

Another Yesterday

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Time

Time comes. Time passes.
Time burns all our chances.
Take your time – but use it slowly
Eking out each moment wholly,
Knowing time will soon be spent –
Much or little though we're lent.

Microcosm of my mind
Where each neuron pulses blind
Yet feeds the aura of my being,
Gives delight at each day's seeing,
What to you the ache of time?
It gave you the pulse sublime:
By dreaming art or blissful sound
You quell the hate which men surround.

Thoughts do not die, as bodies must,
Nor decay to forgotten dust –
But, ghost-like, live to seed fresh minds
When we, perceptive, use their finds.
To comprehend a simple flower
Is worth the passing of an hour;
To see fresh beauty in a shawl,
A chimney stack, a canal wall,
Is more than time can steal from me
And worth life's doubt and agony.

Time comes. Time passes.
Time gives all our chances.
Take your time, and use it slowly
Eking out each moment wholly,
Knowing time will soon be spent-
Much or little though we're lent.

A New Hope

Barren fields, plucked dry –
desiccated corn cobs litter gullies;
dust whirls about numbed feet;
cracked slabs of concrete earth
defy vain hope and promise death
without decay to mark a changing land.

Tread wearily dull night to cloak this pain
and throw your mantle of a starry frost
to anaesthetise my heart. Wind comes like cold vomit
to a starving man; unwelcome movements
to diminish mien; poor argument for changing circumstance.

Then, in the blistering chill before the dawn,
a half-felt movement stirs the numbing air;
a cry of birth torments the threatening void
and crawls with gritted lip upon the plane,
and laughter gurgles from a tiny face
whose promise breaths to life
our false disdain.

Rebellion of the Spirit

How can I write? That noise...
And ever present threatens on the stair
Those steps which measure pithy company,
To grate the heart from slumber to some stifling air
Or carry force by threat of argument
That drives new thought to undetermined lair.

Come then! Again I steel my leaden arm
To task a note of time's ephemeral play
And seize the hour – no, less! Some single mote
Of time, which for a brief wing's beat
Holds sway, enough to guide a faltering pen;
Enough to fire a Rome or new creeds lay
Or stir rebellion to republic's aid.

A New Earth

To touch the moon with wondering eye
Or span a thread of starry sky;
To hold one moment of design,
When naught of certainty was mine;

To craft the cabin dreams have seen,
Pursuing all that could have been
And yet may be – if we are right –
Who hold that thought and mind are might;

To reach beyond all stretch or span
By scant achievement in one man.
Yet stays my fear, my one despair,
That all our goals are noxious air;

For man is king in name alone,
His planet for the apeman's clone.
Unless we take this step of dread,
Our vast creations are as dead.

Now must all human-kind awake
And fight indifference for their sake:
To leave the confines of our earth
And seek a place of greater worth.

One star in all this firmament
To champion our tournament,
And build fresh dreams of truth and worth
Upon some new and greater earth.

Mephistopheles

Like Mephistopheles, who claimed
the contents of my mind,
but was repulsed by a desire for God,
you probed and sought to capture
every thought I had
and tried the age-old adage of your love
to pull me from a course I'd set
while still my world was young.

I too have veered on lusty winds,
and missed a tide or two,
yet – battered though my hulk may seem
and water-sodden, low the hull,
with shattered mizzen sails
heaving in the swell of dying storms –
My way is set by stars when clouds are riven,
and still I hold my bow on course for heaven.

Tumtime Sometime

One tum takes the sun
And looks like toasted butter.

Two tums slim and trim
Love to swank, to run and swim;
On surfboards flash they wavelets skim,
Then dry themselves for supper.

Three tums, flat and firm
Throw a beech-ball at a worm,
But cannot make the poor thing turn
To throw it back again.

Four tums looking smug
Roll themselves beneath a rug
And sup iced lager from a jug
And shout that life is merry.

My tum tries to hide
Its little overhang inside
A Spanish leather belt.
But it sags a bit too wide:
However tight the belt is tied,
There always seems just too much tum to fit in no matter how

I tried...

Oh, Captain!

Oh, Captain! when will you take your place
As Captain of the human race?

We're waiting for a sign
For you to come on-line –

Oh, Captain! when will you take your place?

Oh, Captain! when will you send us love
Who gave to us the eagle and the dove?

From Auschwitz back to Troy
Man could only hate employ -

Oh, Captain! when will you send us love?

Oh, Captain! when will you give us peace
As war and death and famine still increase?

For we're standing on death's slope
Where you alone give hope –

Oh, Captain! when will you give us peace?

Oh, Captain! when will you come on board
A leader who forced not by sword?

Aid our faith with living proof –
That in your hand sits total truth.

Oh, Captain! when will you come on board?

At The Ending Of The Light

What last syllable of breath shall fret my going

At the ending of the light?

