



TIME
BLEW
AWAY
LIKE

DANDELION

SEED

—  POEMS BY
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Time blew away like dandelion seed
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Poems which are still being considered
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Sonnets

Song of Easter

When I was young I feared my growing old
lest, being old, I should want youth again,
or lest the growing old should cause me pain;
I knew the worth of silver less than gold.
I tried to hold the sun and not the moon,
I asked the clock to stop— it paid no heed!
Time blew away like dandelion seed,
as sure as day, the evening came too soon.

 This road I cannot tread the other way.

 The ages passed, and age has come to me.

 Yet still asleep I dream, awake I see,

 as sure as day brings night, the night brings day,
youth, sun and dandelion seed, and why?
They cannot have new life unless they die.



Song of All Souls' Day

I saw the bindweed curl about your tomb
Whereon I set a rose, now short of breath,
And marked the similarity of death
Between your chance to live, its time to bloom.
For though your maker overflowed your hours
Yet still upon your blossom climbed the weed;
You noticed but did nothing; thus its seed
Cast round the earth, and choked your budding flowers.

 But brazen trumpets round its conquering green

 This bindweed blossom, in the rose's stead;

 Just so, before you took this rosy bed

 You sometimes woke and showed what might have been.

But now your chance is gone as chances go.

I've learned your lesson. Let me find the hoe.



Song of New Year's Eve

Look to your Lord who gives you life.
This year must end as all the years.
You live here in the vale of tears.
This year brought toil, the next year strife.
For too, too soon we break our stay.
The end of things may be a birth.
The clouds will fade and take the earth.
Make fast your joy on New Year's Day.
 When dies a friend we weep and mourn.
 When babes are born we drink with cheer.
 But no man mourns when dies the year.
 When dies the age, may you be born.
Your death, your birth, are close at hand.
In him we trust. In him we stand.



A lamp to my feet

I heard there was a secret metric foot
that David knew was favoured by the Lord,
and when he penned the psalms he'd often put
this pattern the Almighty best adored
amongst the endless praise and imprecations;
unstressed, plus stressed, suffuses through his pages,
though hidden by the English of translations;
pentameters still echo down the ages.

 The spondee's spurned, and has been from the start;
 an anapaest's anathema, and grim.

 Though trochees may be near the Maker's heart,
 you'll never hear a dactyl in a hymn.

There's only one the Lord thinks worth a damn:
the sacred, the unchangeable iamb.



Netherlands

If anything should happen to The Hague,
if someday they abandon Amsterdam,
philosophers will take these strange and vague
descriptions, and derive each tree and tram
by mathematical necessity:
should nations shake their fists across the seas
with words of war, it follows there must be
a middle ground, a people loving peace.

And is this scrap alone a netherland?

Not so: we spend our nights beneath the sky,
and every country's low for us, who stand
a thousand miles below the lights on high;
if only I could learn to live as such,
and count myself as kindly as the Dutch.



Mother of trees

I know a tree whose apples are more sweet
and nourishing and fair than any other:

a person it's a privilege to meet,
a maker, a maintainer, and a mother.

Her branches bring delight to every day
from each repeating month that I remember:
we lie beneath her blossomed boughs in May
and eat her rosy apples in September.

Yet as she gives, she lives as more than merely
a giving tree, that spends itself in giving:
for still she's not consumed, though shining yearly
with ever-fiercer fires of joyous living;
her roots in earth, and sunlight on her brows
and every blessed child beneath her boughs.



Thomas

They named me for my granddad's father's father;
they said he'd caught consumption in his youth
and left his son an orphan. But the truth
I learned on reading registers is rather
more horrible, but easy to explain:
his wife had died. And Thomas, left behind,
drowned deep in pain, drank gin, and lost his mind,
died sobbing in a home for the insane.

And in my brain, statistic turned to story:
a broken heart, and lovers dying young,
beyond the brittle lies of broken lungs.

But, grandpa, may I hope we'll meet in glory,
and over soda, on the other side,
I'll let you know I bear your name with pride?



Some folk are born with knowledge of their goal

Some folk are born with knowledge of their goal.

I've met them, though I'm not like that myself;

I'm wandering through life, a placid soul,

content to leave adventures on the shelf.

I've loved and lived without a way to know

the field where I should strive to be the best:

to pan for gold, or be a CEO,

or cure disease, or conquer Everest;

and likewise, you're a Poohstick in the stream:

you drift through life, without an end in mind.

We came together, neither with a dream,

both happy with our futures undefined,

our hoping open-ended; yet it seems

our life together's fashioned from our dreams.



For and about my friend Mary Mactavish and her husband Casey.

On being incompetent in Welsh poetry

My Welsh is just not good enough for verse.

