Not from time's course, but from the living spring,
Miraculous whiteness, a petal, a wing,
Like light, like lightning, soft thunder, white as jet,
Ageing on ageless breaths. The ages are not yet.

Is there a tree, a bud that knows not this:
White breaks from darkness, breaks from such a kiss
No mind can measure? Locked in the branching knot,
Conception shudders; that interior shade
Makes light in darkness, light where light was not;
Then the white petal, of whitest darkness made,
Breaks, and is silent, Immaculate they break,
Consuming vision, blinding eyes awake,
Dazzling the eyes with music, light's unspoken sound,
White born of bride and bridegroom, when they take
Love's path through Hades, engendered of dark ground.

Leda remembers. The rush of wings cast wide.
Sheer lightning, godhead, descending on the flood.
Night, the late, hidden waters on the moon' dark side.
Her virgin secrecy, doomed against time to run.
Morning. The visitation. All colours hurled in one.
Struggling with night, with radiance! That smothering
glory cried:
'Heavenborn am I. White-piumaged heart, you beat
against the sun!'
All recollection sinking from the dazzled blood.

She woke, and her awakened wings were fire,
Darkened with light; 0 blinding white was she
With white's bewildering darkness. So that secret choir

Vernon Watkins

Know in the thicket, and witness more than we,
Listening to early day, dew's voice, the lightest feet,
As though Saint Francis passing, told who they were,
Fledged of pure spirit, though upheld by air.
I think one living is already there,
So sound asleep she is, her breath so faint,
She knows, she welcomes the footsteps of the saint,
So still, so moving, joy sprung of despair,
And the two feasts, where light and darkness meet.

Gordon Wharton

ERRORS OF OBSERVATION

The idea is exciting, surely,
But are your intentions really very pure?
We've watched you with your little opera-glasses
Lying for hours in the stalky grass,
And, to be honest, we are not quite sure.
You say you watch the life beyond the river ;
Can you tell us precisely how it differs
From ours, for instance, do lives pass
More quickly? Do people jump off cliffs?

We are not official inquisitors,
Are merely curious, thus our visit }
We see you noting in your note-book
Squiggly, exciting little notes,
And consider it might be important, is it?
Those people, do they despair, do they go on
Carrying hum-drum burdens over tight-ropes of pain,
Wearing deceptions like outer coats?
Or do they let go, neglect the wife, suffer migraine?

Whatever you're at you do it slowly:
Surely it would be so much simpler to go
In disguise, a convincing set of whiskers,
To observe the detail of the place?
We would terribly like to know
The ultimate purpose of the observations you make,
And if it would matter should you make a mistake.
It is rumoured those people are a sub-human race,
That their habits are dirty, and their religion a fake.

Gordon Wharton

What is the significance of their statues,
Jut-jawed and eyeless, noses extremely flat,
That face us from the shade of that clump of beeches?
How deeply do your investigations reach?
In any case you certainly won't get fat
On the kind of money you get for this sort of thing }
Why not give it up? For us it is rather annoying
To see an intelligent man sprawled in a ditch.
Why not look at us, we're much more interesting?

We must admit to being a little worried.
We noticed this morning that our eyes were sore,
And red as if we had been weeping,
And we were forgetful as if from lack of sleep.
Perhaps you can help us more, so very much more
Than the quacks in the town, if we say that we groom
A horrid nightmare of blackness and doom;
And to see children play is a bore,
Rings a bell in an empty room.

Oh we wish to know so badly
If we ordinary people are quite mad;
Far nicer to have a cosy neurosis,
And you look like a man who knows,
A man who can tell a fixation from a fad.
Those people across the river, can you say
If, like us, they dream they've had their day?
Is the chart you are making too awfully sad,
A graph we suppose of a civilisation's decay?

You smile, but we can read the symptoms;
The other day we heard their belfries ring,
Whether for wedding or a funeral tolling,

Gordon Wharton

Or one of their chiefs in that wise they extolled,
Doesn't much matter, for that sort of thing
Is decadent now, that's obvious, don't you know?
Tell us you do, please say that you think so.
Oh, write the words into the tune we sing,
Give the right answers, tell us what we want to know.

