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POEMS

(My Brother , Life)

1971 - 92

Wayne Perry

*To Siew Mui Perry
as a small testimony of her love
and untiring work.*

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The distant mountain in your dream

The distant mountain in your dream
Is real and conquered
The tide is turned and now we see
How old we are upon this wave of tumult

Grow only deeds
Opening over Occident
Death obeying goes

I am very glad to sink
Into the new Spring of the sea
And reckless O at last reckless
Like these open petals
Rise upon your glorious morning.

The Bay of Nauplia

Let us sit upon this spot one moment longer
The bay of Nauplia is almost silent
Her moderate mountains falling to the sea
Contain the pine-filled wind for ever
The touch of this archaic world
She smiles and all before you stays
She never leaves you

We move among the ruins and the fennel
Wishing only to breathe away this day
Held in this point in time
Which now is conquered by the sunshine

If the Athenian fleet come home from victory...
Look, there within the straits
The sun hesitates above the mountains
We hold our breath our hands in greeting raised
And silently we plunge into the light-filled bay.

Bhudda compared to the Willow tree

Why not look toward the Deben Vale
Where Willows stretch for miles round Wickham spire
There we see the two opposing forms
United by the wavering air

Not a leaf or footprint mars
The loving abstraction and the end of time
Only by a movement of the light
Are we directed to the long conversation
The infinite patience of that smile
Waiting only for quiet thought
And not the dreadful stiletto

Here the fading English air preserves
The enchantment of our identity
And in that spell older than the tower
You see the reconciliation of the tree
The intricate discourse of the growth
And the final kindness.

Without illusion

The self-deceiving years smoulder behind you
Their ashes are the warning keepsake
When in the moment your guard is lowered
And hated illusions crowd round you
Their memory rinses the mind

The state of freedom is a landscape
Where self moves clearly before the subject
Bending its eye upon knowledge with intense lightness
The sudden conflict evaporates like the morning dew
Before the gaze of the brain glinting without illusion

This achievement is perfect freedom
It alone brings happiness and restores
The future to a proper place
Nothing can take it away.

Hotel des Mimosas

The rain falls hard on the quayside
At intervals we tap the barometer
A child cries irritably
In the silence of the room
One can remember a whole lifetime...
Yet it is that picture by Huart
That picture of lupins returning
To make the same inevitable point
That dominates the morning light

We retreat in silent fear
We who have built our bridgeheads to the enemy
Our faint knowledge
The same march to the same tune
Thank God you will be left to answer for us.

The beach at Ranguedoc

When these waves gently roar
Do you hope to return with them?
The sky has never been so beautiful
Covering the boats and water of a free ocean
We should be ashamed of our whining
The small houses by the seashore
Still go their own way
The young man with his pipe
Remains an absurd figure
Let us not make a terrible miscalculation

There is injury and for us no success here
Very well but we are not part of the superstructure
The rainbow at Concarneau is explained
But the effect is unfathomable
For like us it is no longer here.

Norfolk

Even now there seems no limit to your fields
You absorb the old and new and keep
The sense of England free and clear
You make our master Time your servant
Thus standing by the stream beside the church
Surrounded by the sky and distant sea
A corinthian light of freedom fills
This open and continuous world of Norfolk

Nothing can replace so calm a scene
Where river land and sea
Meet in so distinct a harmony
That life and living days
The secret charm of life
Reveals itself in bold and sparkling ways
Though here and there the modern signs
Bring indignation, anger, yet
Your great largesse still holds
And happiness is nothing more
Than standing by your fields
Beneath the widening sky.

The Elm Tree, in memoriam

The green bloom spoke like a city to us
It was almost our image of England
Everywhere she grew calming the mind
A memory of the countryside now itself a memory

Death is that empty watchtower
Hideous in her ruined state
Near every manor house and hill
Near every stream in every park
By all our fields she dies
Returning our ancient cares undelivered

The unbearable vigour of the tree
From which we turn our eyes
Is like our English state
Where no protection issues
And the battle never comes.

The Swallowtail

Not for nothing do you fly and see
Beyond the lanes of corn
Or avenues of myrtle simpleness
The form and beauty of your kingdom
Lit by arms so wide so full of sky
You play on sunbeams rest and die

If so much colour grace and light
Enclosed a sign of insight
It would be an ideal of itself
Perfect in its unconsciousness
Then you are the lovely lens
Who sees for me the darkening side
The mocking noise by sea by land
Grinding toward the shining trees
The flint filled towns
The towers and flags above the river
Crowded by the busy boats
Among the silent reeds where resting
You have been transformed
In a final attempt at memory
Before all is lost
Like the quanting of the hay.

