

Youth's Death

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The Drowning of Love

A woman with her bridegroom lay, within their trothal bed:
He, drunk and stuporous, awoke to find her crimson dead.
Arresting him, and charging him for wilful nuptial murder—
They asked in his defence if, perhaps, he thought she was another?
He knew of only one – a jealous, raw, wild mind,
But for her safety dare not name, nor let them traces find.

She'd sent each day a letter which he read and burnt each night;
Had loved him with a constancy that ruled her daily flight,
Sneaked past his servant, past his dog, which knew her footstep well.
Thus spanned his love beyond the confines of its condemned cell:
To bear her guilt, and burden it, and bring the hint of ease.
They took him then and hanged him, for 'guilty' were his pleas.

Alone, morose, uncomforted, and pining for her love,
She silent sat through darkening hours within a silent cove,
Who by her single, sinful cut had hoped to rip him free.
So bitter now her loss that slowly slid she fathoms three
To lie among the minnows in a forest of green stems,
With weight enough to press her cares midst peristaltic hems.

Tench nestled to her bosom as her pockets slightly bulged;
Her precious love lay drowned by hate – her jealousy indulged.

The New Millennium

The Millennium's ending is coming at last,
And with it comes promise of joy –
No more the sorrow of wars that are past,
But every conceivable toy.

With a will that is risible, middle-aged men
Will take to the air on great kites,
And they'll laugh when they find their limbs broken,
For medicine will mend them like lights.

In inflatable submarines, they'll safely submerge
To potter around in the bay,
Without pausing to notice what pollution's scourge
Has melted so crudely away.

TV will be larger – and sized like a room,
With hundreds of channels to choose
For working-class people to beat back the gloom,
With mass bingo and copious booze.

I.T.V.'s coloured hologram-projected views
Might make us think Africa's here,
As it spills on our carpets the blood of the News
Before wetting our faces with beer.

In this final decade everyone should go wild,
And do everything they have dreamed –
Least the century shows us a mirage beguiled:
Reality's not what it seemed.

ANY... (Anyone for Poetry?)

Any...

one can write

 a piece of prose and

 chop

it into...

 tidy lengths to

 simulate

 the outline of a poem;

that...

 is not poetry,

it is

 but mocking

on the edge of the abyss.

Poetry jumps into darkness,

to pull from air

words for wings to soar,

 on rhythmic thermals

 with a buoyancy visible...

yet invisible.

Holy-Joe

You show the world yourself – in prayer,
Set in rows with matching friends –
while publicly pretending there
That faults bewailed make amends.

You give each night to hymn and praise;
Home-Group meetings; Fellowship;
Ignoring raw, rich earthy ways –
Of family and old friendships.

Can you not see your children's eyes?
Sad, untended with neglect;
You fill their child-like trust with lies –
Their simple faith and love reject.

Leaving them each night for chanting,
Never seeing God in them,
They see your life as wild ranting –
As you fault us and them condemn.

Eternal rest and peace shall come
From cacophony below –
Just chant your verse like savage drum,
And nod to Vicar as you go.

For none will judge so much on looks,
None condemn so loud as those
Who love to flaunt their pious books –
These self-professing Holy-Joes.

Yet only they who pass their time
Far from common public gaze,
Freed of rote-led prayer or chime,
Will know, through solitude, true praise.

La Scala Milan

Rossini wrote so rapturously
 For voices huge with longing;
That many built their great careers –
Falstaffs or Macbeths or Lears –
Filling with grand arias
 This auditorium.

Sweet cellos danced so famously
 With ritornellos running;
Up and back the shaken scale,
Bending bows to full avail,
Filling with a mighty gale
 The auditorium.

The piccolo and cor anglais
 Threw out red cheeks with puffing,
Notes glanced off the chandeliers
And filled the audience's ears
With music never heard in years
 In auditorium.

No finer fiddle could they play,
 No better beats from drumming,
With the best of glissando
From a buxom soprano
Dusting with contralto
 And auditorium.

Then tenor struck out carelessly –
 His cleaved chin looked so dashing;
With mien and accent haughty,
He sang a timbre mighty –
But took a line most flighty
 Round auditorium.

La Scala looks forgivingly
 On many things found lacking –
Hair styles falling less than neat;
Contraltos who miss a beat;
On choruses that need repeat;
 In auditorium.

But never does it tenderly
 Treat tenors who are willing
To stake their lives in wild duets
That take them past their voices' frets,
Loosing them the running bets
 Of auditorium.

This tenor ended prettily,
 By topmost note declining!
To further opera's music flow
And help him sing like castrato
Came calls for surgery below,
 From auditorium.

So we – who strive continuously
 For sweet success in singing –
Reach the top by risking all,
Or be cut down for a fall
To disappear at curtain call
 From auditorium.

Shelley's

Across the road, our corner shop
Sells bric-a-brac and falderals,
Slung on tables each price-pocked:
 Bent stair rods and lino tiles;

Winter-rain repositories,
A summer-warped frayed wooden hive,
Flexless irons, gaping grates,
 Piled in mounds upon the path;

Binfuls of mismatched assortments,
Antique pumps from village greens,
Chipped Welsh dressers, gallipots,
 Pictures of lost country scenes;

Lidless kettles, bungless kegs,
Rust-encrusted nickel knives,
Skates with locked wheels, split chair legs,
 And glue-cracked plates from old St Ives.

