

# Through Troubled Times

John Herbert Marr



Permission is granted to copy, distribute and quote freely from this document for educational or private use. Copyright remains with John Marr, and the author's name must be cited.

Copyright ©2011 John Herbert Marr

*Exile Publications  
Hundon  
Suffolk  
CO10 8HD*

## Contents

Dedication .....	1
Jamal E'deen Hameeda .....	1
Be by a Wildstone Brook .....	2
Marriage Lines .....	3
A Letter .....	4
Kites .....	5
Maria Flor de Liza Famentera Villa Nueva .....	5
Who Cares? .....	6
No Reply .....	6
Separation .....	7
Graffito on a Cell Wall .....	7
Eternity .....	8
A Father's Lament .....	8
The Breakfast Witch .....	9
Jennifer Guinness .....	10
Twice Blest .....	10
Choices .....	11
Spring .....	11
Love's Symphony .....	12
A.W.O.L. ....	12
Cages .....	13
A.E. ....	13

Heroes .....	14
Our Neighbour .....	15
Your Number's Up .....	16
Public Execution .....	17
Lights Out .....	18
Jacqueline du Pre .....	19
My Man – (for Linda) .....	20
In Mitigation – (for Judah) .....	20
Let The Children Speak .....	21
Dear Trev, .....	23
We Grew Up Together .....	24
The Vulture – Bea Campbell .....	25
The Writer – Bea Campbell .....	26
The Lost Sister – for Jane .....	26
Faith To Live By .....	27
First Knowledge .....	28
The Fields of Ebor .....	32
Lines Found In The Mamertine Prison .....	35
Westminster Apiary .....	40
Lucy .....	41
Bought Talk .....	42
Thought Talk .....	42
Song .....	46
Skiddaw Slate .....	47

## Dedication

When certainty is dulled by shafts of doubt,  
Ambition – catching breath – does sickly stalk;  
Humour ebbs, laughter from our hearth slinks out,  
And effortless achievements lamely walk.

Then seek the peace that dwells in solitude,  
Whose poetry may lift us to that clime:  
To gaze upon a world another's viewed –  
With strength and stature in a well-placed rhyme.

Now, sweetest Ann, see mirth in children's play  
Which, as the lark each morning sings anew,  
Does in its pleasure lark all doubt away  
While leaving sharpened hope to bear us through.

This book you hold, and set your hand upon,  
With love is gifted here: to Ann from John.

## Jamal E'deen Hameeda

And yet I weep not sadly:  
For in my death, you live;  
And to return unwanted love would  
For you be death, though life to me.  
And surely life to one as thee  
Is worthy of a thousand deaths of me.

*\* Lebanon: beauty, religion, good.*

## Be by a Wildstone Brook

Be by a wildstone brook;  
Keep time and soul apace;  
Whilst trees bear fruit to drip their leaves,  
Look on as young thought lightly weaves  
    An anagram in space.

Do nothing more than live,  
Call all things badly made –  
Then all men's conflicts think to bear;  
In dull hour's hand or lovers' care  
    Young future's dream will fade.

Slink to a low cowshed:  
Try there to hide strange fear  
As now, fine times warm light reflect,  
Lightened eyes of all detect  
    In people newly dear.

*Bushehr, Iran*

## Marriage Lines

Go – away with yourself, let all stupid thoughts be:

To crash through a light that is red!

Let's harbour the storm, bankrupt in its charm,

To fling up some hope from the dead.

But no, we're not fools – not idiots yet,

To die in the midst of our minds.

Then batten me down, tie my thoughts to the ground

To slaughter false hopes she defines.

Pensively think upon things that are done,

Filling dead books with their truth:

Nothing more here may we glean from the world

Than of time's passing oddities proof.

Tether the weathercock wiggling free;

Gather the storm in its flight.

But don't let me dash with my hopes to the ground,

Or drown in her sea's violent might.

So as all must change with the passing of time,

I'll hurry that change with a wife;

Graduate now from childhood's past vow,

And for Nirvana's state strive.

*Tehran, Iran*

## A Letter

*Khamis Mushayat, Saudi Arabia.*

I could not let you pine away  
For want of letter, note or card;  
Though nothing else you read today,  
This line is from the Khamis Bard<sup>1</sup>.

I tell of travels bravely borne  
By Saudi Air to places far;  
Hold S.S. food aloft in scorn,  
And dream of Paradise's Bar.

Hold dear to what you have within,  
Though jolted high on Cruiser seat<sup>2</sup>;  
Once formed by Eve, man's greatest sin  
Yet bears you to a life complete.

Climb Sheba's mountain, ring the stone<sup>3</sup>;  
Survey a continent aloft.  
Defeated serpent's silent groan<sup>4</sup>  
Shall loud proclaim our aim's not soft.

Then on through Suuks: their gold disdain;  
Its hour is dead, its shine decay;  
The gold of truth has on you lain –  
And in your eyes it lights the way.

When, from this humble paeon, you please  
To face the day- like turning dhow  
That picks a trace out from a breeze –  
Then all shall note your fairest brow.

And if this panegyric rhyme  
With noble, lofty thought is met,  
Come down to earth while there is time:  
At T.T. I shall thrash you yet!<sup>5</sup>

1. Lines written at M.O.D.A., Khamis Mushayt, Saudi Arabia.
2. A Toyota Land Cruiser, for a bumpy ride – women can't drive in Saudi.
3. Mt. Hamoma, where the Queen of Sheba was supposed to have stayed: black igneous rocks that ring when struck.
4. On the death by stoning of a viper at the base of Hamoma.
5. On the excellent quality of her table tennis.

## Kites

Then into this great divide  
Comes the Lord of life's short reign –  
Old death, whose ghost  
Hangs round us all, waiting:  
Here a day less,  
There a day more –  
To step leisurely from the gloom  
And claim us to his bosom.

Uncaring, untiring,  
Never sleeping, never smiling,  
Solemn and grotesque he waits a while  
To give us pause and tempt us on  
To think we're kings whose much crazed notions –  
Given wings by tiny moments leant by him –  
Exaltingly strike upwards.

Soaring kites that test the air for half a day;  
And then he pulls the string.  
And down we plunge into his waiting arms,  
As if we'd never flown.

## Maria Flor de Liza Famentera Villa Nueva

Let all that's in me rise up to this page,  
Like idle tongues that do their masters prate.  
Far more than simple blood or brain engage  
My saddened eyes, my lowly man's estate.

All I have loved and kissed and held most dear;  
All heaven and earth and sun and stars and moon;  
The very flowers and perfumes of the air,  
Taking their proper place, would deem a boon.

But love, like labour, brings its share of pain  
Which issues from its climax of the night.  
Not wanting stress, but lacking it is vain  
If true fruition burst to glorious light.

So, oh darkest hour, council now my heart;  
To seek a glimmer in this love's false start.

## Who Cares?

Who cares?

None – but the lonely piper

Churning out his dirge across the stair

That leads down, down, down to dark despair.

Who cares?

None – but the dark moon howling

In the silent night; calling at the last

Those dear departed dead loves of my past.