My *dw i'n hoffi coffi*'s lacking fizz;

cynghanedd is pedestrian or worse;

I wish it wasn't so, but there it is.

My struggle's still to learn, as yours to teach,

and so my *englyn*'s still in English sung,

and aching *awdls* cower out of reach,

and English shows the thinness of the tongue.

But here's my goal: some month the *Gorsedd* meet

so many miles ahead... I may be there

to share my bitter words, my verses sweet,

at common table. Never mind the chair.

But that's a dream, and not what's on the card,

and much as I might dream... for now... I'm barred.



Margaret

They never told about the cold, cold morn,
the painful blue and cheery winter sky;
the friendly warm embrace of toothy yawn,
the reeking of its breath; its marble eye;
the dragon gets a mention in her tale
but just that Margaret entered its insides:
another hero trapped inside the scales,
but nothing of the dragon's life, besides.

They say the beast was Satan in a glamour,
but that's all nonsense, since the virgin matron
who made her crucifix a makeshift hammer
is ever since considered childbirth's patron;
because it gave her birth, and spared her bones,
she'd visit every week for tea and scones.



Mary

Her soul proclaimed the greatness of the Lord
who dwelt within her belly, and her mind.
The light shines on, the humble are restored,
and food and mercy given to mankind.
That day she saw the everlasting light
she memorised, and treasured up inside,
investing for the fading of her sight
the hope that living light had never died;
 till hope itself within her arms lay dying,
 a frozen journey, ready to embark,
 and nothing more is left for her but trying
 to comprehend the greatness of the dark;
yet somewhere shines the light, in spite of that,
and silently she sighed magnificat.



Oliver's eulogy

It saddened me to know you from afar:
I never heard the whimpers that you gave
when scratched beneath the chin, or saw you save
your mistress from a cat, or passing car;
you never barked as I approached your door;
you never licked my face; I never heard
your nails on wood, or saw you chase a bird,
and now you're gone, I cannot any more.

 You know, it makes me wonder, Oliver:
 I've usually dismissed as pious lies
 those tales of rainbow bridges in the skies
 where faithful friends will wait as once they were
to meet us in the lands beyond the light.
But since you've left, I find I hope they're right.



On first looking into an A to Z

My talent (or my curse) is getting lost:
my routes are recondite and esoteric.
Perverted turns on every road I crossed
have dogged my feet from Dover up to Berwick.
My move to London only served to show
what fearful feast of foolishness was mine:
I lost my way from Tower Hill to Bow,
and rode the wrong way round the Circle Line.
 In nameless London lanes I wandered then
 whose tales belied my tattered A to Z,
 and even now, in memory again
 I plod despairing, Barking in my head,
still losing track of who and where I am,
silent, upon a street in Dagenham.



Shattered

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said... (I couldn't comprehend his speech;
he spoke a tongue I didn't understand.
It might have meant "a statue's on a beach"...
at least, he let me see vacation snaps
and there was quite a lot of sand about
and one old statue, African perhaps,
or Indian, I'm in a bit of doubt.)*

*So anyway, I saw the statue's face:
its nose was crinkled, like a lord who sniffs.*

And then there was some writing on the base;

I couldn't read it. It was hieroglyphs.

*It all seems kind of strange, and far away,
but must have had *some* meaning in its day.*



Two poems

With mind in neutral on the train today
I thought about a poem that I'd seen
ten years, four thousand miles, a life away
inside a cheap religious magazine.
The rhymes were forced, the metre was a sham,
the metaphors far-fetched and rather trite,
the feeling shallow-told, yet here I am
remembering the words again tonight.

I wrote another poem, as a kid:
another paper bought it for a prize.

Ten thousand pairs of eyes saw what I did.

I wonder if, from all those pairs of eyes,
still, somewhere on this planet, I might find
some reader with my poem in their mind.



Finals

I knew an undergraduate at college
who spent his days asleep, or drinking beer;
he never needed academic knowledge
until the day of reckoning drew near,
when, as he found his time was growing short,
he'd borrow books, or photocopy them,
and, downing frantic coffee by the quart,
he'd burn the midnight oil, till five a.m.

It puzzles me a little when I find
the ones who press conversion at the end
expecting atheists to change their mind
in panic, like our coffee-drinking friend,
with fingers crossed and hoping for the best
in case this life's continuously assessed.



Pittsburgh

This moment, I am God upon this town.
I compass every window spread below:
each pinprick point in total looking down
a pattern only overseers know.
I feel the human flow and ebb each minute
perceiving both with every passing breath;
each lighted room has home and hoping in it,
each darkening a sleeping, or a death.

And nothing, nothing makes it wait to darken;
had I the power it should be shining still.