None – but the lonely owl's cold piping

And the scorning gull's wheeled flight.

What gallant victory glass shall toast my parting

At the coffin's passing hour?

They who've tasted death's dark bidding

Shall salute this broken tower.

What noble testament shall stir your striving

Once the pen is stilled and dry?

This only – that my soul surviving

Lives in each repeated sigh.

Laughter

If laughter be the song of innocence,

Then let me nothing know and gladly live.

If joy blooms where there is no schoolroom fence,

I'll nothing think each day and ten links give.

A soft smile snugly clothes the poorest child,

Till radiantly its glow warms all who see;

Such happiness shall tame their natures wild

And lift from gloom the darker side of me.

More lovely than a solemn church bell peel

The light of playful youth illumines my heart;

Each ripple of delight and youngster's squeal

Can burnish Epstein's noble work of art.

For what good's heaven if they sorrow share?

'Tis better far in hell, if laughter's there.

My Heart Shall Beat In Such A Grove

I must seek peace and solitude
Where sleep and dreams pass by;
Through journeys to a blossomed isle
Where I shall sombre lie.

Some little square of grassy floor
Is where I crave to be;
Some portion of an English soil
Across an English sea.

And there I'd take a simple share
Encompassed by beech trees,
With trellised roses climbing free
Alive with blossom-bees.

Within this sacred pleasant spot
Sweet music fills the air,
Deft feet dance through a spangled sun
Whose beams touch golden hair.

Here simple tunes displace cruel hearts,
And timeless instinct guides;
My heart shall beat in such a grove,
Where tranquil peace abides.

The Cone

I worked for half my life upon
 A model of the void;
When it was younger than of late
 And we to it alloyed;
And built a wondrous construction –
 Which COBE has destroyed.

This cone-shaped universe shows that
 Our space did smoothly fill,
Without a crinkled, bumpy skin,
 A furrow or a hill;
But uniform on every side,
 As deep as we could drill.

These ripples on the surface found
 Are more than I can bear;
Their first impressions dignify
 The Cold-Dark-Matter lair,
And add fuel to their raging fire
 Of “knowing all that's there!”

What hope now for the little man?
 What comfort from life's storm?
I know of nothing to relate
 To make the heart strings warm,
For I am tired and weary now
 Of struggling for God's form.

But stay! I'll struggle on yet more
 Before my life is done;
To understand the stars and moon,
 The galaxies and sun;
For if we cease to fight the dark,
 'T were better not begun.

Now I must fight, still more alone,
 If what I've found is right.
To tell the world how we began
 With all my craft and might;
I'll summon every ounce of strength
 Until I reach that light.

News-worthy

Purpose out with proud-fleshed words
The thousand hopes of men;
The rival gods in battle scorned
Drip blood to ink this pen,

Incaridining every page,
Their torment shredded bare;
Their artefacts and jealous greeds
Entangle gentle care.

Whilst altruistic comforting
Of bullet-wounded babes
Confuses what is worth the care
Until compassion fades.

That is the daemon on my back,
The sack of faceless death.
What miracle might burn my eye
And fire my leaden breath?

To wander in the dark quagmire
Is all I've ever known-
And with each step sink deeper in,
At every step alone.

Will peace or pleasure never come?
Till earth's bound rest, I'll seek
My struggle through this black despair
To feed some eagle's beak.

Brueghel's View of Spring

Brueghel the Younger's view of fecund Spring
to celebrate raw Nature's conquering,
boasts merry-making simians leaping round
and selling withered tulips from tilled ground;
whilst I wandered his beech wood thick with briars,
through brilliant, scattered, scented wild-sown flowers;
tangling and tearing at my blooded way,
his untrod path impenetrably lay.

And I, alone, could only wander faint
so far from base, my mobile crackles taint
the air with broken voices I can't hear,
with gypsies' dire forebodings in my ear:
of unbaptised ones buried in the wood;
of prisoners' torment by the rod and hood;
of fear engendered when rulers conspire;
of trembling refugees caught on a wire.

Then came a clarion peel of swinging bells
to give direction midst these fearful dells;
I scrambled up some rock scree strewn with glass
toward these notes of old unwelcome farce.
With pained expression, dulled love, whimpering wit,
enforcing challenge beyond any yet –
I choke on artifice dressed as pure art,
their rags disguised as riches to their heart.

Dull oafs find market stalls for tulips' pride –
this artist's stem is cut before their stride;
and all our works and thoughts are marked "anon":
we are the tulips monkeys piss upon.

Anarchy

This wall paper peeled off long ago.
No pictures hang in homes or halls
Of politicians, gods or family.
Here there are no heroes, only the hour,
And survival is the game.

No skills are taught:
Carpenters, wheelwrights, masons, artists,
All are gone.
Only the skill of the trigger remains,
Universally taught.