Who cares?

None – but my heart, which beats slower

With each passing stroke, reluctant yet to flee

Away from hopeless, hapless, love of thee.

## No Reply

I know it loud rings in your room above;

It's sound drowns out the silence that's your home,

Returning me closed eyes, mind, heart and love:

All expurged by that long unanswered phone,

Till – like my love – the echoes die away.

Your air can take infinity of sound,

Which falls and melts like blossom in the May

To vanish like a single raindrop drowned.

What loss, to top the desert with my sand:

Though all I have, 'tis just a grain to you.

My whole life but a gesture of your hand;

No, less – the shadow which it forms in lieu.

What pains I'd take to have milled down my heart;

In your machine, a tiny screw its part.

## Separation

You've locked yourself away. How can you run  
So fast, yet leave your image in my mind?  
Clasped by the past where living was begun  
You've travelled far – but left yourself behind.

There is no hole on earth where you can hide;  
My thoughts do chase you out, like sun the rain  
Returns to heaven in a well shaped cloud.  
No – here imprisoned will you e'er remain.

Blue silk; so cool the soft touch of your skin;  
The scented air that hangs upon your breath;  
Your tender mind that to mine own was kin;  
Dark pools – your eyes now flash my pending death.

For though temporally I see you go,  
In imagery I cannot leave it so.

## Graffito on a Cell Wall

Dicko  
Billy  
Conway  
Noska  
Grassed  
by some  
Bastard  
over the Border

*Middlesbrough Police Cells, November 1982*

*["Over the border" referred to the old docks area of Middlesbrough  
North of the Railway Track – now seedy and derelict]*

## Eternity

The life of the spirit now surrounds you,  
Heard trembling in the sighing of the wind:  
Both of the world, yet separate, for we sinned;  
Revealed alone in lives that Christ pursue.

The flowing river courses ever on,  
Yet ever stays essentially the same;  
The murmur of the sea foretells His name:  
So dwells our spirit life, though body's done.

Your brow is soft with peace that comes of God;  
Hold to His word, whence faith alone is true.  
The life of the spirit is within you:  
Walk in those paths where His good feet have trod;

Returning love to all, then - as the prize -  
Eternity's sharp light shines in your eyes.

## A Father's Lament

Do not weep, my little one;  
Do not sigh nor fate bewail;  
Rejoice and dance ere I am gone;  
Seize the moment till it fail.

Do not tarry, low, faint-hearted;  
Neither hide in cleft of rock;  
Time will come when we are parted,  
Though life's footfall would we block.

What good fortune now surrounds us!  
Nothing more – save loving thee –  
Shall e'er assuage my lonely spirit:  
For the worst is yet to be.

## The Breakfast Witch

Down beneath the table  
Where no one ever sees,  
The Breakfast Witch is lurking  
To eat what she can seize.

She hardly needs to wait long,  
Before some morsel falls –  
Then like a flash she's onto it.  
(She hides food in the walls!)

Ben has spilt his cereal;  
Now Dan has dropped his toast!  
That Breakfast Witch is there again –  
She comes like Banquo's ghost.

When children rush and shout,  
That's when she's at her best.  
She jogs an arm and suddenly:  
That drink's on Michael's vest!

Lucy, though she tries hard,  
Can't stop her giggling laugh.  
That Breakfast Witch is tickling her -  
Now Lucy needs a bath!

But her extra special pleasure  
Is little ones to tease,  
Who – when they sit at table –  
Never ever say "Please."

I don't think you will see her –  
Matthew, stay upon your chair!  
Don't slide beneath the table,  
Or she might pull your hair.

So, children, eat your peas up;  
Don't leave food in the bowl.  
For that old witch is on the prowl,  
To steal from one and all.

## Jennifer Guinness

Down, down, down to a world of deep despair;  
Here no bird sings in dimmed dark winter's air.  
Out, out, out where the waiting desert sun,  
Uncaring, hides while screaming is begun.

Far, far, far flung tides lap the further side,  
Bringing dross and carnage through gunship's ride.  
In, in, into play – folly of mankind –  
To rout a crazed old man by one more blind.

"On, on, on!" screams war, fed by bloody death;  
Fuelling evil's power as revenge takes breath.  
"Maim! Maim! Maim!" mocks the gruesome mindless horde,  
"Where, God of Peace, in this can you be Lord?"

One calm kidnapped mother tells of her plight:  
"Show no hatred; love alone is God's light."

18 April 1986

*Jennifer Guinness – kidnapped, while President Reagan sent  
bombers from England to bomb Gadafy in Libya*

## Twice Blest

Ne'er have I loved – till now. How strange the clime,  
Where forty winters forge one summer's day.  
Night's vigil ends, now golden orb'd display  
New-dawns into an unsuspecting time.

Your glance has chased away the moon's limp glow  
And colours – freshly wrought – do fight the eye,  
Persuade my gaze away and terrify:  
Did not your presence here all doubt o'erthrow.

One reared in blindness never knows how green  
An orchard seems; how sweetly splashed by red.  
Yet, all to shadow fades at your slight tread  
Which – from your light – their brilliant colours glean.

Now have I stumbled on a world twice blest:  
In having you, and having loveliness.

## Choices

Love's axe kisses sharp; cleaves my sickly heart;  
Splits forces – once united – to full foes;  
Rending in twain harmonious repose;  
Forcing bright tranquil lives to rip apart.

Two solid camps, engulfing morning air,  
Gash my confused mind in vile turmoil.  
Opposing camps of dissonance - once loyal -  
Rage now with suffocating bleak despair.

Two fleshy forms, concealing spirits pure.  
One mothered many children for my joy.  
One mothered manly life from simple boy.  
Two roses brought by this ill love to war.

How then do lesser mortals choose the side,  
Whilst yet the king knows not which steed to ride?

## Spring

Now I have loved you one whole month: till May,  
With heavy blossom, decks the way you tread.  
Nimble swallows swoop, glad that winter's fled,  
Caressing with fleet wing the grand clean day.

We stroll in tranquil woods, whose sleeping leaves  
Awake, spread, feel the air – a thousand shades  
Of dappled verdure shield enchanted glades;  
Murmuring insects strum the air while peace weaves.

A tiny brook dancing down, kissed each stone  
With happy sound, to nurture timbers old  
Which form sweet nature's seat. My love, we hold  
Each other's warm embrace – no more alone!

Bursting joy swells from buried former plight;  
Now we have kissed - the spring of our delight.

## Love's Symphony

I see in you pure shimmering sound, so fair:  
Awaiting love's poised baton for its start.  
Each member, building tone as much it dare,  
At once distinct, yet blending yields its part.

Your eyes, like brass trombones, do rip the air  
To touch mine own with radiant resonance.  
Slim fingers pluck sharp strings that calm my care;  
Sweet lips play oboe lines – and mine entrance.

Clear dulcet teeth: the harp that bites my ear.  
Your thighs - as proud drum rolls - do stand apart.  
The cello forms your breast, in silk sounds near;  
So firm yet soft a note to stir my heart.