Some other one you have to hope will hearken,
some other on some yet more lofty hill—

whom priests and people plead to, not to be
as powerless to hold these lights as me.



Thomas Cantilupe

I have no patron saint. But if I should
I doubt that Doubting Thomas would be him.
Though well he worked with what he understood,
I cannot emulate my eponym:
too squeamish still to press your bloody palms,
too cowardly to bear the cross you bore.
too blind to fall and sing believing psalms.
With other saints called Thomas, all the more.
 But then there's Thomas Cantilupe's career,
 So concrete: he was born in 1218,
 was chancellor of Oxford for a year,
 gave countless counsellings to king and queen
and years of selfless service to his see;
and lives today recalled by God, and me.



404

So many years have passed since first you sought
the lands beyond the edges of the sky,
so many moons reflected in your eye,
(familiar newness, fear of leaving port),
since first you sought, and failed, and learned to fall,
(first hope, then cynicism, silent dread,
 the countless stars, still counting overhead
 the seconds to your final voyage of all...)
 and last, in glory gold and red around
 your greatest search, your final quest to know!
yet... ashes drift, the embers cease to glow,
and darkened life in frozen death is drowned;
and ashes on the swell are seen no more.
The silence surges. *Error 404.*



Among those born as humans on the earth

Among those born as humans on the earth,
within their mind the mirrored planet lies:
the universe contained behind their eyes,
more tangible with every day since birth.
Within, each place you love is held for you
perfected; every friendship dwells therein;
 and if you dare, a thousand tales begin,
 and if you close your eyes you'll see it's true.
 Within that place a forest lies, more real
 than all on earth, and all you count as dear,
wherever they may be, you'll find them here,
just as in life of sight, of sound, of feel;
there you and I will stay, and always be:
and when you need a hug, come visit me.



And so I ask to share your thunderstorms

Here as I sit and number pretty jewels,
the colours small and shining as they stand
arrayed or strewn, in lines as though unplanned
and re-repeating words of other fools
anew, to show my more pedestrian mind
reminders that I still can think anew,
just on a whim I look across to you
and in your eyes and on your page I find
 eternity, infinity on earth,
 the rainbow stretched to where the planet ends
 the thunderstorms themselves your willing friends,
 the rains that drown the land to bring its birth...
my petty counters fade: your rain transforms,
and so I ask to share your thunderstorms.



Carmen

Your poetry holds picnics in the places
where some would say that words should never go;
there's strange delight in passing through those spaces
where nouns are tame and verbs are safe to know
to kingdoms where you colour past the lines,
where adjectives and adverbs long to tread—
the other side of *do not enter* signs
where rulers cannot reach the words you said.

 Yet nothing's for the sake of mere transgression:
 your words below, your metaphors above,
 with every part of speech in your possession
 together make a verbal kind of love;
conceiving thought anew, and giving birth
to cast and recreate the very earth.



For Fin

When your creator took her crayon box
That day she thought to draw you all alive,
She found a certain green to sketch your locks,
Another green to show you grow, you thrive;
A green of richest thought unlimited,
A green to match the green of your creation,
A green to go, to boldly forge ahead,
A green for lands of peaceful meditation;
 The Greene King, standing proud with all his queens,
 Jack-in-the-green, surrounded by his trees;
 A thousand other shades of other greens;
 The greenness of the deepness of the seas;
And I, I fall and marvel at the light,
A million greens, like fireworks in the night.



For Fin – ii

That day she thought to draw you all alive

She drew your outline, sketched you, and refined

And shaped your eyes, that surely saw arrive

The laughing people in the frame behind,

The humans, dogs and kittens, trailing plants,

Who fill your background; all you love are here

Around you in the middle of the dance,

And as you watch, still more of them appear

Beyond your face within the frame advancing

Children and relatives and loves and friends

Holding their merry hands in merry dancing

Extending off beyond the picture's ends;

I know your other folk would say the same:

It's such an honour dancing in your frame.



For Fin – iii

*She found a certain green to sketch your locks,
A deeper green, a perfect green attaining;
And now another from her crayon-stocks;
Refreshing and repeating what's remaining:
She bleaches it and tries another shade
Then leaves it for a while and grows it out,
Returns it to the colours that she made
Begins to work again, and turns about;
 And why this careful labour to provide you
 With perfect colours captured in your hair?
 She knows your colours mirror what's inside you,
 Eternal greens within you everywhere;
And still beneath, the ever-growing you
Shall dye, and yet shall live with life anew.*



For Fin – iv

Another green to show you grow, you thrive;
Out from the snow the snowdrop breaks in flower.
Who could have called this sleeping bulb alive?
Yet buried patiently it waits its hour,
Counting the snowflakes slowly settling
Their weight upon the heavy earth above;
One day its Winter changes to its Spring.
Who can predict the power of life and love?
 Hope that at last the final frost is dead.
 Faith that the Winter dies and Spring shall rise.
 Love for the life that up through blades has bled.
 Joy to a hundred children's waiting eyes;
For every hour it slept beneath the ground,
A thousand wondering eyes shall gather round.