The Lingonberry

I

Sadly, as in the past, we meet upon a plain
And see the state of England dry and formless
The sweeping beauty of her fields and hills
Surrounded by the dying elms and bordered
By the rush of people and of things
Will sink the hopeful spirit of our days
Who cannot bear to watch or yet depart

What rhythm now can find its way
Among the hearts and minds of England
What words in history bind this people
And bring their sense of life to life
Here, where every good thing passed
Compared to the world outside
Is now in her crowded counties
Hardly breathing, for the air she takes
The very air which thunders
And the sweet tired rain
Which falls so hopelessly upon the concrete
Does not cannot change us
As if the very oxygen itself had altered

After all this time the danger lies within
For how lucky are the Philistines
When led by greater men
But now they creep among the relics
Of our kingdom, high and low
Where is their past?
What novel lies have sported them?
They now announce themselves
Like new-plumed birds of prey
With all the confidence of modernity
To doubt the fugitive past

The landscape is bound to our ideas
Every portion of the world outside functions within
Thus if you look at Gloucester
Or Somerset, Wiltshire or Warwick
Oxford or Buckingham
The teeming roads run in
And you can stand upon the tower
To look with former pride
Across the glorious Summer scene
Now Winter landscape
You must remember as you reached the hill
Above the Golden Valley
Or any hill from any scene
And dreamed of this advantage

Entwined in all our hearts
The very springboard of our action
Securing our past, our confidence
In the cause of life,

This is not America
We are not here to extend beyond belief
Custom and habit
But to maintain with sure eyes
Past and present
Keeping forever those real days
Which in any time in any place
Endure as monuments
To our new questions

To this future the landscape
Poses before us a passion of unending scenes
The country heat and distant sea
Shimmer among the high oaks
And through the glancing lanes
Cycling we head toward the shore
Laughing and playing
Down the hill and overtaking
Across the bridge to wait and look
Upon the lovely river

While the one we love
Breathless and excited arrives
And then away racing toward
The shore of our mortality

The ancient cutter leaves the quay
Voices chatter merrily
We wind our way among the tinkling masts
Moored by long mud flats
Now covered by the purple samphire
The sea is calm and blue
The misty sun promises the day
The coast stands all in view
Where several hamlets rest
Beneath the woods and shallow hills
And perfect churches soar
Through trees of oak
The curling smoke of morning fires
From tidy radiant houses
Crowns our happy day
O gentle rising sun
O coast, O sea, O sky

The playful seals squeal and dive
We are all delighted
But in my eye cast toward the shore

A vision of harmony appears
Which can only be destroyed
By our very selves
The soft dark curves of earth
Stretch a hundred miles
In diamond folding fields
And all that travels here
At sea, on land, lives high
Among the art of life
The art of movement
Sight and living days

Evening falls and homeward
Through the Autumn lanes
Our thoughts are satisfied by peace
Not striving till liberty
And happiness are broken
But reaching beyond the minds
Disintegration and defeat
By a supreme detachment.

Thus all our future sorrows
Yield before the brave man.

II

Is the past complete
The cycle of darkness towards us
Have the glorious dead died
Only in the vortex of this spinning world
Where unknown unseen
The petals of the silent poppies
Circle the golden fields of corn
Meet unremembered the harvest?
The way of our fragile love
No longer can withstand
The complex tumult
The stroke of our lifting up
In the memory of others
Gave us a victory
O vulgar tasteless death
How dear life is to every man

This object, these people are forever
O truly fortunate
Coming in compassion to our distress
Is there one who sees, knows

But in the room shadowed by the fire
The cool glass of lingonberry
And our hot faces pressed
Our hands tight-clasped
Beside the open window
Looking into the sombre-scented valley
Where river, house and tree...
O the unimaginable
Thus looking back upon the room
In the moment of intercession
Our gaze is fixed upon the table
There reposing as a final symbol
The jug of lingonberry water.

III

The North sea glows before the window
He adjusts his wide brocaded tie
Descends the stair waits before the door
While the sky is crossed by thunder of potential war
The white cloth sits below the mulberry tree
And breakfast to the song of birds
New sunbeams, her allure
Are taken thoughtfully

Across the lawn beside the church
The cycles wait like children
Symbols of happiness
But in the heavens
The hour of our catastrophe
Beats through the lovely air
A final high-pitched chorus
The bleakest destiny of all

War is a game of chess
Useless without players
Let's concentrate on something else
For the form of death
Never surpasses the insight

Into the question of here and now
This gained we are immortal
The earth may evaporate
All trace of us depart
But we are a portion of the insight
Which like light itself
Is an eternal trajectory

This at least might be so
For in mystery and in doubt
In the dying of the young
In an impossible existence
A thousand lies may be told
Nothing can be granted
But a little security
Given by those in harness
For a final kindness
Grant then O my people
A little security to each
Are we not then bound
To a great undertaking
A great sufficiency
Do we not stand irresistibly
At a new departure
Does not age alter us
Into a coming of age
Then do you not see
Are we not free?

