

Sketches
for
Existence

Wayne Perry

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I : Elegies

Author's note

These poems between 1992-1996 have no single theme but an elegaic quality - hence the title. A word of explanation may help in orientating some of them.

souvenir of Jerusalem

refers to a small tourist book with olive wood covers brought back by my father before he died aged 31.

a condition of complete simplicity

the title is, of course, from Little Gidding, and the final lines refer to the death of Paul Celan.

les saltimbanques

- Picasso's picture.

reverie on the passion of john bradburne

a close friend from my Zimbabwe year, murdered near the leper colony he served for many years.

inaudibly renewing a little film of water

the title is from a Rilke poem.

apologia pro vita sua

from, of course, the title of Newman's biography.

cold wind, to CM

my closest colleague as a physician who committed suicide in 1991.

fan fan, rub rub

Nelsons' instructions to the sailors and surgeon while he was dying and the poem refers to my naval boarding school.

transfiguration

now it is here we are for it
a whole universe in the summer garden
birth and death of animals
eruption of all the promises of life
a god-like sun whose drum beats
on cooling water, a grass stage
with statues ceasing to command
and suspended time from whose collapse
would the world, the garden be reanimated?
no, y squared is out of place, parenthesis:
(the formula is transformation)
quietly the dried seed of death
wonderful pivot of planetary life
waits for germination

it's time

let this small gesture fall unnoticed
on the teeming worlds surface
its ripple ever present
in the pure world of freedom-death
moulded as this flushed apple
perfectly present formidable,
thus we can see and hold its form
like any object of the desired world
let your good arms give way
though leaving them bears all my sadness
odd how one feels accomplished
life was known so death
must be our new companion now

evening sun, topping gooseberries

was it worth it
cantilevered mind
by the fountains playing
a tidy sum this life
early shattered by its flaws
unreconciled
the phantasmagora seeks an end
strive upward?
still the genes pull lower
play the game

evening sun warms the still garden
plainsong vibrates the air
after dinner thinking feeling
ends in weeping
only a note of schubert
and I am done for

spring

spring one more shattering spring
of birdsong and buds and ducklings
each snowdrop and daffodil are screaming
dying but still mowing the lawn
the vermillion tulips draw blood
everlasting primroses break footsteps
I cannot see the angelic hawthorn
for all those tears
this spring is an end, already
preparing more loveliness next year
its beauty terrifies me
more than my blood can bear

'space and time cannot exist without matter'

not poets but science has trumped us
if we said the Virgin Mary
compared to the air we breathe
it would have been no more amazing
we have said it before these stupid constraints
now its in writing from our brothers in labs.
matter too is outreached through consciousness
that is the vital dimension
streaming like sunshine through the universe
look at our words! they are all new dimensions
stemming from the human gravity
no more parallel lines
but Botticellis among the interstices

souvenir of Jerusalem

so his hands touched
these dried flowers
of the Holy Land
the mystery of their names
here on the Mount of Olives
Zion or in the shadow
of the pulpit of Omar
everlasting they came
up to the lake near Tiberias
and on the way to Jericho
amulets of memory
his only memorial
in his humble uniform
I see him across death
though absent from my mind
that death controls it still
dead father

the snowy road

on the sunlit snowy road
where now your footprints mark
the early morning light of christmas days
far trceries of young winter trees
make walking through their leaves
a symbol of this jigsaw universe
like good cooking flowers and wine
mathematics medicine and the end of time,
but if I saw you now so still
against the fields pink imbued snow
winter were to^o much for me too lasting
silent flakes multiply in my heart
commanding silence through decembers birth
a carpet laid upon your tomb
whose memories lie soft-shouldered
on your naked arm

**'a condition of complete simplicity
costing not less than everything'**

empire built unbuilt
music lived with so long
death by train journey
favourite poets
second rate science
I too wish to kill the messenger
returning to the little hut
where the eye of the god
always smiled amid death
disease and finally war
little grace notes only
are your repast
to take you to a miseréré
let the Seine have you
where your imprinted soul
is carried on the water memory
into the ocean of tides
which beat on the brows
of the unsmiling