Exploding walls, severed corpses. Each day
The circle of rubble extends;
No plasterer will close these holes,
No builder can repair such walls.

Awaiting and delivering death
Is all the life they know.
Brutal, short, cruel, unselecting and uncaring.
Young and old are now alike,
Blended and merged to drab greyness.

A child of four springs playfully,
Dragging her Kalashnikov toy,
Making furrows to receive her blood –
Fresh grain for an old land.

Day on predictable day,
The only progress ripples, vacant grey,
Expanding, encircling arable fields and urban walls,
Each falls and that is all they know.

When will a hero come to us?
When will valour rise?
To lift the veil of anarchy;
Bring colour to their eyes?

A Childhood Terror

No calling owl paused in that silent territory of night;

No moving form morose in solitude;

No augural flapping bat, no insect's noisy flight;

No howling dog: each living thing subdued.

Within the house, beneath the eaves, her window thrown ajar,

She hid within the shadows of her mind;

A trembling siren brutalised the lame and heavy air,

Ensnaring hope whilst holding trust confined.

She turned aside and quiet lay, as that soft step grew near,

Her furrowed brow and tingling hand grew moist.

"Dear God," she thought, "as you love me, please let him turn aside,"

Yet knowing prayer is broken when unvoiced.

Her mouth was dry, her eyes stared wide as, feigning sleep, she lay,

"Perhaps he'll walk on by – it worked before."

Her heart was pounding like a drum that called battalions on;

She heard the lock click on her bedroom door.

She heard his tread toward the bed, his shoe scraped from a limp;

He reached her side; his breath caressed her neck,

Then softly, probing in the air, his voice uncertain came,

"Hello, my precious, are you still awake?"

One sound, or cough or nervous scratching move would bring him close.

She lay and froze like any shaking mouse

That some indifferent cat might toy with as a pointless sport,

And wondered why still stood the heedless house.

She lay for what seemed hours, with heart loud-thumping out,
And wondered if he'd gone, or stood still there
But dare not turn, nor give a sign that might encourage him,
While wondering what she'd done to earn this care?

At last she heard him step away, the futile door clicked shut;
Her tension emptied in a long-drawn sigh.
"This time," she thought, "I'm safe again," and turned to face the night;
This time, she heard the owl go hooting by.

To AE

She slipped through space, her life
unique
in moment, place and time –
constrained within her natal cell,
she hypnotised with rhyme.

By penning hope and quiet peace,
we rarely glimpsed her pain;
she moved with gentleness, too still
for braggart art's disdain.

That outer world stays unimpressed
when louder cells strut out;
not poets' thoughts, nor silent prayer
resolved her inner doubt.

She stirred us to creation's heaven,
a silken, glowing bud;
we drew from her a deep found
strength
pulsating through her blood.

For she had seen here greater truth
that signalled through her rhyme,
till we – though journeying alone –
could laugh in darkest time.

I felt her presence in them all –
the ones alive, those ones
long dead – and stirred within my cell.
We were her living sons.

She gave this simpleton fresh hope;
she give me new-glimmed light;
till I, uncertain of the way,
was filled by her delight.

I took one slow uncertain step
onto the path ahead,
where others so more worthy trod,
whose hearts had volumes bled.

Chance led her on to certain doom
whose task would stretch and clasp,
indrawing breath from her weak form
till tiring of life's grasp.

And now how lost, how lonely here,
afraid of art's great light,
I courage take from Ann the brave
who lived to spurn grey night:

to scorn those dire suburban paths,
and fight for truth and right.
Her way, her day is my blazed sun;
her way is all that's bright.

A Strength Invisible

Whenever I alone do lie
With no one in the home,
The fire low, the lamp unlit,
My friends and children gone,
The ghosts of friendships past soon flit
Into my drifting brain;
Not solemn ones, nor filled with wit,
But they who strength retain.

And in the embers of the day
Their strength flows back to me:
How one, when I despaired, help sent;
One gave his dignity;
His gentle peace another lent
Amid the city throng;
Yet others shook my angry bent
With apt and cheering song.

I think in everyone of us
Are ghosts we don't quite know;
Who try to comfort with a word
And guard us when we're low.
Their inspiration, though still blurred
To more enlightened men,
Cannot remain a force unheard
To those who wield the pen.

On A New Poem by A.E.

Today I saw a new poem,
written in your hand,
written tenderly in your bold italic script
with a deep and azure ink,
sinking into permanence in the silent porous page.

Each calligraphic line,
penned and rhymed with panygyric care,
spelled out a love as old as life,
yet soft and young as dew-shine in a morning mist.

Each syllable spoke lovingly
of he who laughed and held you close,
and whispered to the breeze your name;
of times you shared when hope was in each word.