Though seldom seen, there hangs a sign
Which never turns from open:
For poetry and pottery
 Gave Shelley's its cognomen.

As each man casts his mind in clay,
So – equal heaped behind the door –
Lies pottery and poetry,
 Mixed and boxed upon his floor.

He starts too late and closes soon;
He always stops for tea –
I envy him his gentle life
 And wish that I were he.

27 December 1989

To Cough No More

The force of a cough is the carve-up of time
 Into tight little packets of beats,
Which slot in between the clear day of your life
 Like wild litter to swirl in the streets.

The looks that you get are the looks of a pet
 When attention is taken away;
In reality coughs cover idle men's sobs –
 Or might signal the end of their day.

For a cough is the bark of a dog that is done,
 Whose control of each breath is foregone;
His force is all spent and his time is now run:
 It's the tick that his life hangs upon.

He shudders and sweats into chill rivulets
 Which drop-slide from his face to the sheets,
To turn in for peace – from this time of decease –
 The brave silence which only he greets.

Lift Girl Song

The lift is standing with its gate swung wide –

But I do not see.

"It's here," cries the girl, "It's here - go on!"

But still I do not see.

"Go on!" shrieks the girl, whose life is the lift,

"Get on – it's here for you!"

Then I turn and see

What is waiting next to me

And I know I must be

On my way.

The door slides shut with a swishy clunk –

But I do not hear.

"What floor?" cries the girl, "Your floor – go on!"

But still I do not hear.

"You've got to say," shouts the girl, whose love is the lift,

"You've got to name your floor."

Then I turn to see

The buttons hard by me

And I press 'number three'

On my way.

With a jolt of its straps the lift jerks still –

But I do not feel.

"You're here," cries the girl, "You're here – go on!"

But still I do not feel.

"Get out!" shouts the girl, for her soul is the lift,

"You must leave me alone."

Then I feel for the door,

Which slams to once more

Till I visit each floor

On my way.

The Death of Aphrodite

Shattered rocks rudely holed
Grove below your clearest sea
Breaking foam rising high
Penetrate your purest sky
Stain with shadows on your shore
Marked where Love lingered before.

They ripped the tide with eddies grey
And fouled the earth in littered ways
All crazed as men who fought her hills
Bereft of Love, coarsened with spite
Parched of hope, set in scarlet
Plundered fields and fading valour
Skittish maids hurled off your high cliff
Rogues and brigands swathed your shores.

Ancient places of high honour
Blighted by gross mouldy litter
Cast adrift by idle yobbos
Graven faces pulled to pieces
By the belches of drunk soldiers
Wasting land in comprehensions
By bad orders kill all things.

Soldiers, yobbos, march together
Idle on Love's lonely island
Run her through with broken bottles
Pluck her gilt and piss her marble
Foul her greatness, prick her honour
Loath her virtue, cut her tresses
Steal her innocence and silence
When Love is slaughtered on her island
Love is banished from our lives.

No News Tomorrow

I heard a man to say

There would be no news tomorrow –
Tomorrow's news was 'No more news to say'.

I heard him tell his friend

An airport strike in Athens
Would stop the news from crossing out this way.

So tomorrow you can rest assured

There's nothing done today
That might affect the way we live
Or give ourselves away.

Tomorrow's news won't happen now –

Rest easy in your beds –
For aircraft out of Athens
Will not fly above our heads.

No, there's no more news tomorrow

The news is locked away,
You can dream of peace or hope for war –
it won't be done today.

Cleveland Hills

Vomit-yellow clouds of steam plumes
Mix with smoke and merge to grey,
Cloaking over skies they've stolen.
Ill-defined, this unity
Smirches each far-seen horizon
With lung-cutting blackened air;
Griming walls and smutting clothing,
Scowling off into the night –
Like a thief of order.

Sullened by each rote accepting,
Hopeless by irrectitude,
Dressed in rags of dull indifference,
From the town by ripped hills ringed,
Sons of gloom-shod exhalations
Move to kick an alley ball;
Stopping for a careless cough, each
Spits loose black-flecked mucoid plugs
To mark his passing in the world.

Shaped by ferrous seams and workings,
Hills become their catafalque;
Shrouded by the slag of commerce –
Hollow-eyed they drift as spectres,
Dead, before their day is done.

One Life

I have lived through my sentence of sorrow and pleasure;
given my friends such small help as I could.
Now only awaits is the dread of the ending –
conveyed to a regime of disciplined death.

Lined up with demented, incontinent women,
slobbering food, wax-like fixed to their chairs,
and threaded to earth by stale senile decaying,
their souls are well rotted before they touch end.

Untoothered and unable to suckle or argue,
coaxed by a spoonful of Complan for strength,
to live on and suffer one lingering day more,
they croak a sad greeting, in rows as they lie.

They sweat through the night, saddened huddles of
\emptiness
awaiting a turn for their ride to the flue;
while prostitute kindnesses prop and support them:
then shuffle around one more place to the fire.