**the afterlife shop
(a day spent attending cemeteries
with my chinese relatives)**

no fuss or sentiment here
among the paper copies of life's habits
beer cans and cigarettes
gold bars and a parasol
the tea things and that hairbrush
which when blind she loved to comb
ceaselessly her high head
necklace and watch, old slippers
and rainbow money orders
treasures sealed in the heavenly box
whose pyre of sandalwood
sends smoke offerings heavenwards
even oil of rejoice, a hairdrier
and the old mercedes-benz

les saltimbanques

"here we come here we come trooping our hosiery
rouge everywhere not to mention paint
or that nice german Mann and...
wasn't there one called Maria
we are the jolly symbols of 1888
and when they came we were already out of date"

give us a redemptive rose
and sleep again beneath those stars

but if instead your brain is quite minute
you were at least like comets
on the streets of fortinbras,
trickling down to us the stricken stream
uncleaved
we pick at those dead floating feathers
inaudibly hearing you
"troop on troop on my gay devotees
are still some buying flags!
then send them flowers all dearie".

reverie on the passion of john bradburne

long-bearded climbing for the stars
one shepherd of a limbless flock
some still wearing suits
his ancient rhythm like a cock
renders the sky blue and black
unseen the bundu claims its own
marks the incredulous host
bawdy roar of saturday night
come sunday you are saint
the tent flapped in the night
asleep he went before them
suns rays heroic morning
the life-giving departing weight
battered the occiput
hands raised to the virgin air
a wail of love enters
the unseeing universe
ears pricked like a rabbit
shirt dampening
nothingless than victory
by mtemvbas galilee
before a scorching light

once

suddenly offered suddenly won
the eys and contour of asia
bicycling in oxford street
so beings still exist
where natural commodious contact
is felicity is simple currency,
do not laud it with love
a very high flame when children die
and mother's lose their men
call it inscape sitting
askew on chairs in another position

your objectivity attracts
life is functional make it easy
know this its not intended to be easy
a new nervous system creates moves
living on what?
imagine the emotion before battle
brother to right lover to left
highbury is a battle ground
anyway just try and keep moving in step

I'm sorry for all this shit
look are we leaving
your life wells up in my heart

the golden peacock wisdom king

let me ascend on that carpet
you have prepared for me
that in my sickness one moment
might outweigh the whole universe
a revelation of forgiveness,
seeing the knife of love is flawed
which cleaves my little stream
all the incidents of life
shine as one particle of the whole
transmitting itself like light forever
though the star be dead,
now I see your golden king
whose sweeping wings shadow
centuries of the sun's rising
protest at this apotheosis
it has outsoared the sorrow of your night

metamorphosis

the moat is full of early life
surviving catastrophes
our early life we carry like a gait
repeating its unseemly rhythms
which first we live with, overwhelm us
finally change or die with;
without this genes are meaningless
they need an enhancing horror
yet if we took you to a chair
and all your past were hypnotised away
you would survive, beginning again
and all your yours as each year passed
were dreams, where are the avenues
the parks and meadows sweet?
unknown to you you wander down these lanes
which you will still rehearse

without memory

guitar notes sway in the air
the noonday sun insulates the mind
blue orgasmic sea bends our will
a bell recalls christ
white walls maze-like conceal us
we drift seed-borne
chance will be our rest
starting again forgetful of all past
roots stir and water falls
entering more fully into the yellow
petalled stem asserting
floral crystal
plucked by a kindly hand
drying me forever in some silent attic
where children hide
content to hear their whispers
everlastingly

light and shade

natural spring and natural velocity
stepping outwards the congenial host
is part of life's entropy
grace moving in time's knot
liberates it producing sunny days
when on the road a tree may stand
symbolic of all stature
and if you came your shoulder
would with mine beneath the branches
stand within the light and shade
this natural being opens us
and though the moist trunk and leaves
stand waiting, helpful, imperceptibly
we must gain the axis of our growth
we must be
inimitable

late chrysanthemums

colours of the september sun are risen
carried in armfuls new rain shines
room to room they gather hosting life
wonderful abundant thrones
do they not symbolise a home in autumn
where wife or mother tend the thirsty roots
whose ermine leaves so delicate to rabbits
cuff the mounted stems whose tops
once gilded emperors you could not speak of
and still we bow to them
conjuring our pre-winter songs again
they have us in their sway
even the moderns
happy by late vegetables and golden raspberries
as in Golding Constable's garden
they assume a moral authority
where life is inferred

lac de tueda, savoie

bonjour bonjour bonjour
opal mountain hidden chamois
bristle at our plaintive greetings
earthlings blade the frozen lake
melting waters of pure mind
translate impersonal
to its transcendant state
drawing us to it
in this vast cold bowl
there is no loneliness
a sky's anointing fragments
swell and bless the world
hours deepen and the limbs motion
is its own tranquility
there comes a dwelling place
so deeply grave
with art still unportraying
les enfants sur la neige
still unwronging