Thus seeing you, I see a symphony;  
A perfect cadence in a brilliant key.

## A.W.O.L.

Nobody loved him; nobody hated.  
His shallow emotions smoothly smothered  
Less balanced views, with all weakness covered;  
Not for his soul was panting breath bated.

He never shouted nor raged at the dead;  
He never whimpered nor cried in despair;  
Sadly, he cared not that someone should care;  
Standing contented, warm bellied, well fed.

He made no commitments through tender force,  
Seeing not hunger nor pain in his world.  
Looking over, he missed a sleeping child curled  
In death. He suffered no guilt or remorse.

He slouched there, exiled from human rapport  
Not hating, nor loving - so loved no more.

## Cages

What arrogance to prate of "God's own way",  
And make life's being be the end of all;  
They have not risen who can never fall,  
But mere survivors with their limbs of clay.

Each man is caged – of this admit no doubt.  
Most dare not try, for fear of broken wing  
(Though knowing higher larks will sweeter sing),  
And wither without pain till day is out.

Two forces fight to set our latitudes;  
Each pulls in biased ways our earthly caul –  
Fear and love! These two confound us all  
And rule our lives in balanced magnitudes.

That thing I want - I cannot have this day;  
Though things I have will die and fade away.

## A.E.

Beyond constraining corners of my mind  
Exists a silent island of repose,  
Where I may hide – secure from worldly foes –  
Content: there peaceful harmonies to find.

Down those long halls of silence let me brood.  
Now callous threat, vile shout, ill sneering drawls,  
Rude spite and falsehood drop beyond stout walls  
Of places where earth's toil can ne'er intrude.

This isle admits no tremblers, 'fraid to stare  
(Who will not yield dull, sallow sunken gaze  
To silent wonders, etched by love's keen rays);  
Just kindred souls who burdens bravely bare;

Great poets, artists, writers – all who dream;  
And dreaming yet hold firm to truth's first gleam

## Heroes

You ask me what became of heroes old,  
Whose lives – by Nature's bounty – rich fruits yield  
While chasing nymphs through Elysian field;  
Else – battling dragons – fought for stately gold.

They conquered foreign kingdoms with brave sword;  
Or valiant died attempting hopeless task;  
For love of high ideal, nought more would ask  
Who – furthering frontiers – strove with mighty word.

Now surgeons fight dread foes with scalpel blade;  
Dominions new rough Science will explore;  
Cruel atom-breeders fuel fresh dragon's jaw;  
And love by H.I.V. will low be laid.

Heroes today have different fights to win:  
Through waging war 'gainst God and violent sin.

## Our Neighbour

We had a dear neighbour called Mrs McGrogan;  
A sweet widow with accents soft.  
She used to delight in putting her brogue on,  
And telling us all to "Be off!"

A regular tartar was Mrs McGrogan,  
Who hated boys climbing her tree;  
In the dead of the night, the branches they trode on  
She sawed through with devilish glee.

An ugly black cat prowled with Mrs McGrogan:  
Trained well to kill rivals on sight.  
It took by the neck our poor Siamese Rolland,  
And flung him as high as a kite.

Then one foul winter's night, she whispered a slogan;  
The sort that might frighten a mouse:  
"Beware, now! I'll pull off the legs that you growed on,  
If you even look at my house!"

"Beware, little girls, or I'll pickle your nose on  
The spit that turns hot in my grate!"  
But the blood then high rose on old Mrs McGrogan,  
When a ball bounded over her gate.

So, hiding, she waited for all who dared strode on  
Her paths; be they age-ed but three;  
And pegged to the lawn those she caught to be snowed on;  
While letting them whiff her fresh Brie.

A dear neighbour, gentle, was Mrs McGrogan,  
Who smiled upon all she did see;  
Until she caught scrumpers from her berries Logan,  
And saw young boys climbing her tree!

## Your Number's Up

A soldier strode in from the night,  
With beret straight and back upright.  
Said, "Pretty Barmaid, let's have fun!"  
Supped his beer which soon was gone;  
But in her eyes he was as none  
For saying, "Must do a number one."

An airman sauntered through the door;  
Looked like one who knew the score.  
He told the girl, "I fancy you.  
We could dance the whole night through.  
Fly with me – I'll be so true;  
When I have done my number two."

Next sweeping through, a sailor bold;  
Cried out this tale, (though lined and old)  
"Oh, slender girl, do come with me -  
I've been too long on life's rough sea.  
Now from the storm I've found the lee;  
With you I fancy number three!"

The girl then laughed at their dumb plight,  
And swore to give them what was right.  
"Your words stick fast within my craw.  
Is all you see a common whore?"  
Thus saying, rose and slammed the door;  
"I'll give you all my number four!"

## Public Execution

Ten men for justice lost their lives last night.  
And in the hall stood eighteen thousand fools,  
Taking pleasure in other's wretched plight,  
Who cheered and jeered and laughed like Satan's tools.

Did those who died deserve to die? This prove.  
For each had whored or cheated, stole or lied,  
Or killed from wild anger, fear or love;  
And for their way of life they sullen died.

Let not their deaths kill native dignity,  
Nor daunting Peking towers impede the mind.  
Rude acts diminish shared humanity:  
They were our kin, and to ourselves aligned.

Will you know them; can you love so divine?  
To turn your mind beyond a Reuter's line?

*Beijing 1987*

## Lights Out

Stale toast browns and burns untended,  
Filled kettle sings unused;  
Hands unwashed and plug unmended;  
Still polishless these shoes.

Left undarned the gaping sock-hole;  
Left bare the button's place.  
Too late now to crave, "One new role":  
This fool's whole life misplaced!

Use a cracked cup from the corner,  
With no cake to spice my tea;  
Chocolate I'll taste not either;  
Nor raspberry jam for me.

Now refuse an evening's clamouring:  
Slide from their Christmas list.  
Own to ancient tax outstanding;  
Decline a fresh bride's kiss.

Children's laughter can't inspire me?  
This world is tired and done.  
Their darting cat conveys no glee;  
Their play contains no fun.

Each tap's drip is time's tide flowing.  
Cold sighs the days displace.  
Feel each footfall slowing, slowing,  
Mocking age as disgrace.

Out then, dull light, down despair's slope: –  
No lasting kindled flame;  
No final flicker of vain hope;  
No spark of life remain.

## Jacqueline du Pre

Jacqueline du Pre, you made our hearts glow  
In the yearning, aching strings of Elgar  
Whose genius, intertwining your bright star,  
Insistent, throbbing sounds tore from your bow.

Hear the sound of rushing waters, breaking  
In the depths of silence, touching all souls;  
While this cello work your passing life knolls,  
You have kept the fiery beacon burning.

Brilliance, beauty, power and gentle breeding:  
In your life we saw the best of England –  
Earth at one with Heaven, (as once God planned  
For all mankind) inspired by your leading.

Joyfully your name shall sound as laughter:  
Lifted high on music's wing henceafter.