Taking the air and good food from the children,
they blot the horizon in sickly repulse.
Must I sit amongst them, to greet them, to join them?
Fixed in my place till another has died?

One life I have lived, in enjoyment and failure;
one I have shared with a love – now alone.
My life is the one thing that's left me to offer;
let me give it freely, in peace, in my home.

Father's Day

Here I cannot stay – here I will not stay.
But rather would I gyre through the world,
no burdens to my head, no tempting taste of ease,
to vagabond the globe with minstrels' cries, in poverty;
Or saunter down a leaf-green lane in summer's still,
Larkspur hedging round my arm-slung coat,
and tickle-flies afretting at some distant, drowsy cow.

No more the bitter winter of the veteran's defeat –
unvalued and ill-tended,
wandering in his frozen ague
in this granite waste,
he stumbles lamely for a freedom lost:
a simple grassy walk.

He chokes and coughs and crumples
to the wet, green floor
and is dragged back to be
alone once more.

A stubborn, distanced daughter grumbles at his pain
and tells how he must stop
beyond her children's altruistic care,
in isolated, silent, lonely squalor.

Oh, geriatric meddler with our consciences!
You must go on, unseen, unmissed,
your contribution to our world of no account.

But here, in the condoning of your saddened state,
I cannot stay – I will not stay.

Dance with the Gipsies

How I long to dance with the gipsies,
To follow their wild-eyed way,
To leave here on the morrow
With never a care for the day.

And break from all that binds me –
The toil and grind of years;
The shackle of dull kinship;
My mother's pleas and tears.

I'd take a van to the deep wood,
And hide amongst the trees,
And live off poached wild rabbit,
Then feast midst honey bees.

I'd sing till the blue sky darkened,
I'd dance like the wind-stirred leaves,
With wild and drunken abandon
Far from the parson's grieves.

I'd drink at the river's rising,
I'd lie in straw-soft bales,
And dance like the clap of thunder
Over the hills and vales.

Then none would ever catch me –
I'd come or go at will,
And please no-one but the wild moon
Vaulting over the hill.

No more the grip of the factory clock;
Late trains will not see me;
Nor wait in turn on the slip road,
Anxious for my tea.

If dreams could but sustain me,
I would leave this many a day;
But the chill of living routinely
Binds my heart this way.

Hello - I'm a sinner

Hello – I'm a sinner,
Though I'm truly after good.
I want to find some virtued winner
And traduce her to my food.

Hello – I'm a pirate,
In search of richer men.
They'd prefer me poorly imitate
Than sink their vessels with my pen.

Hello – I'm a donkey,
With a world upon my back.
It's a load that's growing wonkey
As doubters droop their reins with slack.

Hello – I'm a tiger,
Prowling through the jungle's ease;
Never learning how my rider
Hacks away our screening trees.

Hello – I'm just me now,
Feeling shy and rather small;
As a child, they say I'll grow soon –
Will I ever be their tall?

Feeding The Ducks – for Mary-Anne

She moved to the water's edge
And pleased seeing well-known friends:
Eager Mallard, scuttling Coot and Grey-lagged Goose,
Each stretch-necked for a crumb or two.
Some flicking crossed tail feathers for a silent thank you,
Some shrieking dismay if left too long,
Some diffident upon the outer fringe,
While some called loudly, urging fledglings to their freebie.

Two fought and ripped feathers flew,
Till remanded by her baleful stare.
One brazened on the deck, insolent greed
Pattering for attention and a private feed.
The bread was gone, and so the birds
Till silence, and the quiet ripples' surge
Were all that marked their passing.

And the girl, left to solitude,
Thought somehow they did profit in the world
Through altruistic interest in their welfare,
And smiled that she had touched a place of wonder –
And guided Nature's blind indifference,
Feeding for a moment the hunger
Which drives survival on.

(Mary-Anne on the Norfolk Broads)

The Swimmer

I used to swim for my country –
A few powerful strokes
and I was through.
Body thrust to the winning side,
every dive a winner.

Now I struggle to stay afloat,
flailing in their shallows,
lungs gasping,
I flounder slowly across
thinking I shall never reach that shore,
ready to yield and sink by the moment.

Until a helping arm grasps and pulls me out
and I lie, spent upon the side,
without a cheer for England.

Love Missed

Had I all time's distressing days
To garner full the long-lost hope of art;
Or all the haughty regions of the stars
To maul weak words in semblence of some prey.

Had I the soldiers' pacing hours
Awaiting through the eve their morrow's fight;
Or all philosophies' long-crazed ideas
Rejuvenated by some Heavenly sight.

Or could the cricket's tympani
Be echoed out with clashes of slabbed rock,
To pitch about the caverns of the dead
And force return of their oblitted stock;

Then, I could bate dull words to frame
A lure and tice disemblers to this trist;
Or turn the space of Heaven to such game,
That you might know how much by me you're missed.

The Hours Book of Arden – for Lucy

This is the Hours Book of Arden
Penned by a ten year hand;
Its colour is a mournful grey
Hemmed by a dull sobriety –
And I did never think to see
This book in its solemnity.

It tolls the hours of her life,
In repetitious ways;
The brook stays frozen in its flow
Where gentle Lucy played,
And all night's slumbering dusky giants
Cannot its course erase.