kampon, kota bharu 1993

this year the cotton buds were bursting
even the wide sewer ran sweetly
among cows goats butterflies and lambs
the little lane curved by the slope
almost catching an english scene
but softer more informal a true peasantry
corydon would have been happy,
though ready smiles spoke of quietude
indolence and religion
still there was a wonderful mood
of ducks in the house, hens scratching
sleepy dogs and domesticity
sunk in the creamy jungle heat
close to the sandy coconut groves
and the deep green sea, warm as tea

kimono

from the table to the floor
fall silently like death
lifeless but perfect
unharmd the world moves on
without misery
without bitterness
noiselessly one goes
like love unseen unheard
joining the vanquished
the sepia photographs
registering time
could I in a bottle put
one message of your constancy
to sexless love
your validity
sealed by your holy spirit

innocence reached

yes we can look forward to death
it restores our innocence
beyond anything one can assign to childhood
a new opening outward
when time becomes history
and history nothingness
for the universe gives up nothing
and waits eternally for new transformations
even the mind of god is a spectator
of an unknowable end
but as an astronaut feels in space
when roared into new wonders
o victory of before and after
where birth and life are deaths
compared to where you came from

the hawthorn, a supplication

annus mirabilis o healing queen
whose white unchanging branches hang
defiant holy as a protective screen
full field and lane full, o country scene!
rich emblems of such wieldy power
never failing us in valedictory flower
while in their cream and pink brocades
down the avenues and ways we've come
dressing the contracting years

unfailing leaf and fruit for birds
whose adamant bowers stir
resistant to what storm and winter bring
wonderful archaic bush of grace
now tree-like rising upward its embrace
preparing new compassions for new eyes

free standing trees

a countryside full of full stops
symbols of largesse contentment hope
a universe of their own but
the dead tree appalls us
whitening branches on blue summer days
incongruous a note of perfidy

take us away until lane and hedgerow
village and field are full again
not fragile ghosts of former time
but great oak and hornbeam
dark chestnut and high beech
silvery lime and rich walnut
grey birch and old poplar
new elms two for every loss
come we are planting like lovers
give us back England!

“...inaudibly renewing a little film of water”

can animate and inanimate be one
the living merge into chemistry
there is no break
we know that C and H and O
are just rejumped
so that a stone in water
or the crumbly soil
you love to make
are part of us
later we become them again
rebearing new life
but now
inaudibly

spring fever

spring fever must affect the mind
nervous systems exacting their toll
and when a new being swims into sight
an empty longing a hollow cut
bleeds and life suspends itself

even the garden is no hiding place
vacuous pointless unreaching
and as the voice sings sharply
"speak after the bleep"
the whole of science evaporates
facing my being now grounded

fears are vanquished
that is its beauty
but you hear a voice a shadow
can this be crack-up?

it must give itself up
neither body nor mind are wanting
we both see we have been there
finding the places the ways
the loneliness countered
more than love more than feeling
we are sending receiving

let me not lose this emotion
which carries then drags then fulfills
its comfort is not very far
I am holding it now like a knife
ready for plunging
is it god is it dust
movement has taken them out
Mishima

I am bowing so deeply
and over his body you smile
I am standing on very high legs
my head is so high
for the very rare time it must fall
your breathing alone would give life
I see what it is in you
merely my own sense of loss

first antimony

this little knowledge saved one life
but there remains the next hurdle
where one may fail
the process unremitting
the signs of mortality grow
even as I write they grow
while around me death avenges life
now in Somalia tomorrow the Sudan
why do not all these little deaths paralyse us?
is it our obligation to knowledge
what nonsense!
our circumspected little love flickers
and all the books in all the world
seem not to heal our longing
for unearthly abodes

apologia pro vita sua

wager the gain and loss
first rate second rate third rate
goodnight the fields of Harrow
no feathering the Eton blade
which college?
the long intended follow on
humbler the tune of sunset
the provinces and self-advancement
mouldered all and arrows
stab the old illusions
returning your flawed life to god
damaging others no more;
o sweet life and country scene
an english field, france
bowing to that ineffable garden
finally stilled