*31 October 1987*

## **My Man – (for Linda)**

My man's a good man; he wanted the best;  
Not just for the kids but also for me.  
(I am a student of sociology.  
You hear me? It's said - to that I've confessed!)

I'd gotta study, while he watched the kids.  
No great shakes: ten years I did it for him,  
(But ancient traditions are slow to dim,)  
Until – with slurred speech and drink-heavy lids –

He piled my books in a heap on the ground;  
Threatened to paraffin them, and kicked me.  
Frenzied I rushed to a place of safety  
And cried, with my kids and others around:

"All men are strong men, till put to the test;  
My man's a good man; he wanted the best."

## **In Mitigation – (for Judah)**

My mother left my dad when I was three;  
I struggled on from there. They did not care  
If I had food or my dad beat me bare.  
Now I've blown it-my wife's walked out on me.

I'd fed my family, working when I could;  
We'd laughed and joked and cried as one. I'd strain  
My best for them. I'd had my share of pain.  
They were my only living flesh and blood.

For days poor health had kept me by the hob;  
She ruled the children, while I begged for beer;  
Now she was taking over, that was clear:  
While she enjoyed her studies, I'd no job.

She did not need my help – nor life – you see;  
What had I left, but tell her – "I am me!"?

## Let The Children Speak

*For the Cleveland Children*

I cannot know who's right; I only know  
That while they rage and argue back and fro,  
Of propitiatory lambs thrown by fate  
Upon dread fires of legal, long debate,  
The children suffer.

We were once as they:

Frightened and alone, grey dawned each new day;  
Innocent, unsure, silence voiced our fears;  
Hidden from the world, no one saw our tears;  
The step upon the stair, that inner dread;  
The loneliness of waiting in our bed.

We, who were these children once, remember,  
And summer blooms become chill December.  
Memories return, forced back on the mind,  
And all the while the tabloid presses grind  
Their numbing call to revive past deeds done.  
The memories are pressed back one by one;  
Refusing each to fade as history,  
Fresh aches now return, etched in memory.

We too recall the day we knew – unchecked;  
The day we knew our parents imperfect.  
And then we knew – e'en then we knew – our lives  
Would dedicated be from prying eyes  
To keep their imperfections hid.

What pain

To live within the shadow of disdain,  
Knowing none would know our secret stowed;  
For those whose duty was to share the load  
Were they who laid upon us as the cause,  
And used our tiny bodies for the tawse  
Of ill, cruel-tutored fingers groping out:  
Too sick with fear to cry or run, or shout  
To mother waiting in the room below.  
(Our darling mother broke herself to know  
The saddened eyes of youth's first trust betrayed;  
Yet, weak herself through her own fears, she stayed.)  
Her silence hung about her as a shroud:  
We could not break it by a word out loud;  
And so we silent stayed, though screamed within,  
While squaring to the world with secret grin.

We saw the other children clear and free,  
And aped their moods with dull conformity,  
While through each party and each childish game  
We knew that we were different.

Not the same

As they who laughed with carefree happy eye  
And watched with sweet content their day flow by,  
While knowing well each day would swiftly close  
With fireside chat and stories read, till doze  
And peaceful slumber took their welcome place:  
And only calm content on father's face.

But in those weary, long, occluded years,  
Through tiresome dreary sadnesses and tears,  
We loved our parents too in diverse ways:  
They cared for us and tended bleeding graze;  
They clothed and fed us; brought us chocolate treat;  
Or chased across the park on legs still fleet.

We loved them both, and never sought to blame  
Or harm them by revealing inner shame.  
We could not let them suffer at our word:  
We only knew that if it once be heard,  
Then we would take the fullest share of guilt,  
Destroying lives of they who first us built.

We lived our lives 'twixt sealed and torn estate,  
Knowing veracious love would come too late.  
It is too late for us: what's done is done;  
Now I say, "For Christ's sake ask the children!"

*The whole community was torn in two by this scandal. As a GP, I met women who told for the first time of their own childhood abuse. As the Senior Police Surgeon for Middlesbrough, I saw abused children. Yet without doubt, many of the parents in the scandal were wrongly accused. It was the polarisation of these positions that drove the inquiry, and led to a dichotomy that is still unresolved. This poem is based on reports of abuse that were given to me in confidence during the inquiry.*

*"The interests of the child must be paramount." Sir Stuart Bell MP, Cleveland Child Abuse Inquiry, November 1987, Middlesbrough.*

## Dear Trev,

You dropped my poem from *Outlet* - was it bad?\*

Maybe you lacked the space to put it in?

Don't be alarmed – I'm not one who gets mad,

though some excuses wear a little thin!

especially after praise and promised place –

it would have kinder been to drop it straight.

True, that would perhaps require too much grace –

yet firm decisions need no long debate.

I wonder, in a hundred years, if they –

who wait within the wings till our play's done –

will deem that "Trev was right, his poem to slay!"

or if – perhaps – they'll judge for Cleveland's son.

Or – dare I whisper – could it be that you

have trembled in the face of what rings true?

Yours ev,

23 February 1988

*\*Trev Teasdale, Editor of the Cleveland poetry magazine Outlet, dropped "Let The Children Speak", after political pressure from Cleveland Council, its financial backers. Ironically, Outlet folded soon afterwards, and Exile was born.*

## We Grew Up Together

We grew up together. My first-found friend  
From childhood whom kind chance did blindly send  
To indulge happy chat and foolish joke.  
We played 'Princes and Maids' with pinned towel cloak;  
Then whiled short hours away upon the stair,  
Rearranging bows in soft, wispy hair,  
And slyly cutting off our lanky locks  
To wrap and send through cardboard posting box.

Such friends – who dreaming knew – did share my dreams  
Which discoursed down these labyrinthine themes:  
Of marriage, children, hopes with seasons rhyme:  
Brave Island Castles built on sands of time.

We grew up together. I now recall  
Her plainness and her quiet way with all.  
Her father loved her proudly and would find  
No fault within her simple, care-free mind;  
One day from her he thought the greatest loss.  
Her mother used to hold her hand to cross  
Her safely over on the nearby road.  
She did this even when she was quite old;  
We all used to laugh. I knew I should not  
But children, at that age, all ruth forgot.

We grew up together. She grew quite shy,  
Though still the darling of her father's eye.  
My mother called her "over protected!"  
They cannot say that now she's newly dead.

We grew up together. In Birmingham  
There were so many friends of greater gramme,  
I did not see her gentle face again  
Until that day I chanced to read her name,  
And then I cried among the list of dead.  
"They never stood a chance," the policeman said,  
Picking through the debris, eyes avoiding  
Shattered arms and legs. Truth had taken wing,  
Unrecognizable among the mess;  
They found her bag: the rest they had to guess.

Nothing left to hide in dank cemetery,  
Just the lone monument of memory.  
Now – as I walk on sharp winter heather –  
I remember, "We grew up together."