A wooden pine outlining frame
Holds what's within in peace,
And in the Book, each page a day,
With still, grey-outlined figures there,
Whose life within the world portrays
Of meeting, parting, parenting.

It shouts of youth and cream-fresh looks,
It sings of joyous play;
With words fresh minted to her ear,
And laughter freely given,
Of timeless passing on to youth
The innocence of Heaven.

We are all one

When murderer and victim are one –
What hope is left for the world?
He may cudgel his brains
Or in lust knife his heart,
For killer and killed are the same.

When love turns to hate, what's the crime?
It's the history of mankind unchanged.
He may smother his smile
Or noose his own neck
Once the feverish mind is deranged.

When passion's desire is unfilled
It will rage for revenge to be wrought.
If truth dare not speak, it will die -
And in dying will take part of us;
For murderer and victim are one.

If love is destroyed, it will kill –
So the weak can pretend strength once more.
And if peace is disturbed
By these same raucous cries
It will fester to war internecine.

At this mighty wheel, we all meet –
Where life turns to death in a night,
And our anger's our pain,
And each hate turns to wound
For we each kill ourselves by this slight.

The Black Night of the Soul

I have striven through the darkness
 And have gathered strength through pain;
Stood firm against the dread wraith
 Of those who sought cheap gain.

I never bent to yield my will
 To dull conformity,
But held to hope of greater gain
 Through search for verity.

When all men's anger lashed my face
 I stood steadfast alone-
Their welts and slash-wounds riven deep-
 Rejoicing at my moan.

Till, weak, I stumbled to a knee,
 My dull mind blank, unwhole,
Through decades of their numbing talk-
 The black night of the soul.

And there, as drugged delirium
 My heart transfigured, wild –
I saw afresh each blinding bud,
 Like wakened little child.

The March skies shimmered through their haze
 Of artists' palette daubs;
And wild birds sang an ecstasy
 Of shrilling, vibrant warbs.

So I, an infant lost in life,
 Was led by loving hand
To where the gentle rivers wash
 Their colour from the land.

Until, at peace, I laid me down,
 My anguished grief all spent.
My soul, refreshed, is bathed by light
 Which for the world is meant.

By Waterbus to the City

I waited by the quay, alone, an old man
Peering through a timeless morning mist which weighed
Upon the river, in promise of some heat.
Two girls, Handelian chords evoking, played
Slowly violin and cello's begging beat.

Not many gathered at that hour of waiting;
Round the Greenwich reach our twin-hulled river barque
Slid smoothly on to us, plying tourist wares
Under silent, folded wings of 'Cutty Sark'
While Tam O'Shanter's mare's tail drooped in these airs.

Down-Thames, the hooded barriers squat like vultures
Till this muddy ribbon road shall flood and seize
The city in its business hour. Morning trains
Race past flatlets piled on in-filled dockland sleaze;
Ghastly shattered warehouses; decaying cranes.

Six laden barges, heavied with years of silt,
Wait on ebb tide (a waterman's washing draped
Across from mast to funnel like mocking sails)
Off 'Prospect of Whitby', where Pepys drank and japed:
No purpose now nor haven for salt-spiced tales.

A flooding tide, and business men the sailors,
Calling pin-stripe suited to West India Dock.
No sense, on this flat highway through the city,
Of rush or crowding here, where our only clock
Is the river, bringing life to each jetty.

One turn, then through touching spars of Tower Bridge –
Drawn like fingers, by some Michelangelo,
Pointing to the bricked-up arch of Traitors' Gate.
Here, the mildly curious tourists come and go,
Trap themselves in film, and marvel at each date.

Rope is thrown; a whistle's sudden blast and I,
Toward the London Bridge, step ashore to work;
Then pause - on impulse - at one vast structure's side.
A lesser architect might such vantage shirk,
But on this marble stair springs sense of London pride.

Noble building of our time, gleam in the sun:
Space-age Monument in glass and stainless steel –
Confidence to all eventualities,
Taking here the image of a mighty wheel,
Shaped with certainty to turn for centuries.

Visions of Tomorrow

Her writing was the hardest black:
Raised sintered letters on the jamb.
Two guns were carried in her belt,
Which bore the symbol of the lamb:
One weapon loaded for the blast;
One pistol primed to slightest touch.

A boy slipped by and drew them both,
And took and hid them in the hutch
Where the marked white rabbit lobbed:
A small red mark upon its head
Where it had grazed some raw-edged nail.

And as he hid the guns beneath
The straw and wooden batten boards,
He thought they saw him and pursued
To keep him in some ancient jail.

A tractor set for grinding corn,
Which tumbled down a monster chute,
Was turned by chain until it broke
And left the boy afeared and mute.

And always there the mighty river,
Pulsing, rising, threatening flood,
Cold and slick and fearsome running
With a white and foamy sheen
On the muddy surface layer
Where the city once had been.

The New Man

Oh, the worst thing in the world
That can befall a guy
Is to never know the reason,
Nor to understand the why.

The worst thing in the world
Is when he becomes a dad
Of a tiny and inquisitive
Endearing little lad,

Who will always ask the question,
And will always wonder why-
The sky is filled with sunshine,
Yet his doggie has to die.