Far away from England
I sat on a metal bed
Talked in low tones to students
How good this case
Far from his desert home
How perfectly the signs were here
Muttering in chosen phrases
One by one we touched the gentle body
Already beyond our grasp
He placed his palm in mine
How pale unwell it seemed
I looked into his eyes
Where the moment of recognition
Passed into the slightest smile
That evening the medicine began
He trembled violently in the night
In the morning as I drove
Unconcerned, immersed in my own fears
He entered into the past alone
The deserted past
And still I see him disappearing
Into the folds of time
O premature death look on look on
Never to see the sea
O never for love is gone
Where is the candle to burn
All our breaking

Then the oak will uphold us
Old spirited warrior time defeater
The elms are destroyed
Our romances go with them
The houses are falling
The flowers encircled
The air over-burdened
We have loved these fields so much

Two hundred years of beauty
Surrounded the meadow
You cannot see the flowers
For the broken elms, natures damnation
Yet she will not defeat us
Destroyer of our image
We have taken our weapons
Determined, against odds
To have new romances
How could it be in the scale of things
We have loved so much

Nevertheless there is a transition
Which if words are useless
The bonds which hold us here
Speak loud and clear
For who in the moment of surrender

In the moment of complete love
Has not believed in an eternal wish
Sanctified by action
Through a perfect remembrance
That feeling these things
Moving without gravity to the end
He becomes as in the moment of the carol
An all-gathering truth
The coldness of his past
In the coldness of his age
Is now a movement in time
As in a Greek statue
He comes to our eternity
By his human love
For we are the figures in the snow
Beside the leafless trees
We are the song of life.

IV

Praise is so difficult now
We have been so badly shaken
The promises have deceived us
Nature in her polar ice
Lies with the frozen gods
The magic tunes fade away
The fairy tales wither
But the face which turns to you
With all the growing fear of love
The loss of love
Is now the sun, the shade
This is the only necessity
As the fire dies away
Not only this love either
But the resolution
That this is our end
The only noble path
And this is no virtue, no perfection
It is only the way through
To the brink of oblivion
From where we return to offer
In a perfect form
The experience of an insight
Grasped by a total release

Held in the highest hope of our imagination
We are granted a blessing
Not indeed by the gods
For has it not been said
It lies beyond the gods

Forward, enter into the Winter
The bleak mid-Winter
As the great wind moans
The lashing storm sings
O snow on snow
Can we now resist you
Your tidings of great joy
Will you melt and sing
You are beyond the gods

The struggle for normality
Through the seasons of time
Is a continual task,
To move as he said
From some sort of artist
To some sort of man
Gives us little laughter
These ends enclose us
In the burden of humanity
If we are not the same thing

Moving to the same mountain top
And if we are not spirit
We advance to a void
Where laughter and sentiment
And universal truth
Disappear into the darkness
Of the echoing cave
Look then again at Norfolk
Or Dorset or Shropshire
Scotland or Normandy
The conviction of harmony
Enters into every stone
These are the solitary proofs
Of a coherent continuum
Not a desperate battle for nothing
But an affirmation in silence
A quiet living which is not imbecility
But an unchanging craft
In the aeons of time
Where we are submerged playing
On the wings of insight

Can we then be happy
Not being fit for these things
Full of intention
Yet lacking any resolution

If resolution leads to nothing,
O happy wanderer across the seas
Careless indifferent life
To live and flower and die
Free from their needs
The wailing of the world,
It will never be those garland days
And who resolves in concentration
As the sense departs
To shackle on their needs
Until knowledge and effort
Bow you down to death

I see him now far off
That solitary unblinkered mind
Whose arm and bearing sway them
He moves among the hills
Defies all feeling
Yet he speaks a louder voice
And you can see on every side
The best are gone or going
Who now resists
But jumps into the void

St George's flag still flies
Among those ancient Norfolk towers

Beckoning a final effort
The oaks stand down and on their crests
Bravely upon the breeze
The great badge waves
Surrounded by the friendly trees
After all we face
In this doubtful hectic time
Why is this a heart's delight
It contains an idea
Fair, kind and true
We are its servants
The world's servants
St George and England

Yet Science breeds her greatest bombs
And the armorial shields
Cigar-shaped point our destiny
We, the inheritors
Carry forward the dogs day
Strangely the people are gone
The landscape is clear
Only this we believed in
For strangers in other lands
Often are warmer, closer
Worst are the cleverer men
Ever colder more rotten
In their predictable ways

Whatever our mistakes here and abroad
It has been a tea-party
Compared to our successors

Nor can it be said directly
Enter then into the Kingdom
Of our dear land and sky
The dark sea bathes us
The hill-tops raise our hearts
Trees shelter shade us
While the open houses
Welcome the free spirit
The labour of our love
Responds to the great task
The earth gives up her secret
And your passage meets
The wide white sails
Beside the silent plain
Faster now and faster
Into the green and misty sea
The sun sets in perfect majesty
And you have listed to eternity
Ever beyond the gods.

1980

Elsing imagined

Turning left you find the country lane
A moment passes silence reigns
Hawthorn hedges lead to Wensum river
Ash and alder sway beside the fields
Where no elm crowns the land
Dense chestnut and royal oak
Guide the secret searcher
The high sun on clear sharp ground
Lights the winding lovely river
Traced with streams and lakes
While by their side the watermill
Still grinds with ancient noise
And as the wind grows swiftly
From the icy polar wastes
A windmill swings her sails
Unwarned a silver flinted wall
Leads us to a perfect conception
The manor by the water-meadow
We have come to Elsing.