One tiny dot betold a stop. You ended then,
but with an end that spoke of all within:
you signed your name as his. And now I know
why mine you'll never own, nor ever dare to sigh
in the same breath as that which holds its own.

Goodbye, grave love,
how sad to see you die,
and know that innocence has parted at this tryst,
this meeting of two lines, which tearfully you kissed.

Don't You Love Those Double Yellow Lines?

My mother had me on a yellow line,
'Cos she couldn't make maternity on time.

It was raining very hard,

So she wrote a little card

And left to drown another glass of wine.

Then a traffic warden came and stood and frowned,
With a ticket for a fine of twenty pound.

"You can't stop here," she said,

And she stuck it to my head.

But I just grinned because I had been found.

Now double lines are like a soothing breast,
Which I caress whenever I'm depressed;

While the traffic warden's frown

Is the sweetest face in town,

And yellow is the colour I like best.

Another Yesterday

And yesterday was just another day,

With nothing over long to struggle through:

Some simple walk-on bit part in a play,

A tune to whistle, perhaps a line or two

Declaiming that the boss would soon be by.

Then one swift exit after brief applause.

What if some others took a chance to fly?

This was no fortified salient, cracked by force,

But their good gift. I could not envy them –

What well-fed cat envies the wheeling bird?

I thought today would drift on much the same:

On empty paths; eclipsed in shadows; blurred.

Then, in the dappled shade, you caught my play

And yesterday's a million miles away.

To The Dying Day

A heavy gaff-topped hull beyond the sound
Chases an ebbing breeze to luff her home
Lest silence, and the hovering threat of calm,
Shall break her dogged search for solid ground.

Orange lights about the harbour wall
To greet the gathering gloom with puny glow
Against a purple cloak where cloud banks grow
To blaze the dome of heaven's apparel.

The empty pavement rattles with a can
Whose purpose long has gone, all meaning spent,
Save in its hollow music giving vent
To images of Spanish Saraband.

Starkly shadowed by the steel-works' flare,
Across the yard the fishing craft in rows
Are tied, with billow breaking massive bows
Frozen in their plunge through empty air.

Light floods the endless solitary street
Creating by its glow a darker rim
Where music, conjured by a careless coin,
Upon the air spills out a jazzy beat.

Within this scene I search with dragging pace
For some vague sign in life for hope to wish.
Then from the shadow comes your welcome kiss
And from this night tomorrow's in your face.

Lines penned on Redcar front at dusk. 1992

A Love Yet Stirring

O man! What wreckage has your hatred strewn
Within this tiny, sea-encompassed globe.
Vast, fertile tracts decay to blasted dune;
Days mimicking a xenon-pulsing strobe.

Here once stood nations proud in gaunt relief:
The faithful Moor, the awesome tribal king,
Whose only skirmish was with neighbouring chief
Whom poets, praising brave defeat, could sing.

Your enemy lies now within your walls:
The cause is compromised; the ideals lost.
Semtex is the voice of village brawls;
Flat mortar shells argue when love is crossed.

And yet — through all the carnage, all the waste,
Your constant love my inspiration laced.

The Exile Ghost

There is a ghost within our house

 Upon the topmost stair

And, though none else believe in her,

 I know she's sitting there.

I've seen her in my chair at night,

 When all the lights are low;

She watches through the window pane

 Like ladies long ago.

She wears an etched, wide silver band

 Around a long brown tress,

And dazzles as she dances in

 Victorian white dress.

She looks so young, and sounds so bright,

 As singing she goes by,

And always there's a softened hint

 Of starlight in her eye.

She floats along the passages,

 She sings within the hall

Then, as I reach to touch her face,

 She passes through the wall.

And in the dark, I've woken once

 When I was feeling low,

And felt her presence in the room,

 A brilliant warming glow.

I've often wondered whom she was,

 What sudden death she knew;

Yet happiness and love she had

 Although her years were few.

For there's an aura in her stance

 Which few today may see;

A gentle hope, a kindly grace

 Which is the world to me.

And all the while she's in the home

 No overwhelming trial

Shall ever rob my peacefulness

 Nor break me by its guile.

Aliens

And through the gaping roof snow flurries fall:
Their wintry grip holds England in its palm.
Old basin pipes are blocked by rocks of ice;
Beneath them, cracked bowls catch incessant drips.

Sick children squeeze for comfort in a shawl;
A gutting candle draws great shadows out.
Broken boards are burnt for lack of gas,
Found crumbs are shared, too few to leave a taste.

No hint of help comes from the drifting moon,
Where once a monument to mind was built;
Without a city's lights to blot their power,
The taunting clouds flash countless undimmed stars.

Then to this savaged land an alien comes,
Who promises to mend our broken dreams;
New warmth and clothing, medicines and food,
With hope seductive if we follow him.