*For Pamela Palmer - aged 19, schoolgirl friend of AE.*

*Died 21 November, 1974 at 8.30 pm.*

*Tavern In The Town Cellar Bar.*

## The Vulture – Bea Campbell

*Bea Campbell – Two Studies*

While there is ill-will vented, or old passions freshly roused,  
Or some girl is beaten by the man she loves;  
While poverty stands gauntly; till complacency is dowsed,  
Cut brilliantly in night with shadows long;  
When people suffer pain, or grief, or anger at their state,  
Then the vulture hovers high 'bove all that's wrong.

In slow wide circles drifting round the Cleveland towns and plain,  
Kept floating on corruption's savage wing,  
She seeks to be an irritant: lewd politicians's bane!  
For fat pickings of rich sentences and prose.  
She took her quarry: victims of uncaring petty men,  
Once this sickly stench of carnage first arose.

She'll cry at others' sickness, while none knowing of her own;  
She'll always write it straight - no compromise!  
She'll smile at others gladness, though her love has found no  
home:

Simply calls herself a jobbing journalist,  
With news deadlines to meet, and pretty cloths to rush and buy,  
Till she lacks strength to raise a protest fist.

Living out the lives of others, it is easy to get by:  
Their emotions are the cloak one swiftly dons.  
She'll see you (if a woman) with a sympathetic eye –  
All eternal truths for her must wear a hem,  
For feminists will look askance at underprivileged males  
And will turn their every protest back on them.

There's irony at work here 'midst the iron of our hills,  
For the one who seeks to help does wring slow death;  
Cruel open sores might heal with time if kept from public thrills  
But this vulture takes its prey to rip and seize  
For front page news or balaam box – it matters not, if paid –  
Then flees back home from poverty's disease.

*To Bea Campbell, who descended on Middlesbrough in the midst  
of the Cleveland Child Abuse Scandal with the light of prejudice in  
her eyes, to pick the bones of innocence decayed.*

## The Writer – Bea Campbell

The woman came with sadness in her eyes  
Which tried to pierce through hidden inner soul;  
No affectation - she would brook no lies!  
She'd only called to ask about my role

Among the people here in Middlesbrough.  
It did not seem too hard to share my views,  
And she with them seemed quickly to concur.  
So why pick me with many more to choose?

Then, as she probed and wrote my each reply,  
I seemed to sense a distance in her pose;  
No matter if I raged or turned to cry,  
She listened only for considered prose.

Immured from deep emotion by disdain,  
What can she write, who living knows no pain?

## The Lost Sister – for Jane

How we all laughed with pleasure at her call:  
Truth, intellect and power of mind were one.  
Her hair shone like the fiery setting sun;  
Her beauty, wit and charm delighted all.

She knew the poets: loved them line by line,  
And laid the Brontës' songs within her heart.  
Only the bravest heroes rode her cart:  
With weak, fat fools she'd e'en refuse to dine.

How could we guess she'd break by simple man?  
We never thought dull flattery could turn  
Her graceful head; or foolish gold she'd yearn.  
But when that sod of clay called, then she sang:

"Though Haworth's lanes in summer suit me fine,  
Warm winter's best. A coward soul is mine!"

## Faith To Live By

Praise not these works I've penned as good,  
Nor compliment my light;  
If I have talent here one whit,  
It comes as God says, "Write!"  
I did not form these of myself,  
Nor seek to let them grow;  
We each are given God's own gifts,  
And His worth we must show.

If fame or fortune are assigned  
To me in season's time,  
Add not your praise to public ways:  
I speak but God's own rhyme.  
If you must praise me here at all,  
Then let this paeon be sung:  
That I have kept my faith with God,  
Till painful journey's done.

I've kept my faith in that I've known  
His presence in my life;  
Through uncipherable measure;  
Through obscure pains and strife;  
He stands in firm continuum,  
Guide and guard and free;

His ever certain presence here  
Both awe and comfort me.

Throughout the earth's long history  
He stands at every place.  
I know I keep not all His laws,  
And often slide from grace;  
Yet firm I stand in faith of Him  
Who my whole life has planned;  
And all He asks is trust in Him,  
To keep me in His hand.

I'll rest content when journey's done  
That I've full measure given,  
And know that at the final breath  
He'll lift me into Heaven.  
And, soul secure and future known,  
What further prayer have I?  
Save begging those of lesser faith  
To trust Him, ere they die.

*Lines written on the death of my patient, Mr Gordon Sample.  
Billingham, 4.50 am. 18 December 1987.*

## First Knowledge

I listened in my youthful days  
To nature's soft refrain;  
I climbed the wild and windy ways  
Of mountain ridge and moraine lays;  
Observing each new moon's phase,  
On open moor or plain.

I caught the silence of the shore,  
When all had left the sands;  
Grey pebbles clack; sea surges snore;  
Their simple repetitions pour  
Soft balmy ease to my core,  
As lovers holding hands.

The freedom of a youth was mine,  
Who living knows no lie:  
On simple thoughts his heart does dine;  
To pleasures new he does incline;  
Tasting meat or blood red wine,  
I had no thought to die.

Through times of ease and quiet content,  
There seemed no end to life.  
Luxuriation was my bent –  
But dull acceptance makes no dent;  
Still the soul lay dormant, pent, –  
And then began my strife!

What stimulates the poet's mind?  
What credence does he vent  
Who hesitates at labour's grind  
When nature beckons, rich and kind,  
Till – lured back to ways so blind –  
He never leaves life's tent?

From sudden dawn the sun arose  
To light a hidden shore,  
And in its light my heart first froze;  
On past life's ways the gates banged close!  
Tough as desert grown aloes,  
On basalt-weathered floor.

To see that shore lit by those rays,  
That vast expanse of tide  
That flowed and coursed beyond my gaze –  
Wherein the fleet-finned dolphin plays  
To music of elden lays  
Which charms the distant side –

Was revelation newly brought  
Of ancient paradigm;  
To know the great who knowledge wrought  
Had sojourned there, had same tide fought,  
Else – perishing – come to naught  
Without one word of hymn.

So knowing nil of deeps I'd found,  
Well resolved, I plunged in:  
And then a mighty roaring sound  
Filled my ears till I near drowned;  
Swirling eddies, hidden ground –  
My world was filled with din.

Fearful struggles, entreaties, screams,  
Instinctive first response;  
Then came a silence as in dreams,  
Like trysting lovers' hidden schemes  
Where nothing acts as it seems;  
I'd known this knowledge once.

And dim first memory faintly stirred:  
Of pressing rhythmic pain;  
Of vice-like grip; then crying heard;  
Farragos, blasts, then vision blurred;  
As when babies' birth occurred,  
From cries, to breathing fain.

I never felt so much alone;  
So naked and unloved:  
In headland race with fearful groan,  
Past corpses' fresh heart-rending moan,  
Till I sank like leaden stone,  
Or boxer badly gloved.

I sank, and thought no more to rise  
From depths where dull world sleeps.  
Then, midst the pain of lewd men's cries,  
An angel pure, in soft disguise,  
Brought succour through loathsome sighs,  
And bore me o'er the deeps.

To hidden isle, she ferried me,  
And lay me on the sand;  
Deep footprints cut there did I see,  
Of other wanderers, born free,  
Who none would serve as lackey:  
Hence from their homesteads banned.