Eternity is but a single night

So now as age must grow and shadows cast
Their longing looks to you
Where in the lost horizons of the world
Will you seek rest and wait
What forces move to your confusion
Seeing that fate unaltered
Bears our last estate
No, even in that cloud of gamma rays
From which they sought to save us
Hastens the happy end
You saw the Gods were gone
We having grown older
Are united in a single night.

The mind in an ideal landscape

Impossible to think of love and song
To see the mantled shepherd tall and strong
To grow with Virgil in these vales and fields
Destroy false science and uphold the new
The country home the village and the farm
Contain division and contain arcadia
Equality, there is nothing more
Within our hills and shores so fragile
As will not die upon that word
Equality to live where none can breathe
O Augustan age reroot us
Restore our happy phase and think
If we have anything to say
It comes from that deep site
Where tamarisks once swayed
Beyond the Tricanian shore.

The place, the place itself

This is not a Norman sky
Standing here by the white gate
Surrounded by the last of Albertine
The dry brown leaves falling
In tiny pieces on the Autumn grass,
Ancient beeches born beside the church
Dip their branches in the silent lake
Beyond the canopies of oaks
Gather like armies in an antique haze
O Tansonville O Quarles
They only shade the distant hills.

South Huish

Snow purifies the gentle hills
Lost world of January Devon
And from the window sheep shiver
Beneath the tilting smoke grey sky
A roofless Saxon church bears
The interval of space and silence
Sings through the noise of life,
A blonde-haired girl tending horses
Carries the snow-drenched hay
And crows protest in anger at the cold
My lady sews upon the notes
Two sentries in happy isolation gaze
At the gentle hills waiting for the sun.

Heroic dancer...actor

Statue of darkness depression
And you might submit
As in a dream of power
Life was suspended cut off
By that extraordinary figure
Cast in perfect symmetry
Stirring the memory of Michelangelo
O harlequin of desire
You were but an object
Viewed as sculpture
That hair those limbs
What could I do with you
Black wordless enchanter
Remain the heroic dancer.

To Michelangelo

My Lord where is the saddle of your warm embrace
Which mounted can endure life's pace
I lie between truth and sorrow
Misdemeanors of half my life
Now stand waiting delivery,
Thus the unacknowledged portion of my life
Ascends to his rightful place suppliant
To his will and joy,
I ride you through earth's veil
And feel my desperation sink
To calm and fitful ease,
Blow on blow I cast aside
Tasting the combat in my will
While your word my heart devise.

Nightmare in May

So we near the end
Perhaps in May it is finished
You will be disconsolate
And I deservedly alone
O my darling girl
Why have I caused this unhappiness
You have waited patiently
And supported...nothing
I would not give what you need
Or go on without you
It is no excuse this love
Separated by indecision
Can we embrace, use Science
And build on our past love,

If no then asunder
Where will we go home
You, the garden, the house, time
Dissolve in tears of memory
And then indifference rejection
Be with me now and in the moment
Of our parting.

Here is the end

Do not as Spring appears confess
A new belief in love
But let desire break against it
Thus I am made divided
And your work promotes me
To our meeting now inseparable
Let it be this unhappiness
Like two ships lost at sea
With lonely captains desolate
By vast cold shores
If I have failed through weakness
Here here is the end
Beyond desire pain sickness death.

A Symbol of our Time

And even in my most carnal desires, magnetised always in a certain direction concentrated about a single dream, I might have recognised as their primary motive an idea, an idea which I would have laid down my life, at the innermost core of which as in my daydreams while I sat reading all afternoon in the garden at Combray, lay the thought of perfection.

I Are we not then part of the landscape?

The purpose of art he replied
Mimicking to all aside
Is to restore our human love
It does not point to God or
That gentle youth in doublet hat and cloth
But ourselves going forward
In the setting of this land

The air was thick that Winter
The low white clouds impenetrable
Silent with the coming snow
Which lay quiet welcoming
Across the whole landscape,
The world was closed
Sunk in the creamy air
Which if you recalled
Sent one into the past
When life was static, fixed
In one village one town
A valley, between two rivers,
We lay almost embalmed
No motor car no plane, what happiness,
Not even the friendly train
Which once you set your watch by

But whose romance had dwindled
With eternal arguments in newspapers
Concerning their survival,
The snow held us captive
Imprisoned in a faery world
And if the shallow sun was seen
The brilliance of tree and bush
The house the village there below
Seemed to give a great shout of beauty
Holding yourself steady by the gate

Time itself was frozen
In a procession of Christmases
What gifts could we bear?
For what we took for granted
Now presented with a new face
As when we go to the theatre
And recognise our own dilemmas
So this old world seemed new
Through which our hero strides
Who like you is poised toward the unfamiliar
Where he must play
(Though half the part)
In England whom he loved

Tarn hailed a cab in wintry rain
Leaving the lecture at the BM
To tourists intent on ending art,
Afternoon darkness filled the station
Which more and more reminded him
Of Russia or Poland
Leaving by train the only choice
Here where cars were impossible
There there were no cars,
The lovely fields were black
As sickly urban lights lit
The tiny gossamer flakes
Unending in their falling,
The line ran by Dedham Vale
A motorway had struck that little world
Which Delacroix had bowed to
(Forgive our foolish ways);