How many turn, how many take that road?
Proclaiming with fixed clothes their choice, and each
By repetitious word each justifies:
"Peace and Cooperation" is their reach.

Yet, to my heart, conformity is flawed,
Though promising such comfort here on earth.
I choose the wild, the fierce, unsettled way:
Freedom and Independence are my birth.

What Went Wrong, Raymond?

I once beheld the power of dreams
That fête a questing mind
To build an island fortress for their sake;
Where make-believe is what it seems,
And truth is all you find,—
But lacked the faith inventive dreams must take.

I might have voyaged westward
To the land that overwhelms,
Or strayed beyond the boundaries of man's mind;
I could have journeyed eastward
To some silken castle realms,—
But I guess I never was the travelling kind.

In fancy undercover clothes
I might have been a sleuth,
And brought some captured criminal to book;
I could have dealt elixiral blows
To ogres who steal youth, —
If I'd had the time to take a look.

I voyaged to the stars today
My route and time seem planned,
To take the second space-ship after dark;

At least, I saw the Milky Way,
A ticket was to hand,—
But somehow lacked the guts to make my mark.

They're calling out the registers,
They're rolling out each name
Of everyone the century has known;
I clipped my wings with secateurs,
I missed my chance of fame, —
And now I'm only fit to die alone.

I heard the sounds of magic
I touched the harpist's string,
For music binds a spell that's like a moat;
The airs they played were tragic
They left no song to sing,—
And wrapped their golden strings around my throat.

I shaped a mighty bronze from clay
And sketched some girls in pink,
So gifted was this precious artist's hand;
The bronze I cast I threw away,
The pictures flecked with ink, —
What went wrong, Raymond? Where's the promised land?

Inspired by "Life Story"

Prosperina

She looked not up, nor seemed she sure

Who stepped from that abyss,

But like one blinded by the sun

She left the caves of Dis:

The sleeping earth must be renewed

By Proserpina's kiss.

When forced by Hades to a death

Unlooked for, she choose him;

Ingesting pomegranate seeds

Was not some idle whim,

But linked her soul to Hades' throne

Within his caverns dim.

Her hair tempestuously whipped

About her solemn brow;

With stumbling feet, to meet the light,

She struggled from her vow,

Yet all the while I heard her cry,

"My heart is still below!"

And from her exile underworld

Young Proserpina sings;

To bring new strength and melody

On blissful summer wings;

Before returning to those depths

When winter's curfew rings.

But modern man no longer calls

These gods for harvest yield;

Did Prosperina vainly roam

The ancient fen and weald,

Where once she offered sacrifice

To free a barren field?

Her charnel vault is now the mind;

In hidden lairs she'll creep,

Whose archetypal dreams unite

Each one of us in sleep,

whence Jung has gently through them probed

To glimpse her image deep.

Without some touch of care divine

We walk the earth alone,

And keep no hope, but bleak despair

Which death and hate condone;

In Proserpina life may sound

A sweeter, hopeful tone.

At My Parting

Feel no sadness at my parting,
 But rejoice — I know not pain.
Rather, I for you must sorrow,
 Still awaiting greater gain.

My adventure's just beginning,
 Now I've crossed death's dark divide.
Let me, on this final journey,
 Cast infinity aside.

There is nothing left to bind me —
 See my spirit soaring free.
Death and all its darkest anguish
 Hold no power over me.

Stillness, peace and gentle echoes
 Comfort and surround me now,
As my spirit moves among you
 Threading past each saddened brow.

In my present, all time pauses;
 In my future is my past;
In this instant, you are with me,
 Safe before the doubter's blast.

Myriads and hosts surround me,
 Spanning vast infinity.
Music orchestrates our vision
 Of the waiting deity.

One Man

I am but one man, alone;
Each step I walk I count my own,
Never knowing, when we're born,
How many hopes shall be forsworn.

Hounded by harsh enemies
I totter to the great abyss;
Nothing guides me to God's light;
In vain I search, while all is night.

Put into another pen,
I should not write that page again;
Racked by pain, while doubts torment,
The sea surge sounds its last lament;
Even hope begins to ebb
When caught in this constricting web.

Now I glimpse a simple smile;
Sincere, core warm, no hidden guile;
Hate and temper have no place
Upon that gentle, welcome face.

Her soft whispers vanquish fear;
Let brilliant, guiding stars appear.
Suddenly, God's voice is heard
Within a woman's gentle word.

Mother of Man

What soft thoughts lay upon that breast
Which caught the infant's face at rest.

Embraces warm encompassed care,
Blocking out cruel terror there.

Her soft caresses cured his strife;
Her smile gave pleasure to his life.

Such silent strength within those arms,
Which held him safe from worldly harms.

A simple kiss upon the knee
Would heal it for eternity.

No matter what his infant fears,
She stooped to touch his glistening tears.

By honest faith in providence
Her loyalty gave confidence.