Oh surely you can see that –
There's a new book every day,
And it's written by our children
Who have found their words to say:

“We don't know what life is meaning,
We don't know what it's about-
But inside there stirs this feeling
That makes us scream and shout!

“And it pulls us from our mother
And it turns us from our dad,
It stirs the crazy notions
And it forces us act mad!”

Then we sit in silent wonder
At the new life we have stirred,
Or we wake in cold rebellion
And our vision becomes blurred,

As we fight the child we've started,
An extension of ourselves,
Now a limb from which we're parted
Which we'd rather lock on shelves.

But youth will not be silenced,
And the child won't go away-
For theirs is our tomorrow,
And theirs the frightening day.

Your Name In The Wind –

To A.E. from J.H.

Through the flowing folds of darkness,
Through the river's gentle lay,
Here I danced with my beloved,
Here I played my life away.

With the coldest hint of sunrise,
In the cruelest morning light,
I must rise to steal onward,
Taking boredom for my flight.

Mid the marches of the morning,
Through the welter of the forenoon,
Gathered pace and sweet distractions
Lay in me the dreams of "Soon!".

In the aching void of silence,
Through the empty pain unbowed,
I draw breath above the lone wind
Where I scream your name aloud.

Then the hours fade to silence,
Time becomes a memory –
Once more beside you, safe I lie,
Caught within your poetry.

By The Hair of His Nose

There's no knowing if the noses on the chimney in the hall
Are the ones which Uncle Charlie used to wear;
They've been mounted on their platter for a century or more
And are showing some slight changes in their hair.

For these noses are the hairiest that ever graced a man,
With great bushes growing from each nostril's place;
Hanging like the vines in jungles where wild creatures
congregate,
They once formed the finest features on his face.

They were platted and adorned with lace and ornamental
frills;
They were combed and tied in ribbons and pigtails,
And to further his appearance in the city where he worked,
They were dyed with coal - the best of British Rail's.

In the evening by the fire, Uncle Charlie used to read,
While the children played beside him on the hearth:
Games of Blind-Man's-Bluff, and thimble hunts, and find the
hidden cat –
Then they'd leave his hair to take a welcome bath.

Now one morning Aunty Agatha decided to spring-clean,
So she took her mop and broom to uncle's hair.
She removed a broken chimney, one stray dog and two dead
rats,
Three bananas and an antique midwife's chair.

In the middle of the winter when the world should all be still,
Uncle's hair began to make a fearful noise.
Aunty fetched a caving rescue team to ascertain the din,
Who there found a group of seven missing boys.

Then at last our Uncle Charlie left his frightful world of woe,
But the undertaker had a dreadful trial:
For he couldn't fit the lid on him, no matter how he tried,
So they had the noses mounted on a tile.

The Daughter of Mammon

To give her speech richness and worth,
She placed a pound beneath her tongue;
Two others pressed into each palm
So reach of money might be long.

That all the world might know her wealth
She strapped a gold coin to her chest;
To keep her body firm yet flat,
Two round coins more pressed at each breast.

Resisting love and common things,
She hid a coin between her thigh
That in that rich and fertile space
It might grow fat and multiply.

To stay in sight before her gaze,
One coin was fastened to her nose;
Beneath her feet were two coins more:
Reminders of the road she chose.

Above her head, well balanced, still,
One small gold coin flashed in her hair
And kept her eyes from looking down –
Or looking up with wondering stare.

Oh, daughter of the world, how sad
This offspring of your metal loin:
You've vanquished all the tenderness
Bequeathed by love's more gentle coin.

We each are born...

We each are born into a world unique
in time and place and moment;
caught, imprisoned in the cell of our birth
to fit a unique mould.

Impinging on the great outside
where other cells stot out
and all our hopes and piety
cannot resolve one part of it,
but lead us on to a certain doom.

We strive to grow and take a task
of living in sane form,
and hope to move beyond our birth,
to move in sane strange way unknown,
to fashion hope and peace therein,
to catch the glimpse of pain –
then move again to higher parts
that other cells might sense our part
and be inspired to grow.

I felt the presence of them all –
the ones alive, the ones long dead,
and stirred within my cell
for they have known a greater truth
and signal through dark time
to they who journey far alone,
and cry in lonely night.

They gave a simple hope and prayer
to give me new-born might
and I, uncertain of the way,
took one uncertain step
along the path that lay ahead
where others had not trod.

But oh, how dark and lonely there,
afraid of that black night.
I pull my courage from the brave
who too once spurned the light
and trod in darkness on their paths,
and fought for truth and might.

A Nameless Dread in the Night

There's a name that cannot be said –
It fills each young mind with deep dread;
For the Shibbo's the name that whips men insane,
It's the blood-curdling curse of the dead.

The Shibbo is raging tonight,
Her lust is a terrible sight –
She's dressed grey and black with a hang-man's arched
back,
Oh the Shibbo is raging tonight.

The Shibbo is out on the prowl –
As vicious as night-pouncing owl.
She has fangs that spit gore on the slightest guffaw,
Oh the Shibbo is prowling tonight.

If young children you would afright,
Whisper them her mad name in the night:
That Shibbo's abroad with a fiery sword,
And she'll savage young children tonight.