He made every journey a return to safety
The oasis of the landscape
Calmed the divided mind
Now the glorious snow
Touched with a living serenity
The broken tree by the road
The lane dipping and turning
By the stream where the hall lay
Just seen through the bent oaks

As you stood by the long gate
Looking down the field into that exterior face,
The train passed Venta Icenorum
(At last you have come law and empire)
Entered faithful Norwich, now growing
Like a hideous octopus
Into the unshareable fields,
Approached slowly the station
The arrival recaptured for the millionth time
Which even the space age could not wholly reduce

Tarn gazed on the station facade
Bringing her pathos and blessings
Seen through a child's eye
The palaces of wonder
Standing motionless in St Petersburg,
For the snow had restored
The child's instinct to the man
An unforced and natural understanding
When from the window of the house
The mystery of the snow garden
Loved and familiar objects
Laid to rest by a magic wizard
Whose flowing cloak and staff
Would sweep across the land
Sprinkling his enchantment with the gentle breeze,
The taxi rank seemed empty

He stood gazing ahead
A tattooed man waved obliquely
Arms still uncovered in the freezing air
Prepared to make the journey
At twice the price
Snowflakes settled on their eyelids
Tarn inclined his head
And fell into the warm plastic folds
Of a battered consul

He was tired of Russia, America
The third world, oil
Above all tired of politicians
Who would not make us see
It always seemed
For he had diagnosis and treatment
England, what we must do
Or smoulder away
The remedy was simple once you saw
A nation that must steel itself
To thirty million or thereabouts
By all inducements
(For there are no more sweets)
Will bring again the demi-paradise
Not fool-ridden economics
What monsters does it breed
In which this earth, this England

Might be one long runway
Filled with the screaming air

The deserted road was almost lost
In a world of silent villages
Here the holly hedge begins
Invisible but for the shock of berries
There the nut walk grows
Bent beneath white fruit
Now the hawthorn hedge leading
Beyond times disintegration
Toward the frozen river
Where banks of bowed reeds
Point an honoured way
Lead the imagined glance
To home and silence

And now with difficulty
They turned beneath the giant oaks
O that those trees could speak
Could move to our defence
Some were older than the church
Which stood across the meadow
Alone adjacent to our heart,
Approached in the high grass of Summer
Necklaced by poppies
The tumbling organ sounds

The word is spoken
But here face upward
Gazing at the tower
The figure of the church
In this field of poppies
Is itself the inexpressible
Not the funeral dirge
Tasteless in thought
Nor the literal word
Craving for our submission
But here at this moment
As the sun sets on evensong
We dream outside
Where a symbol lives
Stands higher than the fighters overhead

No sign from the tattooed man
The silent rider almost knightly
In strength and form
Steerer of the driven snow
By mighty gates upholding
The flint filled walls of Elsonville
Where an immeasurable journey
Joins the stones the races,
The snow fell like holy water
Tarn stood in the embered light
Beside his gentle darling

Tender as the night
The presence of kindness, loving care,
But the rider could not go
In this great night
Was shown the Chinese room
And left there by the fire
Full of silent inclination, grace,
Absorbed by another world

Tarn stood on the seventh stair
How high the glorious snow
So lovely to his darling
Returning him to childhood
To toy soldiers
And the unclouded past
Which yet was filled with death
Pointing to one future
The leper or the saint
Both victims of God's
Failure or success
Dissolution or confidence
Friends dispelled, forgotten,
Sadly we are the same thing

The old covenant is broken
None shall enter the Stygian shore
The brave rise higher than fortune

Destiny is hurled from her throne
Suffering has taught us peace
More suffering is unforgiveable
The un hoped for blessing
The unlooked forward to
He mounted the curving stairs
The experience of history
Confronted by a single life
Is the inherited consciousness
Of an antique tongue

Morning and the snow shone
The rider met him on the stairs
'Do you think there will be war?'
For this man knew the world
'Even now in the face of horror
As when the crew see the tempest
Are almost destroyed by it
So the victory promises
An unbreachable confidence
This is the accolade
What choice is there
Are we to be a satrap
In the eye of the storm
What of the poppies of yesterday
The effort of centuries,
The seas about us are controlled

Our forces outnumbered
But together a mighty hand
On the neck of their ambition
Die with them in a final struggle'
Tarn gazed at the snow garden
'No not the unending curse
Where what remains is mishapen
Tortured through long generations
Not even freedom'

He saw for the first time
That in the hands of man
Art and science
Beauty and truth
Even in their sanctuaries
Contain their destruction
Religion above all things
Join in seeking one end
Which science now supplies
A perfect dissolution
Of all our veneers
Unto a wasteland.
Where then can the romance of the lane
Deeply cut on the side of the valley
Wandering to an unknown village
Revealing through the hedgerow
The secret views of undisturbed landscape

Where the dark oaks
Stand in their abiding passion
Alone in a realm of cornflowers
Where is there an end
Of the golden fields
Of barns and towers and hills
By gentle sloping meadows
Swept by the running sky
The drone of the bi-plane overhead
Or the happy noisy bees
At the end of an English afternoon
The cycle by the white gate
Hand on shoulder gazing outward
To this scene which secretly
Has constructed us
Given us our meaning
Our aquatic life.