However wild his scheme or plan,
Her love was for the future man.

He looked into her glowing eyes
And knew that he could touch the skies.

From countless centuries of wrong,
This matchless mother made him strong.

And one day, bravely, we'll repay
The love she dared to give each day.

Doggerel in the Night

At sleeping they both must be extremely tight,
To not hear their dog barking throughout the night.
It starts as the day breaks, about six a.m.,
With yapping and yelping and howls from its pen,
Then slowly works up to a feverish pitch;
No wonder the insult is: “noisy old bitch!”

Such sounds are expected in China, I know,
Where dogs in the abattoir die a death slow,
But Suffolk's a place where gentility reigns;
Where people are civil; with hushed country lanes.
To suffer this whining and crying's a curse;
You don't know if howling or barking is worse!

But, for certain, the noises do not emanate
From my cottage confined with its tiny gate.
The next thing you note is the volume decrease,
So you think to yourself that at last it will cease;
You roll quickly over and reach for the zed
And thank Old Man Fortune for your comfy bed.

Now bountiful sleep comes but slowly your way,
And you wait for the light and the peace of the day;
You're tired and baffled by this godless hour,
And long for a drink or hot toast to devour.
You snuggle up closely 'gainst wife's tender skin,
To the chorus of birds making their morning din.

At last, sleep descends with its own special grace,
With the weight of the pillow held over your face,
And you know you've one hour before you must stir,
And you're just dozing off, when that lousy old cur –
Which you thought, perhaps a kind man had shot through the
brain —
Starts scratching and barking and baying again!

To Sleep

Oh sleep, you welcome shutter on all pain,
 You chide misfortune with true piety;
Now bathe my mind and coming death disdain:
 Your gentle kiss sets wildest visions free.

Great artists, by its light, new work conceive
 With frenzied hues that are the stuff of dreams;
Sweet orchestras a magic sound-spell weave,
 While architects construct their wildest schemes.

In ousted care and conquered penury
 No valiant knight yet battled greater foe –
From visions of the stars to Kekulé
 Good sleep lays siege to every banished woe.

To rich and poor alike comes ancient sleep:
Such physic yields true bliss in measures deep.

Love's Anniversary

No crashing bells shall break our morning mist –
 no auguries can stab this balanced day.
White doves may flutter past, rattling wings upon their cote,
 but their presence is unneeded;
statues in the church crypt bleed – or not –
 to this day it is a careless prop;
black cats linger to no purpose here –
 let them curl by some domestic fire;
dogs howl, yearning lost ferality –
 today we heed them not.

Love will come without warning,
 seeping in like the quiet tide,
lifting all by touch of gentle swell,
 covering bare rocks with fresh promise of life.
Covered now, the bareness of my soul
 soars in your presence on a breath of love.
My day is special each morning
 I waken with you by my side.

The Gates of Night

The gates of night are descending,
the doors closing up one by one;
into the blackness unending –
destroyer of sweet life and fun.

Yet life must be worth the defending –
life to the very last dram
must be drunk in great quaffs for amending,
then out with one final grand slam.

To no man on earth my knee bending,
still hopeful of new powers to hail,
I dare that my life, by its ending,
through uncharted waters will sail.

To Ann – A Son

No brighter hope within me plays,
no sounder joy, no sweeter face
than he, who – slit from trampled womb –
is placed upon a father's knee.

Your bright eyes scan this sterile room
bedazzled by a surgeon's light,
with my moist eyes aglint with hope,
green-gown swathed and screened from view.

Your mother's steadfast looks transfix
my battered and enfeebled faith;
wise strength and love-bonds underpin
doubts vanquished by her burnished soul.

Your manly strength lies coiled within
an infant's perfect, modest frame;
yet even here I feel your power –
God's potent force caged for an hour.

Chris Croc's Tail

Old Rory lion, prowling round,
left once his tail upon the ground.
Tiger Tonkin found it there,
then swam the river for a dare.

Chrisie Croc snapped Tonkin's heel,
then thought – he'd best his teeth conceal;
for no one came when they flashed out –
his friends were each chewed inside out.

His mother told him, long ago,
to only smile and say 'Hello'.
"It's rude to eat your friends for tea.
Please save them for your family."

So Tonkin lived to reach the shore,
but lion's tail was no more.
And Chrisie, smiling when he'd done,
said, "lions' tails are much more fun!"

A little boy called Edwin John
a handsome tail once came upon.
"Don't touch!" said mother, solemnly,
"or you'll be next for Chris Croc's tea."

But Edwin, thinking it a joke,
ran off with it to Chris Croc poke.
And Chris Croc smiled as he drew near,
and welcomed him with scarce a tear.

If ever you cross Chris Croc's path,
be sure you'll take an early bath.
And Edwin John? He is no more;
but there's the tail, behind the door.