Down marble halls, past fountains pure,  
She showed me words of gold,  
(These secret runes to me she bore;  
Translated them in accents sure,  
Till vestigial doubts she tore,  
With lamentations told.

Great names, that hitherto were words,  
To flesh-filled life did leap;  
Their voices sang as sweetest birds;  
They called and danced as sylvan herds;  
Bade me don the battle-girds;  
And brought refreshing sleep.

I dared to ask, "What right have I,  
Among these marvellous men?"  
With scornful tone, she made reply:  
"You ever question, ever try;  
Never write one jot of lie!  
Put your hand to your pen!"

Thus braced I vowed to never quit,  
But ever question more.  
I vowed to write so what is writ  
May never from the world be smit,  
But stand here hard as granite:  
Rocks standing on the shore.

Secure now from dull, drab drizzle,  
Brought by unworthy life,  
I leapt again into the grizzle;  
Blocked the runes with iron chisel;  
Feet astride life's great easel,  
To tackle all that's rife.

Though unkempt hounds around me bayed,  
Yet here all joy was mine:  
My bloody hand my soul obeyed,  
So none may read and be dismayed.  
Finding here a truth displayed:  
Returned I to the brine.

"Come hearken, ere you quit life's race!  
If you will reach the shore –  
Though spumes of foes will dash your face –  
You shall not plummet without trace;  
Breath anew with quickened pace,  
Accept angel's succour.

"All they who join these antiphons  
Need never fear to fight  
Those seeking solace with Bourbons  
In solitary cells as 'ones';  
Their television icons  
As anodyne of might.

"In this vigil, bear no pity  
On they who strangle right.  
Let them keep their icons pretty;  
You shall beach by ancient jetty:  
Dare to bring down the city!  
Teach the world – truth is might!"

No person living shall I bar,  
Now purpose I've been leant.  
Though sat in cold and unlit car  
With darkness creeping, night's first star  
Shall bear me on journeys far,  
While truth be my intent.

## The Fields of Ebor

She is gone, the sweetest singer,  
To the far off fields of Ebor;  
She, the fount of all that's lovely,  
She is taken from the city;  
Taken for some distant war song;  
Gone to make some other heart sing.  
Weary of the present battle,  
Tired of singing - tired of life.

Taken now, she takes all music.  
Now I know what peace she brought me,  
By the presence of her music:  
All I heard was sweetest singing;  
In the humming of the insects;  
In the rustling of the petals;  
In the murmur of the waters;  
In the sighing of the wind.

She, who piped her tunes so clearly,  
Made me sing the songs of Heaven;  
Brought the sunshine of the morning;  
Brought the warmth of summer evening;  
Brought the soft autumnal leaves down;  
Made the soft snow crisp and sparkle;  
Made the dew glow gold and shimmer,  
With her sounds of pure delight.

From the bursting of the morning,  
Till the dying of the full day;  
Through the evening, through the night time,  
Ever present was her music;  
Filling saddened heart with laughter;  
Pulling bleeding feet through deep mire;  
Lifting spirits strained and weary;  
Bringing peace and constant joy.

Now the silence fills my hours;  
Lonely silence, as midst gravestones;  
Emptiness, as unfilled graveyards;  
Deathly still, as rusting engines,  
Forming crusts of rime and mildew,  
Eating through the cracked old metal:  
Thus it is my heart lies heavy,  
Heaving tardily each breath.

I am left now, poor and empty;  
Hollow laughter, none to fill it;  
Left behind, as empty vessel;  
Taken all her great gifts from me;  
She has played her last song to me.  
Alone now in night time's dark depths,  
Empty days and unfilled hours,  
Drag before my heavy brow.

Empty now the home she haunted;  
Empty now her hollow hallways;  
Yet her scent invests each doorway;  
Still her breath hangs on the stairways.  
Lingering like the blush of sunset  
When the stars begin to pin-prick,  
While the daylight hangs on evening:  
So hangs her face in my mind.

Long the days we spent together;  
Happy hours that drifted o'er us,  
Filled each moment with her laughter;  
Filled each night with dreaming of her;  
Neither felt we could be parted;  
Neither sought to seek another;  
Living only for each other,  
Every moment was our last.

She is gone, my sweet Joanna;  
She the first of all that's lovely;  
She who piped her songs so clearly;  
She whose face did light the morning,  
Lost to sight beyond the wide plains,  
Hidden now where none may find her,  
Taken to a far off city;  
Taken by the fates of war.

In her silence, I hear noises:  
All cacophony is brought here;  
Now my hours are filled with noises;  
Grinding, shrieking, throbbing noises;  
Cutting through the air so shrilly;  
Driven by their dull distractions,  
Till I nearly break from screaming!  
She has left no silent void.

I am watched now, like a hawk now:  
Watching over all my movements;  
Least I join my silent sister;  
Least I flee across the mountains;  
Least I leave the scene of battle,  
Letting fall all circumscription,  
And desert to other countries,  
Taking freedom's standard there.

## Lines Found In The Mamertine Prison

*for Benjamin*

I

Will you remember me in years to come?  
The father that you did not see, held dumb  
In this foul, stinking cell. Remember me! –  
Ever a prisoner; never to go free.  
Oh son, will you remember me at all?  
I wonder as I write what will befall;  
What diverse journeys lie before us both:  
Yours, tumbling summer seasons; mine dull sloth.  
Divergently we seem to drift from here  
Yet, paradoxically, we draw more near  
Until that end when both must reach this place;  
This confluence of peoples face to face.

II

How long since I first weighed you in my hand?  
Imagined countless futures to be planned?  
My son, I've seen you grow in depth and strength,  
Enlarging stature, reaching man's full length,  
Till – like Phoenician barge with oarsmen keen –  
Just spume-streaked wake of memory was seen;  
A white and foamy plume within my ken  
(Viewed through the narrow grill of Mamertine)  
Which too did break and mingle with the main,  
Till naught but added sparkle did remain.

III

When first incarcerated in this goal  
I did not gripe, nor wayward fate bewail,  
But day on day took all time did allot  
And carefully observed the rules; forgot  
All past life, and those carefree days of youth,  
When friendships forged were built on rocks of truth,  
And love through eyes of innocence was seen  
(Though strictly in purlieu of Mamertine;)  
When strummed the minstrel free with rapturous lays,  
In those dim, ill-remembered, happy days.

IV

The food is fair; I'm in good mind and health;  
They give me jobs to do, though no great wealth.  
I'm given beer on feast days – tto imbibe time! –  
And act each day in fitful pantomime.  
I am one hour of freedom given each day  
When I may walk or read, or talk or play;  
Yet this denied will be, unless I'm 'good',  
And follow all their ways. Truly I would  
Follow if I might, but here within me  
Is that spark: original humanity,  
Which cries out to soar free and leads me wild  
On life uncaring, like an infant child,  
To dance and sing and act the pratish clown.  
They move in then, and swiftly put me down.  
I'm not a model prisoner, whom they trust  
To follow blindly their dictates: I'm cussed  
And damned before their eyes by envy's spite,  
To dare achieve for half a day what's right.