consciousness on a bank holiday

unrepeatable day light hurting the eyes
the rare harsh sunshine like crystal
on the adoring leaves and life itself
hypnotised by rivers of heat
sweeping the lonely valley air
what am I, what am I doing
here is my vegetable top all-seeing
and if this sunny day should cease
its image is imprinted on the universe
sensation not lost but transfigured
except for one who waits for your decrees
yet as she kneels beside the waters edge
let me take one memory of her
on my knees

to paul celan

moving toward myself-encountering no one
except you
world remaining invisible
except you
conjuring your death-free poems
out of death
plunging us into new life
beaming us out of this world
sending the message in the bottle
the human spirit
far far from anointment
but nearly there
so purely seen in oppression
leaving us the mud of liberty
bring me
in
to your breath crystal
more visibly

cold wind, to CM

cold april afternoon two years now
your pride seemed undiminished
"you were right and we were wrong"
how I miss your impudent refrains
yet no love is lost
just an intellectual lust,
keeping your private dreams apart
unshared you still have them
no shocked entreaty follows on
but bands of creditors
(death brings out the best in us)
strangely slavish to your own ideas
intolerance became unbearable
leaving us your loose ends
but in my heart a cold wind blows

“fan fan, rub rub”

notes of sunset blow bugler...blow!
da de da, da de da, da de da, da de da
scrambled egg numberless
their duty like the wind has swept
our history seaward
duty dieth
arms and playing fields of freezing colours
mighty swaying chapel singing
branded us like calves
power was the walk on the terrace
interminable days beneath lids
home another false dawn
da de da, da de da, da de, da da da da da
still pealing psalm twenty-three
luftwaffe wheeling
only now thirty years later
I understand
the horror of my authenticity

synopsis of England

when from the Lickey hills I first saw you
wind driven raining and still radiant
somehow I knew your consolation
as the years past your country scenes
world of hill and field village and river
would preserve the individual I was
delivering through despair
and even happiness
yet as I see your slow destruction
planting trees seems apathetic
your inward nature turning inward
bearing the dream of memory
the cloth of gold unmaterialised

II : Unstable

Author's note

This poem was written in response to fears that the human genome project and human cloning would undermine our individual uniqueness. The answer is found in the poets of this poem.

unstable

(remembering Gödel's theory of unsolvable paradoxes and the current naivety of biology in solving man)

the triumph of death might be nearer
as the sorrowful millenium approaches
building pipsqueaks
which could solve the homeless,
playing it cool or hip
while surmountable problems
become insurmountable
here on christmas day
waiting in minneapolis hub
of all places
for our usual end of term ski
what better place for composition
and solving problems
although you too may be up to here
in personal odysseys

just as medicine now might look again
at individuals its old heresy
we come back into fashion
thus proving it depends
on where ones standing
DNA now gives us our position
on how we treat and backs
our old conceit of readjusting
but this I think last big attempt
at myth and art laced
with a scientific shepherds crook
might oscillate in rich contention
with words as music and the spheres
or pared to a crystal edge
sparing all beauty
and from its ruins new language
new realities appear

take snow
does it not show a water message
could be infinite
and bring to biology
the paradox of physics

for the quality of ourselves
is not definable
least of all by the poor objectives
of mathematics
it is that the analysis
as eliot put it
prevented my original feeling for the poem
being recaptured

the world is layered
but it could be the commonplace
the great surging everyday tide
of ordinary life
that contains felicity
not quantum or IT
or the antics of the rich
the tabloid horrors
or the academic twitch
but the wasteland of graffiti
and the dying estates
the nursing homes and diners
on the outskirts of cities
contain our aumenenses

certain are these horrors
even there golden lands exist
perhaps the beribboned
helmeted teutons of maximillien
or charles the fifth
flit through their imagination
wandering among the towns and villages
of the rhine and danube
before the late nightmare of germany
almost destroyed
a medieval renaissance
who knows what glories
ruminant in the bronx
or the terraces of wigan
they too can take their turn
among the streams and meadows of st. florien
hidden in the deep glades of olm
beneath the turretted castles
a prince in swadling clothes
grows among the foresters

it might be you
who bearing only the blue and golden ring
in this winter palace of cones and bells
attend the benedictines for the poor
they know the ring
and among rejoicing feasts
you ascend as king
and all this world must end
before our winters tale complete