*II And he is a portion of that Christian dust,
But I shall see it reanimated*

O ride across the ancient sea
Where Tarn's memory serves his cause
Upon the Bundu plain
He strode by African village
Seeing the horror of dung on the cord
The health resort of malaria
Typhoid and the curse of leprosy
Raged, while cousins argued
And our new black men desired
Their new world
And all his work undone
By one or other stroke of pen
And unthought words

Mtewba where John and he
Had sung from Beerbub tree
Looked into the eye of God
Drunk with long days
Beneath the purple Jacaranda
Blossoming by the feet of lepers
So gay and ill
On the limping savannah
O dip into the ocean
Of sleep and happiness

The lunar rainbow
And the honeyed crispy fly
By the beerbub tree
Emilia Duo Darwin bride of Christ.
Was the snow high on the window ledge
The dark garden entombed
By memories of the unceasing past
This village this place
Hidden in winter
Was this the moment of illumination
The lepers dissolving
Carried in wheelbarrows
Drunk on a Saturday night
John with the dapsone
Beside his sea of Galilee
Singing a lamentation of Jeremiah
Comparing the air with the Virgin
Is buried in his colony
By an African bullet
Gone are the Beira women
O madman of Kent
Generous and holy
With a suitable past
Incoherent, irrelevant
Symbol of our time?

They lived before him in the snow
But were they an answer?
From the wolf in the North
There is no safeguard,
Surely for us too
It was a world without mercy
And we were unprotected
By those ancestral voices
It is a dream for the leper
And a dream for us
We giving it up
Not having suffered so much,
Motionless by the white window
The fire of Winter
Are they then a signal
From beyond the stars
Or as victims of the past
Repeating it,
We cannot dismiss our inheritance
It is our phantom limb
O lepers
Between your void and our new bomb
Is there a way through
Which is not an insult
Is a metaphysic?

The Greek light is fading
The hope of nobility charity
The just assessment
Seem almost naive
Yet it is the landscape which
Maintains our innocence
In the face of our desires
There leper and bomb
Are united in a single action
Neither victory nor defeat.

III *We can only embody truth we cannot know it*

The ground became Spring
But Tarn, not old, was too old
For the promise of snowdrops
He saw them in silent envy
Loving their outward form
Their momentary splendour
The whole of botany
In its unseen future,
Was love so different
As it sat a governor
Of all our sensations
Overriding the light and shade
The freedom of not being in love,
Thus it espoused freedom
For the duties it held
The necessity of kindness it bred
Brought us far from freedom of will
Which he understood, knew
To freedom of spirit
Which he maintained he did not know.
Yet love for most men
Was the condition of sanity
Of work and confidence
Or was it an admission
Of repetitive defeat

The safe harbour from fear
Of our daily desires
A retreat from the challenge
The recognition of failure
To deliver creation

He knelt by the snowdrops
But gazed up at my approach
Smiled knowing my anterior knowledge
And I spoke the needed lines
For only he could experience
The arcadian time of memorial days
Emblems of human struggle
Where he has touched time
And the myrtle avenue
Let Caesar speak
And from our ancient farms
Leave the vine and olive
And go forth to Empire,

An idea to bow down to.

IV

His darling crossed the Summer lawn
He stood gazing by the lake
'My increasing fear is this
And what will we look forward to
Where is our meeting place,'
And he replied in haste with words
Of harshness and deceit
And she with tears flowed back
To her appointed tasks
Waiting for the promise
Which will not come
Deceived by his boyish charms
His ageless grace

She let her hair grow long again
Returning to the oriental coiffe
And paleness crept in every pore
Resolved and went her way
Waiting for a sign
The symbol of this love
Which will never come in
Those familiar ways but moves
In his mind to a distant echo
Of another place, a world
Where he departs looking

To death's distinguished life
And that preparation consumed
And warmed his heart
Even though his love for her was great
His love of death was greater
Though he waits for a natural grace,
He saw the time before birth
Time present and after death
Were held only by consciousness
Which when gone time itself dissolved
And the snow garden, the beerbub tree
His unrecorded desert life
The freedom of shore and jungle
Were crushed into a grain of sand
And thrown against the wind
To scatter hopelessly
Among the lost avenues
Of human, of eternal consciousness
Where he assumes his place

Others found their roles
Played them and departed
Did one really differ?
Here in a single place
Where time embodies childhood
And the Christmas tree
School and onwards

To the evidence of science,
There seems a return
Not to the philosophy of childhood
But to a metaphysical conceit
Forever beyond one's grasp,
For a moment the church bell rings
And the carol sings of older days
Then a churchman speaks
And all is lost again,
The inanimate also speaks
But man has killed his source
By careless words
Destroying too the hopes of others