Her teeth are yellow and green;
Her nose drips foul blood and smells mean;
Her eyes are steel cold; no! there's none here so bold
As would dare to defy her tonight.

She spews from her bowels at your gate
Because of the pain and the hate,
Old men hide and quake when she starts to awake:
Oh the Shibbo is spewing tonight.

The Shibbo is out on the street,
With howls for each daemon she'll meet,
Her heels go click clack and her jaw goes ker-smack
Oh the Shibbo is streeting tonight.

Beyond...

Beyond her saddened eyes, a glance-
Where hollowed, ghostly shadows pass
And ripple in her soul's still depths
With silent time's disquietude;
Where raveled woolly skeins of dreams
Lie lost in helpless solitude.

Her magic pride once lighted ways
And drew in many to her call,
If ever evening draws us on
To touch unyielding sovereignty,
We surely will rejoice to stand
Beside her life of marble stone.
With paley moonlight clasping hope
We might in honour labour there,
To toil the fields she has sown.

To Welcome Warmth

Should January come to us once more
While we still share life's fitful pantomime,
In that far year, two thousand twenty-four,
Our England then will be a pleasant clime
And getting up no longer just a chore:
For sun and gentle breezes most sublime
Our scientists have premised as a theme,
With hot-house summers in mid-winter's scheme.

For many that I know will loud rejoice
To ply a year-long trade of ice-cream stalls;
Or gather round Trafalgar Square to voice
The New Year in, divest of woollen shawls;
Then - celebratory tennis, if their choice,
Or playing on green turf with cricket balls;
And football will by then be out of fashion-
No more a wild spectator sport of "smash 'em!"

And, though the river's flow may rise a bit,
A dense, green jungle will sprout once again
Above the sodden domes of Ancient Brit;
We'll row to work along an open drain,

With pin-striped suits no more prerequisite
Upon the steamy swamps of Wiltshire Plain,
But just a vague, remembered mystery,
Confined to ancients' minds - and history.

The palm-strewn walks near sunken Brighton pier
Where lovers saunter down Marine Parade,
Will move inland a quarter mile each year;
Flamenco-dance and Spanish serenade
Replace the Morris dance as more sincere,
With Pimms in March, and pink-iced lemonade;
While round the quiet reaches of the Dee
A crocodile was seen in February.

Though somewhat smaller then will be our isle,
As people get accustomed to new shapes,
I do not think we'll miss it for a while –
And "What goes next?" will be the yearly japes.
Then we, with happy content in our pile,
Will gladden as we sun midst terraced grapes;
While less blessed folk in torrid, foreign heat
Will curse their burning sands and blistered feet.

Jerboa - The Desert Rat

Out of Alexandria, across to Alamein,
The British Eighth held Cairo to the rear
While Rommel's Panzers pounded their position yet again,
To lodge in Egypt by the ending year.
The Jerry's turret tanks and shells had tried their discipline
For months, with maiming, loss and slaughter near;
But British Tom's a hardy breed, and cornered fights to win-
They vowed to push the Fox from his frontier.

Named appositely Jerboa, the fighting Desert Rat,
A tough but mobile denizen of sand,
The Seventh Armoured took the vanguard without caveat;
Their tanks' repeating fire swept arid land
To cross the coast of Africa and vanquish tyranny,
Reducing Hitler's Middle East command
So Churchill could announce with pride their stirring victory:
"The end of the beginning has been spanned!"

The outraged guns of savagery again confront our Earth,
Whose lawful sovereignty they overthrew,
Till Desert Rats again reveal the metal they are worth,
To arm the sword United Nations drew
And bring a tyrant to his knees by international laws
(As Byron wrote, in praise of Waterloo).
Now Jerboa is emblem to a new united cause:
To forge a lasting peace, once they are through.

The Euthanasia of Youth

Time, with careless pace, stepped slowly on
Through needling change and futile war,
Bone-moulding famine, unispecies growth,
Flabbery peace and niggardly new discovery;
But always mingling life with death
As populations grew and world resources dwindled.

New rules of euthanasia
Replace the old civilities,
Chasing old men to their graves,
Breeding gnawing fear in girls,
As each wrinkle is a countdown
To their own demise.
No idle theory now,
But stark reality,
And weakness crouches in the twilight days,
Stalking the numbed conscience,
Stifling protest
With the latest terminator pills.

Human expectation now can choose no less –
The norm is timely death;
Where all who cease to work shall die,
Gravely filling specious expectation,
Or with joy deriding doubt;
By rectitude risking no ire,
Nor the damning slight of outcasts
To society's new foe,
The unexpected end.

They sink to welcoming oblivion
With cold rejoicing in their servitude.

And others, working on, bondaged by fear
To penal bench or desk,
Must linger in some ghostly limbo,
Feared to die,
Yet lost to friends and life.

Who Reads This Now?

Who reads this now?

In you the line goes on,

And in your eye

The spark rekindled

Burns and dare not die.

Through lowering days

Set in the midst of war,

A simple verse

With rhyme outrunning reason

Spans a silent universe.

Who reads this now?

What future times

Turn back to ask a poet why

We struggle through the void

Against the children's cry.

Know, then, once more

That every measured line

And every song

Resounds to bear the soul

To joyous heaven ere long.