The Light We Cannot See

There is a light set in this world for love,
A light deep-set and screened from careless gaze
Which, burning in the darkness, goes unseen
Until a close-held face its rays emblaze.

With face turned square to catch its fiery glow,
Jo stood within a breath of that great light
Whose close proximity set her ablaze:
A fiery beacon in an endless night.

Before us shines the goodness she attained,
Each feature thrown by love in proud relief
Etched now so clear in every memory:
Her glowing eyes, her smile, her voice, her laugh.

That light gave wisdom, power and certainty;
Her life made real the light we cannot see.

A deep-set light is burning in the world, seen only as it reflects off the faces of those near to it. The closer the person is to that light, the more intensely is it reflected; Jo was very close to that light. It threw every feature of her face into sharp relief, making her stand apart from the common run of people; her glowing eyes, her smile, her voice and her laughter, etched in memory, shine before us. For most people, life runs along well marked ways, and what we do is not greatly different from what others do; the signifier is how we do it. With Jo, everything she did she did in abundance, throwing her whole life into the moment, making it alive, and pressing the mark of the moment deeply into all who knew her. Through such lives, we know a greater light and sense its brightness and its power; through her we sense the brightness and power of the light we cannot see.

In Memoriam: Jo Morgan, died 1998.

And Neither Took The Blame

Sef and Geoff were opposites,
Though each did seem the same.
Sef was tall and Geoff was small,
And both loved playing games.

Sef was loud while Geoff was soft,
Yet each would pick on Jack.
Sef would shout while Geoff would chat
And ride upon Jack's back.

Sef would make Jack tremble,
Geoff would make Jack cry,
But neither would apologise
Nor wipe Jack's tears dry.

Yes, Sef and Geoff were opposites,
Though each did seem the same.
Sef was tall, and Geoff was small,
And neither took the blame.

My House

Monday's house was built in a hurry,
Fighting to keep storm clouds at bay.

Tuesday's house was forged from plenty,
Built for ease in a laid-back way.

Wednesday's house had paper for windows,
Painted to show what lies ahead.

Thursday's house was built for pleasure,
With laden tables and a soft, fat bed.

Friday's house was fashioned for leasure,
Made for rest when the week is through.

Saturday's house is a working house,
Coal fire burning and kneeding dough.

But Sunday's house is still reflection,
Filled with thoughts of far away,
As children's laughter echoes through it;
Yes, Sunday's house is my home for a day.

Where may I find your king?

Pray tell me, you untutored soul, where may I find your king?

He's here before you, at the hearth- behold I wear his ring.

To what black art, oh nondescript, do you ascribe your health?

'Tis but the prize of stubbornness, which never wanted wealth.

And whence, I wonder, wretched fool, begets your inane grin?

That's laughter, born before the world, from God who is within.

Tell me, callow beardless one, how do you cling to youth?

Nor worry's line, nor stubble's growth, will stick to simple truth.

Why do you dance, you peasant boy, when you lack even shoes?

My heart is bright, my step is light, for I have naught to lose.

What song is that, you foolish churl, when thirst should bind your tongue?

That song was heard upon my lips before your day grew long.

How can you pray, you beggar's maid, with famine at your gate?

This crust brings more of life to me than any prelate's plate.

Why do you look so inward rapt, when foul noise fills the air?

I hear the sound of angel wings, which overcome despair.

How can you sleep, you gormless dolt, when death is all around?

I dream of life beyond the grave, wherein my sleep is sound.

What love, you ugly misbent man, can touch your loathsome frame?

The love of all who suffer thus; the love that bears my name.

I wish a thousand things

I wish a thousand things had been done differently –
A thousand choices which I might have made;
Then how I live and what I've done
And whom I know and who knows me
Would change in ways too subtle to discern.

Our lives lie in a world our past has made;
One all our yesteryears have drained as sludge
To ooze in floods of slimy might have been.
The wind blows fiercely to some hidden call,
Too wilful to obey a call of mine –
But this storm shelter's my own chiselled making.

The Wayside Inn

In night's dark field where dreams take urgent rhyme,
I dreamt on life and its full mystery:
A wide and rutted highway throughout time
With speeding souls conveyed in history.

Then came a slip road to a wayside inn;
Some few pulled off to pause for food or song,
Or talk about the journey with their kin
Before embarking to rejoin the throng.

Here birth's the exit, and the entry death;
The milling crowds the land wherein we've strayed;
Yet, on this road, the inn is but a breath
Wherein all life's variety is played.

We clutch to this temporal hut in vain,
And death but starts our journey once again.

19 April 1999 (For Cardinal Hume, on the announcement of his
fatal cancer)

The Ant

The little beetle smiled and said,

"How glad I'm not an ant.

Without much pay they work all day,

and merriment seems scant."