Thus in parallel did our hero's
Life succeed in striving upward
Of sorts within his limitations
Providing and moving in his way
And to those beyond it
In the night-time walk
By the tube station confined
To the purgatory of Camberwell
Or the hell of Leyton,
But in the night walk by the hall
Across the park and by the lake
Through the gate in the mossy wall
To the winding lane moonfilled and misty

The trees hanging wetly in the Summer chill
Owl and bat on this prehistoric tour
The soul of England held as a mystery
Which in these tender moments
Sanctified and reconfirmed him,
But in the hardening of life
When each shock breaks something more
And we are slowly driven
(Or more quickly) to our graves
Then do these moments fructify
For a final end?
No, the sensation fails us
We arrive trembling and in shame
At these new horrors of the world
But he contended that the moments of happiness
If forgotten were still
The moments of truth and the rest
The horror and disintegration
Where the daemon untrimmed
Nature's course

He could return to them
(If the mind still worked)
As he took the wandering lane
Passed the river where the black swan sailed
On through the oak wood
Where in a clearing the church stood

Embattled by time and algae
Mounting the hill where the wild garlic
Signalled the honoured way
Then the deep cut descent
Where the towering hedgerows
Deepened the blackness
And only the coming motor car
Could destroy his happiness
Down down he plunged
The fields appeared in moonlight
The lane continued open to the sky
Hugging the river bank
Which flowed lovingly
To the sea there a mile or so
Before him like steel beneath the moon
And as he turned full circle
The sea, the fields, the hill,
The transcendent moon
The oak wood, the hall, the dying roses
Seemed to swirl like a vortex
And lift him upward to that black sky
Which would not answer him.

V *The brave man does what he has to do*

Tarn stood among the great oaks
Watching the white clothed tresses
Beat in the Western wind
His tattooed guardian guided
The people on the lawns
Now his faithful friend, his arm,
The lake shone in the September sun
And the black daemon of his heart
Conversed with his darling,
He at the periphery
His enemy and his friend
The danger point
When control was lost.
Others of the past had come invited
From childhood, school, medicine
And distant lands,
So life had been a disappointment
(He hoped to live in verse)
Science was the crossword
He had fed in print
But that marionette the metaphysic
Had played in a suite of Bach
What were these notes?
Yet here in that secret voice
Plain as geometry

Science and life were united in time
The marionette freed.
So with the landscape
The visual truth displayed
By generations
Or in a picture by Corot,
Here the living Hall
A maze of gardens, walks
And ordered serenity

He waited for Tir Nan Og
And as his friends wandered
On the Dodo terrace
Held hands among the corkscrew bays
Or disappeared liaising
In woods far off
His hands tightened
While his daemon strode the grounds
Wrestled in the peace garden
With his tattooed friend
Grinned through his despair
The daemon waved
And he waved back,
The fountain walk was crowded
But in the filling grounds
The picture of a life was formed
Through the lives of others

His loves and doubts
Work and pleasure
Fear and sexuality
Were encompassed by them
Growing now one figment
Now another of a metaphysic
Where only his darling
Held the door against
His alter self

'...Do not speak of bells to ring
Or lanterns waving on November nights
Forget the mist on marsh banks
Where St George still rides
Do not speak of freedom's cenotaph
When England is one blade of grass...'
They rose before him like a cloud
Wishing him well, a great oration
For with this voice he attended
A sublime will
Uttered, uttered, uttered
And the rain fell in tiny spikes
His friends dispersed
Only the daemon and the tattooed were left
Walking by his darling
As they trudged to the hill
Where he would shortly rest.

Look on, look on
Across the lake and garden to
The Hall the woods and there
The fields the land itself
Glowing with ancient love
Beyond the long lanes way
Beside the curling river
Down the valley through the hills
And there the priestly sea
The limit of our vision.

VI *Is not nothingness a form of perfection*

And where is the music of his past
Look across the sea of time
Seeing the horror of our end
In the midst of innocence
Each solitary day a monument
To be honoured and wept over,
The rolling mist from the sea
Gives way to Winter sunshine
The un hoped for Spring
And the silence of Summer
In the quiet secret village
Where no pomp bestrides
But far away the great tunes play
Yet to be wiped away,
The end beckons
A crown, a village, a play
The emotion shudders
And deaths soft face
Appears from the pleached alley
Moves with peerless eyes
Among the roses of his darling
Waits upon the calm lawn

The ocean of his life is spent
The wave returns

And where the sand was scored
The shore is fresh and smooth
All trace of us depart
They have replaced us
And we are a portion of that happiness
Which precedes our birth
Which brought us here to life
The bequest returned,
O the unreachable blessed oaks
Is that the sea-bell sounding?
The hero of the Summer...
Wind your way to Sydling
Elsing, Ashprington
Go forth into the world in peace
Elsonville, Quarles, Tansonville

Cool hand on the sickly vein
Which crossed that ageless brow
African river, Malayan jungle
And the Arabian desert
Italian pictures and a tour of France
Greece and the image of England
Fail as sense becomes nonsense
And nonsense nothingness.
And he is borne across those sacred fields
The wind is cold, the sun passes
And I can feel her fingers on my eyelids.