the lightness of snow
is a complete thing
it changes the world benevonently
so bush and tree housetop and lane
radiate a frozen warmth
gives grace to the ungraceful
and all transport ascends
a noise of silence
still I see onegin on his way
to grotigeskia or somesuch
the heap of stone cold enchanted
the library so complete
sleigh ski langlauf
walking on its softness
the iceing sugar world
releases and controls
commands allegiance
and when a bird or stoat is spied
a hare or pheasant loiters
in the snow-filled field of avalon
it is places not yet known
where tenebrae still sung
and candles tapered one by one
in some cathedral of the rhine
or danube bent whose mitred towers
and castles on snowy crags
look down upon an ancient scene
preserved restored to some ancient task
now dwindling neath the modern chore
where is bohemia and her shore
the maggar and the old eloquence
their many endless fissures
torn to shreds
now covered by the snow

such is redemptive force
old millenium
but the faces and places
are unredeemable
can any scale weigh it
the passing memory of swann
and the duchess de guermantes
conjure the little gate
and the meséglise way
so we invent from our hall
on return to london
the helmingham way
or the framlingham way
to preserve still this island
of country scenes
where you may see the old world
made explicit
and even as the hurrying times
dishonour memory
we encompass it

but now late winter sun beguiles
the hibernating spirit
seeks a new reflection
waits for another language
subway or london hip
is camouflage
and we too hide
from the evocation
the genius of each brain
finally expressed
the secret key turned
looked for all our lives
that which is out of time
ourselves

that village or island
a far away coast
by this lake or mountain
among these hills these declivities
and gently folding fields
from your watchtower
the curving mass of spring
where shepherds stroll

is this still your paradise
some unrealised place
which you find upon return
faded in romance
has gone and all your tales
decomposed

an act of courage
the act itself
release the spar
of your obsession
the lifeboat waits

an afternoon in spring
my mother takes my hand
moving across the surrey sun
her breathing not so strong
and then the unbearable pity
of understanding her
loving her
knowing the long past shared
and mainly unexpressed
fills me with alarm
but still I know we will not say
what we feel
it cannot be said
this long long love
unshakeable
in vissicitude
but now in this point in time
in this point in space
seeing her on the garden seat
alone with her own thoughts
holding my hand in hers
we kiss

the pity of celan
seeing them leave for germany
he escaping
the uncompleted emotion of his love
finally killed him
though none of us ever complete it
he never found in his poetry
that completion

which we must climb to see
the new world made implicit
by his vigour
these unfinished edifices
speak warmer more possible
more open
than wagners total work of art
we can build upon them
unlike these completed monuments
not so broad a task
but further more penetrating
into the substratum of our minds
where unlocking new rings of power
will free us for the new burdens
casting so quickly on us
new poets will guide us through
ha! but we are a minor form
no one will see us
and from our supreme height
before the eighteenth century
we come very low
below the paintings and the sounds
the world of incidence and things
we hardly feature
who cares! for those who miss these four
could well be dead

earth you darling I will (rilke)
and always beginning
just when all was up
when no escape seems possible
you bring us your surprise
you keep us going

world whose spin in time
like rilkes ringing glass
which shatters as it rings
holds us so close
our true mother
whom we cannot bear to leave
as in our own mother
symbols always departing
for somebody
and as the new spring appears

accompanied this weekend
by die walkuryie
and periahs goldberg
I am walking on my knees

mandlestams goldfinch
for the natural worlds instinct
is innocent relief
against the terror of people
just as the landscape provides
inanimate solace
and a building should be an incident
subordinate to that whole

obsessive world of imagining
and fears so deep
guilt and self-torture
arise from his early death
and impotence in protecting
a mother
these fault lines produce genius
or death

eye of god weekend
tulips more red and yellow
the sky bluer
primroses more purple gold and orange
daffodils apricot and white
freshness of green fresher
camellias pinker
anenomes bluer
the deep-rooted rain of winter
has repaid
the country trembles in expectation
delivery of my liverish science
tai pai it has come to this
talking to the unconsolated
GPs in darkest wigan
about science on its own
yet they are cheerful
one jogs 10 miles a day
in the rain of mersey basin
most are single-handed
their dedicated days are numbered

nearly all indian hindu
a friendly humane bunch
and nice caring wives
the NHS coalface

courage... the only thing
which makes life livable (ibsen)

and in this twinning world
of contradictions
en route to senegal
we land at malaga
due to passenger violence
at these moments how right wing one feels
about the behaviour of others
still private actions are as bad
if unknown
and how small the world is
its human problem
though politicians act
as if it was so large
coming and going
how comfortless their exhortations
their impertinence
their bad manners
how splendid the exceptions