To beetle then the ant replied,

while marching still in line,

"We sup a sweet ambrosial treat;

on dung we do not dine."

"How sad your life of modest worth,"

declaimed the raucous fly.

"You hold no joy in making noise;

you toil and then you die."

"'Tis true I silent make my way

beneath the spider's web,

while in its throat you thrash and shout;

you're but a buzzing bleb."

A silent moth drew on the wind

to fly with quiet glee,

"How low you crawl beneath your wall,

you cannot there be free.

"Give me originality,

you ants are all the same.

I flutter free, just look at me..."

then flew into the flame.

The Mayfly danced in bright array

about the earthy hill.

"Come flit away with break of day,

'tis foolish to be still."

But to her taunts the ant was deaf,

and would not move away.

"They need no cot who, soon to rot,

lie dead at end of day."

The Curse

For you have cursed me,
and your curse will resound
down the recorded paths of history for all time,
a mark of hate in a lonely life.

In love, we call a blessing,
God with you, God speed, God save,
and wish well upon the recipient
for that external power, emblem of
a deep affection for mankind.

Saints may bring a blessing,
but what saint laid a curse?
It stands for hatred and deep enmity,
a call to all the ungood in the world,
to harm, to hurt, and finally destroy.

My child asked simply, "What's a curse?"
and I, defensive, lightly tried to laugh it off,
that hatred which, suffusing out, displaces love.
The poetry has died, and with its death
die I.

And thus I stand within your eyes,
a curse,
a blotch upon your life.
And with love's death comes my unlooked for end;
my time is nigh.
Now I must die.

He Had It In Socks

If you're wanting for socks
To wrap snug in a box
For sending to nephews or nieces,
Just to wear beneath shoes
There is little to choose,
And a plain silver-grey often pleases.

But for socks to delight
Or to glow in the night,
You need to be fussy and choosy,
For such socks are not meant
To be posted or leant,
Nor for paddling around the Jacuzzi.

My collection of socks
Would outweigh a fat fox,
With cartoons from every top comic.
There's the Menace from hell,
A Tasmanian Devil,
And wild cowboys and warfare atomic.

I've pink socks and blue socks,
Ill-fitting green-hue socks,
Patterned gaudy, through plain, to just dull.
For the Café Royale,
I wear socks with a bell,
To ring changes on hand-knitted wool.

No more socks will I wear
With a hole or a tear,
Chosen by aunts with long locks.
I rebel at the thought
That to wear what I ought
I am taught to be caught in their socks.

Now my journey is done,
And my life it is run,
As I sojourn among the old crocks.
I'm sartorially free
And renounce hose with glee;
I tell you I've had it in socks.

My Son

When my son took his first breath,
It blew aside my pent-up rage,
Setting hope at centre stage,
By matching life 'gainst sullen death.

When my son opened his eyes,
He saw a world of secret dread –
The sin and pain to which I'm wed –
And stared at me with fixed surmise.

When my son took that first sup,
Drawn from a breast I loved like he,
It symbolled peace and purity –
A freely tendered loving cup.

When my son began to speak,
He told of innocence within,
From which the best and worst begin,
That drew a tear upon my cheek.

When my son a first step tried,
Much pleased to frustrate gravity,
Though falling in perplexity,
He picked the path which I must stride.

When, in later years, he turned
And said, with wonder in his voice,
To live like me would be his choice,
I answered, "It's from you I learned."

The Company Man

When, in time to come, they ask,
At the distillation
Of the world's long history,
"What bad deeds did you do?"
You shall tell them
You lied, and cheated a man of his due.

Then when, like cracking thunder, comes
That great soul-searching, "Why?"
You shall at last confess what's true:
Such arrogance can't die.

"I served the Company," you say,
"What counted was their need.
I took no thought of children's pain,
To crying took no heed.

"I wrecked more lives than you can count,
I fucked them through and through.
And each one wrecked rewarded me:
Through greed and profit's due.

"With bonuses and shares
My stake was held secure;
Until that day my turn came round –
They pushed me through the door.

"Therefore, my state is just as theirs –
Indeed, I fare far worse,
For I have fallen from high grace
And suffered mankind's curse."

Then spoke the calm recording voice,
"Tis well you have replied.
You give an honest rendering,
With nothing true denied.

"For many worse than you have stood
Before this moving pen,
With lies so red and deeds so dark
The world was cursed again."

He smiled, to think the worst was done,
That nothing more was due.
He'd paid his price while on the earth:
Now hope within him grew.

But came the voice one further time
To plague him with fresh doubt:
"This is the Company of Heaven.
From here, you are thrown out."

Then as he fell from that high place
He turned once to implore:
"Why must I fall from all you've said
When others have done more?"

Through thinning air, the voice came soft,
To haunt him as he died,
"They each left one to care for them;
But you have love denied."