V

They said, "Your children likewise here are held  
As expiation – leave and they'll be felled!"  
I cannot count the years it took to write  
These lines to you: each culled with failing sight.  
They give no paper – just the scraps I find –  
While unpenned thoughts beguile my jumbled mind.  
The upper floors I pace are filled with light,  
As dim, slow adaptation renders bright  
The shadowed flickering sun, through grills and slats,  
Which brightens up my day as silk cravats  
Adorn a dying man, whose drab greyness  
Attests to deeper depths - dread Tullianus!  
Fine dancing motes in sunbeam shafts traverse,  
Whilst fitful shades of moving leaves arras  
The walls, with ever changing shape and form:  
Pretty, touching movements which heart warm.  
For here, the lower is the true prison,  
Where dead souls linger and expire, unrisen.

## VI

There are no books here - they I miss the most;  
 Cut off from all past poets – that great host  
 Of greater men who suffered here before,  
 For summoning with courage men to war,  
 And gallantly opposing Goth and slaves  
 Who ruled their lives in ever pressing waves  
 By shove and shout and thrusting past the bar;  
 Encamped around their homesteads like thick tar,  
 To trap and wallow in their foul, black mire  
 Of barrenness, lost moments and desire.

## VII

Nor is music allowed; we may not sing;  
 But in the yard below, the maidens bring  
 Their gifts; of elder-wine and new baked loaves,  
 Medicaments to heal raw wounds, and clothes  
 To warm these wrecks of spent humanity;  
 And these young maids sing each to each all day.  
 A breeze is whistling through the trees outside,  
 And murmuring, whispering seas chant on each tide.  
 Each night, afore the sun shafts out his beams,  
 A host with bursting song prepares his gleams,  
 And I, transfixed, receive their joyful gift –  
 Though condemned by their notes to wider rift.  
 All this I took, and welcomed – as my bread –  
 'Twas natural that my soul should like be fed.  
 But then, when most resigned to abject state,  
 A minstrel, strolling at the outer gate,  
 Played on his lyre, – as softest temple bell, –  
 To cantilena sung by fair damsel:  
 So soft and lilting on the evening air  
 It lifted me beyond all worldly care.

## VIII

Did e'er such beauty hide such fatal bane?  
I screamed aloud – the vicious scream of pain –  
The pain of music tearing at my soul,  
To rip it hence from callous earthly coil,  
And free it from this straitjacket of pain;  
From mean distrust; from love first killed by Cain.  
And thus they called me mad on many counts:  
For twirling – with my shackles as a flounce;  
For dancing in the streets – in fettered chains;  
For humming haunting tunes – where sickness reigns;  
For kissing air – which my fair love had breathed;  
For singing – under blows I first received;  
For clapping – as the doomed escaped to death;  
For cheering – as each day I fresh took breath;  
And now, for screaming – to a wondrous note,  
Drawn by this singer from her silken throat.  
"He's mad," they cried with glee, "take him below!  
To deepest hell – Tullianus! – let him go!"

## IX

There is no light of any kind to see,  
Though murky, eerie phantoms shadow me;  
Vague emanations silhouette the frames  
Of men colleted hand and foot in chains  
To walls and pillars; in this deep recess,  
Imagination forms its own excess  
Where imbricated days do patience teach.  
And crusts are thrown within our feeble reach,  
(Crude jailers sport with famine; bait with bread  
For grateful grunt, as if 'tis theirs to shed!)  
Excepting they who – being too gloomy –  
Are herewith condemned – morto per fame.  
Others go by slow suppliziato  
(To this am I condemned – they've told me so!)  
Yet others die through quiet strangolato;  
Or fall too quick from grace, decapitato.

## X

I struggle for the words to write my woe;  
 Stressed thoughts, as flowers on dung, are swift to grow.  
 Grim guards, whose eyes of hemlock hate avouch,  
 Revile me; even torment as I crouch.  
 They wake me from sound sleep to ridicule  
 My unkempt looks or stance, or preach some rule;  
 I have to wait till sleep does cloak their eyes,  
 Then scratch on scraps in darkness ere they rise.  
 Sometimes they wake and tear my efforts through,  
 And beat me, and my secret thoughts pursue.  
 Then, son, I cry and start to count the cost  
 Of all my work; of all the freedom lost.  
 And angels, asked if it was worth the pain,  
 Reply, "You will not pass this way again.  
 Give all you know and have to further truth:  
 For that alone will break Tullianus' roof."  
 And thus I scratch with feeble hand each day,  
 Not knowing if these lines will serve as prey  
 To those who would devour a humble deed,  
 Transforming love with selfish arrant creed.

## XI

How does man cope with wilful, vicious wrongs?  
 Till – bullied, beaten, bruised, – for death he longs?  
 One man whimpers at the blows received  
 But makes no move to duck or be relieved.  
 One screams with feigned distress before blows fall;  
 One cowers in tight grip against a wall,  
 Defending head and heart; some choose to fight,  
 Raging at the world; some go mad; I write.

Notes: -

*Suppliziato* - suffocation

*Strangolato* - strangulation

*Decapitate* - decapitation

*Morto per fame* - starvation

*The Mamertine prison was the state prison of ancient Rome, used to imprison malefactors and enemies of the State. The lower cell, called Tullianus, is probably the most ancient building in Rome. Victims included: Pontius, King of the Sanniti, died 290 B.C., Vercingetorix, the King of the Gauls, strangolato 49 B.C., and Jugurtha, King of Numidia, dead of starvation 104 B.C., the Holy Martyrs, Peter and Paul, and other Apostles imprisoned in the reign of Nero.*

*(With grateful acknowledgement to a story by Malcolm Lowry)*

## Westminster Apiary

Look to the bee, and learn great wisdom,  
Through understanding of her ways.  
With great clamour and commotion,  
Of which she has not any notion,  
She toils and never plays.

The queen is fertile, yet non-stinging;  
She only takes one drone for life.  
And cocooned, pampered, safe she lies,  
(Never learning her time flies)  
Freed from low workers' strife.

The myriad eggs she lays each season  
Are clones of her – identical!  
They cannot vary by one hair –  
(Each must dark be or each be fair)  
Except each one is sterile.

Not character nor name's call marks them;  
None can be told – not one – apart;  
They only dance to her fine tune,  
Which turns to winter's death too soon,  
And never outward dart.

Though consequently often dying,  
The workers will defend their queen,  
With barbéd tails that badly sting.  
She never questions this instinct;  
Just continues to preen.

The drones look poor pathetic creatures;  
Large of eye, yet small of body.  
They do no work within the hive:  
Though vital genes they keep alive,  
They're given treatment shoddy.

When summer's done and winter's coming,  
The drones are driven from the hive  
By biting at their legs and wings.  
Thus their differences quick death brings,  
Who are too weak to strive.

Totalitarian paradise here,  
For ever loyal, for ever fixed;  
Where nothing changes, nothing grows:  
New life evolving never shows.  
Thus he – who queen's arse licks.