VII *Requiem*

'This is the place he lies
Beneath this English turf
He loved beyond reason,
Here you must fight to death's anguish
Join him in the journey
Casting off life's reference'
And there they struggled
True inheritors of his past
Companions of good and evil
Locked in a fatal embrace
Exhausted she ministered the poison
And they sank beside him
The tomb was sealed yet open to the sky
Encircled by the woods around the hill
An antique pagan site,
She descended and from the lake
Gazed on her inheritance
But could make nothing of it
Was nothing in his absence, lost,
And as the days passed into months
Signed all to the son
Became a shadow in that place
Wandering daily to the hill
In rain or snow or wind
And there she died in grief

Joining them in the race to
The unknown cause
He had dictated to them

O lovely river, hill
The living world faces its decay
And we are bound to it
By time's great starlight source
Who seeks our old mortality
What price are these harmonic notes
Which make me dizzy hearing them
Enter the resurrection of the tomb
Or the peace of nothingness?
The multiheaded gods of sense
Or the ancestral voices?
The great Omega of faith
Is all turned up and out of place
But here the September sun
Still meets the apple
And darkening plums swell
To nature's tune
And we are returned to passing days
Only to be destroyed
By man's dangerous toys

To speak directly seems
Not to speak at all

And yet to hesitate and puff
Is weakness or conceit
Where is the root from which
This monster man has grown
And where will he find rest,
The landscape and the lab
The quiet town and study
Work upon things
Hidden by beauty
The system run on noble size
Where we can be
And there the metaphysic
Will be harnessed
To our willing destiny,
There the winding lane
Will lead us in our search
For peace and honour
To the enfolding hills
These gates and fields

Dancing with tree and hedge
Making our new tapestry,
Encode our lives O sun
Bring us through birth and death
And every shock between
A great anointment
Which is the springboard

Of our going forward, upward
Artificer of this setting life
Diversified as Tuscany or Umbria
Or the Weald of Kent
The Norfolk shore
Or the March of Wales
The rich escarpment of beauty
Jewelled in botany
Cypress, oak and nut
New elm and high hedge
Chiselled on an endless face
Now evilly tortured
(Except in the hidden battle
By the railway station
Or in the dark night
Of London roads, time's biology)

Then Tarn sank deeper into the earth
With his beloved, friends
But they are not passing remains
Of an archaic life
For they are reconstituted
Unrecognised into new life
And as you pass the Hall
Possessed by a new nation among
The crowds who throng the doors
A new face has entered

Unbeknown and consciousness
Is the connecting reality
Before and after
From which we leave, rejoin, leave
And join again until
We enter that perfect time
The time before our birth
The incarnation of consciousness
Suspended.

18th December 1986

Metaphysics

Rilke, history of knowing coming from nowhere
Giving us new laws of intelligence
A mental drill rendering the earth's veins
Pure gold and silver
Has provided us the space beyond the Summer garden
Where we can stretch a new creative will
And by these exercises take us to the place
Of high and pure ideas
Where we will live forever
The metaphysics of the whole creation,
His entrance beckons us to follow
The surprising germane stars
And dying live at last
Dear Rilke 'on those right angled knees'.

Mishima

The ice flows in the Summer garden
And each idea is beheaded like a flower
Narcissus did not die nor was he dreamed
O Abbess! He had not begun
And aged wisdom? Standing like a fool
Through broken mirrors of his own ideas
We also come by force and are wounded,
Give us therefore the fruits of your earth
That the blinding sun of death
Is illuminated in triumph,
Tutelary genius
The ice cracks in cementing floes
Splitting the known universe
Know and not know,

Farewel.

Swann

A secret Roman Emperor is not better cast
To flee uncontrolled the pages
Where every handshake rings an elegy
And human love quite unredeemable,
But here he lives in his Park
Dissolved in the people and places
The things, her partridge feather
And the girls, the boys, O youths
Rapturing time
Who wheel now our dinner plates
Denying us the white gate of freedom
Where in Catmos Vale
The hawthorns hang in verisimilitude
And intoxicating power of love and beauty
In their frothy branches cream and pink
And white as angels
In his blessed angelus.

Death

This chair, this crooked chair
The little table, the angle of the light
These books, the ancient timbers overhead
Sounds from the busy kitchen
And the cool hall air from the open door
The moment of darkness as the frosty grass
Deepens beneath a far pink sky
The garden in ice or sun or heat
Protecting all the days of work
From hopelessness, the growing trees...
These are what I cannot leave
They speak like any beating heart
And leaving them is just as hard.

Perfection...Time

Yesterday a sheet of Mendelssohn
Lay sanguine upon the table
A song and final staves surrendered
On the brown and faded paper
His gentle flowing hand
With every letter note and line
Of perfect symmetry.
Below the signature, lively, full
Carriage and horses were sketched
And people waited for a journey,
This little German song, the pen and brown ink
The journeyman Time broken by Perfection.

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