Sheila Wingfield

POISONED IN SEARCH OF THE MEDICINE OF IMMORTALITY

When Hsiang Tsung, great emperor,
Giddy and ill, carried in a litter,
Saw the stars sway,

His conquests and his arguments
And powers, falling into fever with him,
Pulsed their lives away.

Bow to his shade. To be at rest
Is but a dog that sighs and settles: better
The unrelenting day.

LINES FOR THE MARGIN OF AN OLD GOSPEL

Children now awake to birds.
Mortals rose to words
Fresh as the morning

When clover and the far hawks,
Scabious and meadow-larks
Shadowed a searing

Sheila Wingfield

That ran along nerve and sense,
To mend a bad conscience
By caustic of loving.

Tax-collector and prostitute:
Perhaps they were astute,
More understanding

Than open throats, festered teeth,
Slovenly wits and breath
Gaping and crowding,

Or than any tolling-tongued
Masters who had wronged
Life with their learning.

Gently or fiercely, to all around
He would explain, expound,
Like a dog leaping

Through tall stalks of wheat:
Such was the pounce and feat
Of this debating;

Till an attic room rang
With a sad air sung
After the supping.

Destiny and darkness flow
Faster, now, than low
Clouds that are falling;

Sheila Wingfield

His friend snores, head to rock;
The world takes stock,
Hardly breathing,

Thinking how steeped jealousy,
Prim-lipped authority,
Pride of condemning

Can derive from that despair,
Sleep, lantern, unfair,
Act of denying.

Warmth drains out of us, The soul
Shown in its goodness, whole:
No hammering

Of flesh to wood can harm that proof.
Yet man is without roof
And night is freezing.

Diana Witherby

CHILDHOOD AND AGE

The spiky children pour through resined schools,
Some to move out among the river pools
And swimming in this olive summer, scud
Like jerking water-flies across the mud.
Others, with parks for natural earth, must pass
Through corky patches in the dried up grass,
Where bark, like wrinkled fruit-stone, grips the dust,
And blistered chairs are furred by ginger rust.

Their winter is remote, A heavy haze
Curtains away the cold yard's dirty maize,
The frozen bird with wings as stiff as horn,
Whose tendril claw now roots among the corn.
Nor, under tarry sun, do they recall
The spinning chimney-pot of whistling squall.
The adult and the even-blooded know
In childhood, as in fever, time is slow.

And all his running through the hedge and flower
Shakes only the dog-rose, not the child's hour.
Despite his rapid legs which vault and speed,
The stationary windmill is not freed
Standing inside his head, the years are long,
Their sails are almost motionless among
The springing, stroking winds. But age has found
How seasons race when bones are dull and bound.

Diana Witherby

On shadowed mantelpiece of mind the cool hours tick
Fast for the old, this amber afternoon. How quick
For them the change from silken greening dusk to
 night
And night to day. But how fatigued and slow the
 fight
With their own limbs as dry as wicker, which,
 though rain
Falls on the summer turf, cannot be fresh again.

David Wright

CANONS ASHBY

County of squares and spires, in the middle of England,
Where with companions I was used to rove,
County containing the cedar of John Dryden,
Cedar, in whose shadow of thunder and love
I saw those Caroline lawns, and musical
I heard, inaudible, those waters fall, fall

Triumphs and miseries, last poet of a golden
Order, and under whose laurel I desire
To plant a leaf of bay, and by whose building
To tune irregular strings, his stronger lyre
Plunging, a swan to alight, upon a clear
Music of language I delight to hear.

Not a hundred yards from where my substance wastes
Nightly in London, John Dryden died on tick.
The air clouded, and in his garden gusts
Shook the cedar tree; as I watched its branches flick
In a windy prolegomenon to autumn
While a sky marshalled engines to a storm,

I no longer heard those falling waters fall,
Silence like Iris descended from a cloud,
And lawns grew dark, as that once musical
Shadow of a cedar faded in the loud
Shades of thunder-cumuli on the grass,
Till we left the garden empty as it was.

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