africa again
black subjects in a landscape
their rotting taxis
airport importance
and if given the upper hand
ha ha ha he he he
yet sitting on an immemorial rock
legs asunder
eloquent redolence
of an ancient charisma

picasso owes so much to this art

now we must see this open way
a life unharnessed
there is no other sway
kind waters breaking

on these basalt rocks
whose salt-soaked lives
may make us one by one
become like them
petrified by age old seas
as each holy property of youth
declines and dies
for which there are no fees
in compensation
but the ever present firmness
of your love

ever departing
old sage old rilke

depart these black shores
whose tiny children
hang like beads from every finger
running to your look
whose status gives endowment
to their lives
and in their eyes
that source of mystery springs
where we are one with them
come genes and robots
come o killing god
you are one drop
in that infinity

III : Sketches for Existence

Author's note

The title is taken from a line in Paul Celan. MT refers to Marina Tsvetayeva. Mishima is, of course, the great Japanese writer. The poem, respite, is the view from our house in the country.

breaking the circle

moving from self to non-self
knowing the cost
breaching the circle
of existence
choosing between being
and not being
courage
when courage is broken
for only then
can the past be redeemed
from lack of courage
even the dead
make no impact
your mother?
your wife!
yourself for gods sake,
detail on detail
is witnessed
in your heart
reigns the truth

montana, christmas 98

paradise is one more ski
a wilderness conquered
here is your wide space
of elk and bear and eagle
lilliput humanity
nature triumphant
american pastoral
but in his city
the daughter was dying
full of this centuries crap
let us submit
as if to a god
seeing the green plain
and distant mountain
embrace you
the eye of a horse
in an alpine meadow
an eagle has conquered
by the orange light of montana

the purpose of art? to break the laws of reality

– mishima

hey ho away we go
DNA flashes on and off
giving us infinity
depending on the weather
and we
we have broken reality
by these scarcely moving details
reordering the words
the idea
out of the manifold inconsistency
the contradictions
arises the phoenix
out of the ashes
the soil of new life

**“it is not cezannes’ paintings but his anxiety
about the problem which interests me”**

picasso

green and yellow life
surviving the brown paste
of a roman viaduct
trickling by centimetres
a life-giving stream
above the deserted plain
the town like a novel
iridescent chiming with time
how could war touch it?
and by the houses and hills
he paints the sand-covered
lanes and thick green leaves
among the light of time
hanging blue and white
on the insistent canvas
always escaping

engendered

short slightly staring eyes
above great balls no doubt
a history of women
and great pictures
how was it done?
dionysian forces flowed
uninterruptedly
the moderns were born
by parisian sinks
poet and musician
were second best
les demoiselles d'avignon
sweeps all before it
paint becomes substance
and the whole artefact
of man and nature
is the tool of art

january spring

the air has changed
the light lighter the cold sun
more easy on tree and bush
more gentle on wall and lane
lifting us imperceptibly
into new life
the old made explicit
for a moment the horror passes
yesterday vanquished
we smile
the earth turns toward us
this very small moment of time
when winter passes into
the promise of spring
coronation of hope
of beginning again,
while this feeling lasts
of light and shade
we are still growing coming
the detection tells us we live
the flicker of change
quite buried in the snow
of february
but there in the memory
the signal has flown
when we do not see it
then
likes ones state of mind
from a fatal disease
care abandoned
only death can give adoration

(and still I have not trapped it)

remembrance

waiting for the fall
which deepens him
the withdrawal from life
when he might sense
as the sun explodes
the pure the immutable
happiness of his victory
leaving he hoped
the sketches and fragments
of the solid world
its evolving dispensation
the path of nothingness
sealed by the holy spirit
so like a country doctor
dying naked by his youth
we stare toward this happy void
listening against hope
for a celestial note
seeing our courage desert us
as the moment appears
then we are sealed in spirit
as the end belies the beginning
the truth kiss