*(Of Margaret Thatcher and her Government)*

## Lucy

My child came like a welcome summer's day  
Whose buds contain the essence of the flower;  
Within her tiny frame, all woman's power  
Revealing time will over-soon display.

Fresh light glints from her curl of copper hair,  
Whilst her soft voice is music, drowning woe;  
Through her young wisdom, ways of peace will show;  
She grows with grace and love each day more fair.

She stands upon the rim of womanhood:  
This child, who shared her trust, has glimpsed life's truth,  
Reluctant yet to turn from joyous youth,  
Yet eager for that force none has withstood.

My love, my life, my hope is in that hand, –  
Still trembling on the brink of what God planned.

## Bought Talk

My Darling Squigglekins, I've missed you so;  
Although 'twas only yesterday we met -  
I really feel so lost when you must go;  
I'm sorry that I left you so upset.

I loved our drink in bed, with lights turned low-  
I thought you would enjoy that Vodka cup;  
That it should make you sick, I didn't know –  
Perhaps it was the wine you later sup.

I ache with thoughts of you that rack my mind:  
Your golden tresses, which fresh visions place  
(Yet artful Titian gilts can never find)  
Upon the satin paper that's your face.

My darling, how I love your flashing eyes:  
Soft velvet hues of blue, now flecked with grey,  
(Whose colours seem to pale the lowering skies)  
Which dreamily do gaze across my way.

## Thought Talk

(We planned a time  
Beyond all rhyme,  
When lovers kissed  
And were not missed)

(You drink your life  
To conquer strife –  
Yet always groans  
Repay drinks' loans)

(Our early schemes  
Of lovers dreams  
Were quickly spent  
With lust's intent)

(What hopeless task,  
To this girl ask  
If she be true:  
I have no clue!)

Your lips are fragrant flowers that adorn  
The secret garden that becomes your mouth.  
There is no finer spot from night till morn -  
Beyond the borders North, or countries South.

And, oh those ears! So shapely, yet so fair,  
Which lend themselves to kisses by the score:  
Half hidden by the garlands of your hair,  
Such temples these, rich diamonds should adore.

Dear, Darling Squigglekins, how smooth your neck,  
Which sits like pious swan in high regard;  
High, sleek, haughty, while precious jewels bedeck  
In lines, fit to be graced by Avon bard.

Not least your hands dare I omit extol;  
With skin as soft as smoothest hotel quilt.  
Their touch sends shocks of pleasure to my soul:  
I tell you so, without a pang of guilt.

Well, did you like the shoes I bought one bit?  
I meant than for your birthday - do behave! -  
You quite forgot to tell me how they fit;  
I think the green will match the dress I gave.

(I hope my wife  
– Bane of my life –  
Will fail to see  
Their bite on me)

(For those last rings,  
– Though simple things –  
I have not paid.  
Now they're mislaid)

(Those pearls you took:  
My wife did look,  
And made me say,  
"Insurance, pay!")

(You want, I know,  
A ring to show;  
But must you hold  
A ring of gold?)

(I know your fun –  
My pants undone!  
But I am tired;  
My hours are hired)

Forgive me, Dearest, can you sometimes bide  
Some thoughts of mine that are not simply 'us'.  
My wife thinks that I talk of her outside;  
She has become far too suspicious.

My wife still treats me like a simpleton;  
She doesn't understand I have my needs,  
And only wants to talk about our son,  
Or buy her trinkets – necklaces or beads.

More troubles come from the son I eschew:  
He smokes my cigarettes and drinks my beer;  
He takes the condoms that I keep for you;  
I've never known his whereabouts all year.

He now steals money from his mother's purse  
To spend upon his friends – and silly curls!  
And then denies it, which thing is the worse.  
I think he's had it off with several girls.

Please wait, my dear, I know you want to play –  
But I am burdened by these thoughts of him;  
For other things than you can my mind sway,  
And simple pleasures we must sometimes skim.

(Do you suppose  
She nothing knows,  
Who silent sits  
While having fits?)

(You will not see  
She's part of me.  
Why do you care  
What she will wear?)

(Why does he try  
This to deny?  
He should speak true  
As my thoughts do)

(I had to lie  
About the tie  
Touched by your lips –  
I said 'twas chips)

(You lost your son,  
Through things undone.  
This son of mine  
I'd like to shine)

He's taken time off school – we don't know why.  
We don't know where he goes, or whom he sees;  
But when confronted thus, he tells some lie  
And says, "I'll act in any way I please!"

All right, my darling Squigglekins, – let's go;  
You really have a scrumptious, tempting bum.  
We've talked too long - now let's some action show;  
For here with you I always love to come.

(Why do I yearn for that beyond good sense?  
From deeds unseen and motives badly planned,  
My actions always yield ill consequence:  
My son might truer be if these I banned.)

(It's getting late –  
I've missed that date  
With my salesman.  
What can I plan?)

(My wife won't know  
Just where I go –  
"As long as he  
Comes 'Back for tea!'")

It's time to go –  
We've been too slow.  
I'll see you soon –  
Next afternoon?

## Song

How long should a man  
Love a woman?  
If he truly loves her,  
He'll love her  
For ever.

And he'll hold her hand,  
And stroke her hair,  
And no one else on earth  
Will ever be there.

How long should a man  
Please a woman?  
If he truly loves her,  
He'll please her  
For ever.

He will give to her  
Everything he has –  
His life, his heart and hopes,  
And his dreams of the stars.

How long should a man  
Hold a woman?

If he truly loves her,  
He'll hold her  
For ever.

And he'll keep her safe,  
And stand by her,  
Shoulder to shoulder  
He'll stand by her.

How long should a man  
Keep a woman?  
If he truly loves her,  
He'll keep her  
For ever.

Yes, he'll hold her fast,  
Till the stars break;  
He'll hold her till the sun burns cold.  
He'll hold her till the end of time on earth,  
And beyond in the great unknown.

That's how long a man  
Should love a woman;  
If he truly loves her,  
He'll love her  
For ever.

## Skiddaw Slate

The sun was warm, the turf sprang firm,  
As though just newly laid;  
Yet ten long years had passed it by,  
Since this cool grave was made.

I walked above the long-dead man,  
Yet felt his bones were warm;  
And ached within, for what he'd known  
My heart in vain did yearn.

I felt no anger for him now;  
All jealous rage was spent.  
For he had loved what I could not;  
Through him my love was vent.

He'd known great times of happiness,  
(And times of sorrow too)  
And every day I envied him,  
Those days I could but rue.

He wore a crown of Lakeland slate,  
A great green slab of stone,  
That glinted in the wintry sun  
Like grass when freshly mown.

I cried to stand upon that ground,  
Beside that Skiddaw stone.  
For he in death has more than I  
In life have ever known.

The sun stayed warm, the turf was clean,  
As though just newly laid;  
Yet ten long years has he been gone:  
Through dying, he has stayed.

And she I love, yet cannot have  
Will join him in a while;  
The Skiddaw slate will name them both,  
Within that final aisle.