The Highgate Poet

With timeless, measured verse
He penned a changing land,
From Highgate Hill to Oxford gown
His tolling bells command.

Though crowned with accolades
By Crowns who celebrate,
Saluting royal marriages
And grand affairs of state,

Beyond the churches' stone
He told of common men:
Their human failings dignified
In Lincoln wold and fen.

We count his death as loss
And in his shadow stalk;
Those old, still serene, English ways
Where lesser poets walk.

How cold and drear that day,
The trees their foliage shorn –
Dark silhouettes against the sky
Like those who come to mourn.

Outside, a whitened world,
Where branches stood unmoved,
And breathless winter's air hung still –
On scenes he has approved.

His memory lives on,
Though in his grave he lies,
Through honest, measured poetry-
As did his life comprise.

To An Adolescent Son

You stand upon the step of life
And wait to be admitted.
How empty now your head of noise,
How free of prejudice:
A simple room, uncarpeted,
No pictures nor a book,
A varnished ash-plank wooden cot
Is all the world you see,
With vantage gained in staring round
Upon your mother's knee.

Dear child, why must we fill your mind
With images of death?
Or race to make your earth replete
In carnage, war and violence?
Then stand in awe and wonder we,
As surly you begin to fight
And raise that flag of 'destiny',
Declaiming what we taught as right.

Now in your troubled, doubting hours,
Retake the bearing of a child
And wear bewildered innocence
As aspect to your troubled brow;
Call in the broad, deep skips of art;
Throw off this mantle if you dare:
To purge the cellars of your mind
Of all our debris cluttered there.

One Perfect Love

He found one perfect love at last –
A budding flower so fair,
Who walked the paths of piety
And spoke with graceful air.

He loved and worshipped all her ways
Then took her home for tea;
He wooed her and caressed her hand
With softest melody.

He bought her gifts of satinwood;
Bright jewellery for her hair;
He dined her well at Wheeler's Inn,
With drinks at the "Astaire".

He bought seats at the opera,
And showed her galleries great,
Acquiring pictures for her room
Or copies from the Tate.

Then at the last when all was done,
She left him in the lurch,
And went off with a penniless
Young curate from the church.

He could not comprehend her mood,
His receipts made one mound:
They'd dined at Wheeler's Restaurant –
The bill was £60,

The tickets to Die Fledermouse
Were on his credit card,
The room away, the rail fare,
His collars lipstick-scarred,

The heavy gold, the cigarettes,
The A-la-Mode cut clothes,
The perfume and the Garfield toy,
Her single, deep-red rose.

He summed it up and totalled it
And never could see why
For love, but not for metal coin,
Her heart was his to buy.

The Garden of Chalice-Isle

I know an ancient garden by a wall
Where steady smiles and firm resolve ascend;
A gentle glade of hidden happiness
Set in a land where peace and honour tend.

Here in this rose-specked, green secluded isle,
Bright star-kissed lovers softly serenade;
No wrecking anger steals their scented air
Nor withering years their promises can jade.

Within this ground of compassed dignity
Eternal lovers' moods are new expressed;
Encouragements through structured praise exchanged,
And dreams, through still and quiet hope, addressed.

Enriching joy is shared in murmurings;
Each passing comment heard is positive;
High fluting birds and heavy, fragrant blooms
Suggest Chalice-Isle's way is how to live.

A cleanly flowing river of delight
Resounds with bubbling tunes exuberant;
Strong fountains of pure laughter richly play,
Requiring nothing mean nor petulant.

This glade shall form the centre of my earth:
Here weary men may laze and grow refreshed;
Here simple dreamers strengthen their resolve
To leave confusion in its web enmeshed.

Here, misery and sullenness must pause
And wait on peace. Then, like a gentle bell,
Its peeling music can refresh the soul
Till suffering shall cease at this deep well.

Its English fragrances perfume the world
And spread by contact to diminish pain,
Till all that mess of sad humanity
Can echo to its laughter once again.

The Testing Hour

It is the testing hour:

Two coal men pack their sacks of dust;
The air smells thick and brown;
With sparrows shouting drabby notes
Which drown the distant siren's wail.

Ten a.m. on Monday:

Loud office boys troop out for tea
And with unfeigned indifference –
As bronzey figures on a plinth –
Ignore redundant men across the square.

They hear the testing hour,
Whose wail calls not for them, "Attend!
Now test machinery and plant!"
The Job-Centre's their only call:
Another week's production on the square.

Three figures on a plinth

Stare far beyond thin shuffling queues;

Gaze far above young office boys.

The men they mimicked long ago

Set now like stone: their testing hour is done.

(Billingham centre, when ICI tested the alarm siren each week; May 1991)

In Praise of New Verse

The voice of our Laureate's dead –

Without crows or hawks, nothing's said!

If wit be desirous

Let Patten inspire us

When Royalty's fed, bed or wed.

Force

For the train of her life was up-pulling all the way
As she climbed each dreary track;
It was hauling her coach through the deeply wooded hills
In the high cut-sided track,
So that often she saw naught but rolling banks ahead,
With arched tree-branch kiss above,
Or some far distant fields with their placid grazing cows
And a hint of couples' love.