**“art is a lie in helping us
understand the truth”**

picasso

never pure and never simple
see hughes on plath
and let me not hear
an irish brogue again
who to the ear imagined
an aversion worse than surrey
where then the pure lilt of summer
still there still there
beyond the cornfield
down the old beards lane
past the folly
where his grace
so many times disgraced
the girls who loved him
nonetheless
twas their fault
not to know him
there now through the wood
past fields of english soil
the quality of her breathing day
its special light
in winter hard
in summer rhapsody

all interplay suggestion
art;
a curious little word
(like rilkes inclination)
quality, links art and truth
indefinable defines
and I do not know if time
will show it
or those things lost in time
were greater
or why one is learning to do without
the people one still loves
so omerus moves
and we too
in a way so ornate
one could never explain
we love condemnation
but each heart may not exist
only inhabited
either or
the task of new creation
awaits

two horses

the gypsy on his moped
long haired and ugly
moves them up the verge
little converse
mind my trees I say
he nods and pulls them further on
solid not too large
young faced and better talk with them
now hes gone
black and white
chestnut and white
two companions in cold february
loving my carrots
nuzzling my hand
the affection of these total strangers
allows for creation
unlike humans
stifling it
the affection of animals
is a very big subject

the torso of opera

impediment all is impediment
as inclination bows
beneath this weight
here the sun explodes
here the garden erupts
a prince of peace is killed
from the brothel to the stage
the wintry hopelessness
of kings and paupers
grapple for the grail of love
heroic lives dissolve in failure
impudence succeeds
arise and fall the watchword
of our stars
and it is us
as we come late to see
stumbling from our seats
into the strandian air

“nowhere is lying ahead”

MT

look at these rock-pools
life in corners
calm then storm
none can escape the violence
of the search
each has their foothold
then dislodged
here here
here

suddenly the pool is clear
new life appears
we have disappeared
to nowhere

amfortas

wounded the world seeks you
invisibly killing you
demanding leadership
desiring humiliation
the figure of amfortas
grows ever larger more complete
absorbing our own lives
reaching out more and more
to our own humility
the sacred possibility
of a life uncanceled
the human lifelong wound
healed?
he sets out the task
he who brings it home
will be our praise
is parsifal possible?

blue into yellow

winter withdraws
one rain-filled sunday
despair
then yellow surrounds us
light abundant light
changes the film of water
the leafless branches
glow like metal
warm sun!
your embrace holds me forever
all these days without you
passionless
you the golden orb, the wisdom king
healing the earth and sky
our father who art in heaven

another spring

still here
watching the angle of the light
see how it transposes
a garden of grass and wall
or water more still
in the stillness of warm light
the slight tension of perfection
the interpretative photon
cascading through all your senses
formality and nature
moving through brown and grey
green oasis of spring
undercolour
leaving me with a future
coming after me

silently

now we are silent
devon remembers
the water-filled day
a sun-filled vision
that hill comes to meet me
are we halfway?
the long sea oblivious
and down that lane of garlic
cow pat and ozone
the ruined church is ringed by sheep,
still sinking from thought
only now in recollection
have we come through

only now do I love her

how long?
twenty years of procrastination
has been my destination
then at the moment of departure
looking for the millionth time
into that moon face
my love is complete
nobody else was possible
not consummation
not belief
not intellect
but being herself
an entity
practical devoted
looking toward eternity

measurement and eternity

non-bible
your god or my god
what god
moving on hot coals
grinding teeth
the paralysed boy
and you
here is the unendurable
you measure it

let me drink from this cup

looking at the compost heap
life can begin even there
the ashes and vegetables
rot together
the odd dead rabbit
and rat
make up a tidy foursome
the grass has turned a slimy green
full of dung flies
always jumping on each other
this looks like hell
it can't be long
better prepare for it
for does it not nourish
a flower

nothing and consciousness

how long we were nothing
or were we
how short we are something
or are we
once makes little sense
but if only once
greeting the world
what ardour
can you imagine so short a time
and losing a third?
among all those faces
the billions
a sort of relief
except for the very small circle
better in a month
almost relieved at ones going

there is no I

(the noontide sun of summer flowed over the still garden-mishima)

first and last attempts
coagulate
not death by ritual
but the frozen recess of the heart
exposed to all the world
on the ice edge
the hollow tree
and its film of water
still accumulating
together in one long rush
we enter the stygian pool
no celestial city
no trumpets sounding
but more perfect
a quiet smiling eternal sleep

even love is reposed
the people and places
the contiguous slices
are but a fancy of time
shimmering
this april is cruel
no psalm can rescue me
the stones only the stones
support and endure
my heart will not lift up
to no one
to babble

one day

counting the sunshine
the new unbearable spring
the waiting grass
but in the other world
we can step out of all this
all these memories
all these affections
into new borders
and new departures
freed from the terrible responsibility
of being somebody
to the uplands of shepherds
forever herding
seeing a wildflower bloom
on the warm breeze
give me one more day