Each long tunnel fought held the sickly smoke of death,
And men's dead hands beckoned her back;
Yet she willed each great wheel to turn forward one more
time
Through the high cut-sided track,
And the cold air grew mist-filled to hide the noble trees
Which her faith alone kept leaved.
Was it only for this that her journey had begun?
Was there nothing she'd achieved?

Then was suddenly flashed though a break in the high bank
A brief glimpse of distant sea;
And she knew of an instant how high up she had come
From that glance at a far blue sea;
In her race she was high crags and heights above the rest,
And her pleasure was supreme
As she took in full measure the distance she had come
Far beyond her wildest dream.

And her ecstatic joy at the knowing was delight,
Though the walls closed in once more;
For that rapturous glimpse filled the centre of her soul
And her carriage she'd endure,
As she struggled ever up, ever seeming alone,
Now she knew t'was not in vain;
Now her journey had purpose beyond its dismal scene,
And her life was worth the pain.

Paper Up The Parlour

Paper up the parlour, dear, for Jane does come to tea,

So sweep the grate out clean then set the fire;

Add sparkle to the cream jug with clean linen on the tray,

And brush the carpet till its pile stands higher.

Wash the dishes thoroughly; hide cracked cups in the drawer;

Prepare a cake with crumpets buttered well.

Patch your dress with silken threads, dear, by the pocket where it's torn,

For Jane does come to tea and she's a swell.

I knew her once in childhood, dear, she danced and played like you;

She loved to paint and fill her life with fun.

But now she's grown and changed so much: you'll understand, one day...

And don't you dare to eat her jam and bun!

Youth's Death

What day, and what low hour caused youth to die?
Who killed that tender bud? Who stole her years?
Who came, with Falsehood's wraps and Cynic's tears,
To mourn her loss and passing with a sigh?

Bright Mirth and Summer had retired to bed;
Plain Laughter slipped away, but Sorrow came.
Conformity was there, and just the same,
Since Revelry and Innocence had fled.

Youth's simple cousin, Happiness, was lost,
And Aunty Curiosity had left;
The twin girls, Hope and Joy, had suffered theft,
But Hatred brought a shroud attired in Frost.

For some, Youth dies as ghostly Death draws near;
But hers was killed by Love's more bitter tear.

The Lord's Thumb Stone

Within this hill was set a stone
Beside the main road's course
Which, my old father lectured me,
Once saved a cart and horse.

And his sage father too recalled
This stone had saved a child:
When Carter Jones' horse ran amok
Then turned – its load unpiled.

This self-same stone the locals named
'The Lord's Thumb', hereabout,
And vowed it would in place remain
Till Domesday saw them out.

But progress would wear none o' that;
When widening of the lane,
They ripped the rock from out its bed
For concrete paths and drain.

Then, winter's night, when frost gripped firm,
A wagon out of Sleight
Slipped its brake and lurched across
To tumble on the height.

There, still, beneath the silent wreck,
A child's white hand made linger.
The locals now recall that vow
And call this bend 'God's Finger'.

Great Aunt Angelina

My Great Aunt Angelina wore
Red tights beneath her pinafore;
And with great swank she always swore
 She wanted to seem wealthy.

Last Spring she had a tummy pain
So took the Paris midnight train
And journeyed furtively to Spain –
 Her ostentation stealthy.

When she was turning ninety-two
She caught an esoteric 'flu;
With pallid skin and lips of blue
 She didn't look too healthy.

Her priest made haste to unction pour
But Great Aunt pushed him through the door,
And leapt from bed to tread Grouse Moor –
 It was the Glorious Twelfth.

To Theo Major

(Theodore Major 1908 – 1999)

Light touched your hand, and lay in solid folds
upon a hardboard canvas bed –
 because you could afford no more.

The silence of your dreams, the hollowed shell of hope,
the loneliness of memories unshared,
 eternally lie captured by your stroke.

This one bent frame will stretch, to light the universe
and share in art where none can go –
 or point a way to heaven.

Here one frail man shall struggle on against all fools
and critics who condemn an open mind:
 your courage shall inspire our dreams.

Within these dubious crumbling walls, unbridled love
makes proud your faith in truth and peace and joy;
 we need not speak – your art does tell it all.

After our first visit to him at Appley Bridge, 1992

The Gentle Knight

Ancient Tarot shows Death raging,
Not as ending, but as changing –
A soft transition from life known before.
Whispered love or sorrow's caging,
Naked infants mothers paging,
The death card is the opening of a door.

Though timid, stagnant, mortal,
The path is ours alone;
How shall we pass that portal
Into a room unknown?

Depicted there are fallen kings,
With crowns awry and broken rings,
Out-spread beneath the hooded rider's feet.
A maiden who no longer sings,
A bishop covered by angels' wings –
None ready to this solemn figure meet.

When death shall take the centre
Of this stage on which we're set,
Dare we his dark door enter
Or shall we fight him yet?

One figure stands upon that card,
Unfearing even death's drawn shard –
A tiny, smiling child runs out to greet.
Not charnel vaults, nor bodies charred;
For her, the passage is not hard,
With welcome flowers for gentle stranger's feet.

May we, child like, step out in peace
Beyond life's choking fears;
Accepting death as bold release
When that good knight appears.