respite

twelve years of the ken valley
looking into its face
across pylons and a distant mast
the norman tower in the trees
where the red cross of england
flutters on a freemasons mast
manned by a new lady
new houses in the glebe
and other fields planned
for retirement
a few sheep and horses
mainly corn and beet
rise together in the mist of april
as the softening sun
relents for high suffolk
this sustaining view
unexceptional
leads back to the spring garden
wondering if another summer garden
will be mine
still we have seen perfection
the ducklings are born
the ironing is proceeding
handel gives us caesar
ready for death
there is no I

fakery

are we all fakes?
special pleading
is modern society
and even sincere
authentic do not ring true
the high art of fakery
breeds success
and little separates
the ideals of yesterday
from cynicism today
we are like overbred dogs
soon enough nature takes her revenge
this clay pot with a quart of blood
what is it worth?
take it and be done

spring rain

end of day
still holding on
still signalling
give me a counterirritant
not a new start
the more one looks
the more appalling it all seems
perhaps a passing phase
when the oil is low
o the pure contradiction!
but how wonderful
against all the odds
to know
there is no I

one perfect day

deeper green the sward
more yellow the narcissus
finer the pink blossom
bluer the running sky
a day of levitation
when dark thoughts are gone
the sun and moon reign
an unrepeatable day
and you have seen it
if never again you have won it
this earth has made you adore it
we are released like a dove
into the empyrean
into the no-ones land
of after and nothingness
into the everlasting
interstices

departure and return

there is no let up
moving more slowly
into the inevitable
but ones little fate
against hector or achilles
seems trite
one is hardly more than
bilbo baggins
and of course less good
the little circle breaks
but will reform
as the gap in the carpet
is rethreaded;
though one sees it falling
thronged and exhausted
though its trees and hedgerows
weep for guardians
though its ways are known
when like mystery
the path was unknown
when ahead will now be always someone
still let me see her
climbing oer the hill
let me
walk once more upon
an english road

poem and ending

do we not owe ourselves reward
those coins of happiness
rare and delicate exchange
we try so unsuccessfully to send
instead of turning inward
can we gaze unclouded
unrepentant
can we become ourselves only
when the moment of realisation
of complete growth
is overtaken by the awareness
of death
his unseeing eyes
leering towards you
but behold the blue sky
of another bank holiday
is it possible
yet ones stock is failing
the little signs grow
and the world the world
spins on, murder and mayhem
on one hand
new organs new life on the other

pure contradiction
and so for oneself
as life stretches you out further
the elastic breaks
is this the moment of insight
the reversal of time
beyond memory
for we must account for the world
beyond memory
the forgotten world
of people and places
the endless photograph albums
the attic of life
father on the yangtze of all places
black-haired and beautiful
the excitement of life
so soon extinguished
ashes in golders green
(why golders green?)
and from that point I know
all my life is subject
poem without ending

fragments of a confession

one man is all men
if there is no I
and as the sun seeps into veins
on this very perfect day
waist-deep in cow parsley
of l'angleterre profonde
can we be removed
from the horrors to come
sooner or later the disintegration
only by a vision of the sunlight
beyond the summer garden
preserving in the memory
this very fine day
where silence and may blossom
like a crucifix
are held up against
the gathering storm

to you and to the whole university

thirty years at the medical coalface
beginning with promise
ending in - not despair
but disorientation
still there is time
for breakthrough
yes some decent science
more patient help
but the heroic moment
if I can show -
complete clearing of the carotid
with this cocktail
eureka! we are transformed
and all our life would seem
a preparation for this moment
yet can it be the poetry
which will save them
and me

“frost and sunshine, a marvellous day”

– pushkin

on first reading onegin
came the lingonberry
the idea of novel-verse
is it time to begin again
on this very wet june
a time of reminiscence
reading eliot
how serious the poets life is
though in the end he was inside
his academic attention
I remain on the outside
that is my entelechy

a poet may believe...

he is expressing only his private experience.....yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation and despair of a generation - eliot

calm
calmness
always wait till tomorrow
usually better
by a process of attrition
deadly thoughts
are driven
downwards
and the moment of liberation?
use counterbalancing fears
anything to neutralise
their perfidy
since they arise
from that distant past
another you
innocent passenger to those events

Rome

those massed graves
even before you see them
you bow

Rome reality

seeing her tortoises
crushed by modernity
these cruel barbarous roads
flooded with appalling humanity
hilarious hill towns
the eaten compagna
open your graves
modern romans
and be swallowed by them!