For Fin – v

A green of richest thought unlimited.

I try to say I love you every day:

I know I keep repeating things I've said.

Perhaps I'll try to phrase another way:

Suppose I counted all the money ever

From now until when Abel risked his neck

With my accountants, who were very clever,

And wrote it on a record-breaking cheque...

It wasn't half your empathising, was it?

Your thoughts are treasured more than bank accounts;

The bank won't put your loving on deposit.

And could they take it, given such amounts?

The jealousy of cash makes misers blind,

And who needs money when you have your mind?



For Fin – vi

A green to match the green of your creation!

She took her time in sketching out your features,
Shading you well, and, drawn with dedication,
You took the pen she gives to all her creatures
And set about some drawing of your own,
Filling the art with arc and line and shade,
Showing your work the care that you were shown,
And making them as well as you were made;

 And much as life your drawing hand was giving,

 Another life from deep within you drew:

 A life, not merely likeness of the living,

 So separate, yet such a part of you:

Who finds your baby-picture on the shelf
And smiles and finds you, showing you yourself.



For Fin – vii

A green to go, to boldly forge ahead,
Should shine on traffic lights for every person.
If you should find a colour in its stead
That stops you— not an arrow for diversion,
To Edmondsbury, Hatfield and the North,
Or any other place that's worth the going—
But rather reds that block your going forth;
If traffic signals freeze your days from flowing,
 Your life is green and you deserve the green.
 And if you try to go about your day
 And greens are coming few and far between,
 And reds and ambers blare about your way:
If so, I pray your days to hold instead
All green, and never amber, never red.



For Fin – viii

A green for lands of peaceful meditation.

You call: Come stand upon my sacred ground,
Come sit and breathe the peace of contemplation,
Come feel the grass beneath, the lilies round,
Come sleep, come wake, and drink the quiet waters,
Come to the maytree, blackbird, waterfall;
Come know yourselves the planet's sons and daughters.
The people pass and pause, and still you call:
 It's waiting for you when you ask to try it:
 Peace (and the air) cannot be bought or sold.
 You'll never gain it if you try to buy it:
 It's not an asset crumpled fists can hold.
All that you have is nothing you can lose;
You stand on sacred ground. Remove your shoes.



For Fin – ix

The Greene King, standing proud with all his queens,

Guarding a land of oaks and aches and cold.

It's not a normal place, by any means,

This island of the oldest of the old,

Where bow the ancient oak and ash and thorn

In homage to a figure on a hill;

Deep in the hills where Wayland Smith was born

You stand, an English body, English still.

For odes and age and air and ale have filled you,

Made you their own and promised you belong;

And since their homesick longing hasn't killed you,

I think you'll be returning to their song;

Come, take your time, and sit and drink with me!

What say you to another cup of tea?



For Fin – x

*Jack-in-the-green, surrounded by his trees,
Had given birth to leafy life aplenty,
He'd introduced his firs by fours and threes,
And sowed his seedling cedars by the twenty;
The field was filled with trunks and twigs and roots,
The soil was sound and fertile, and the fall
Would fill the forest floor with growing shoots,
And none but Jack was there to watch it all
 Until you came to wander through this field,
 To walk within the ways within the wood;
 Your mind was brought to peace, your spirit healed,
 The forest given form and blessed as good;*
Jack-in-the-green will wonder all his days:
your presence never ceases to a maze.



For Fin – xi

A thousand other shades of other greens:

“Leaf”, “emerald”, “sea”, “bottle”, off the cuff;

“Viridian” (uncertain what it means),

But there’s so many. Names are not enough.

Yet, in another life, your maker might

Have picked you out among primeval glades

To work as keeper of the rainbow’s light

And in another Eden name the shades;

 If so, the planet’s poets will rejoice

 That, given life together with a name,

 The colours sing a stronger, clearer voice,

 And every hue will never seem the same:

Each of the shades looks loving back to you,

Its namer and the one who made it new.



For Fin– xii

The greenness of the deepness of the seas:

A home to fish of many a scaly nation.

Follow the shoals; the smallest one of these

Swims as a fishy summit of creation.

Yet every one's indebted to the shoal,

All subtle in their difference from the rest:

A fish of friends, a member of the whole,

A mix of traits, a taking of the best.

So you and those of us you love so well

Will grow along with other friends' increase,

Required ingredients in the living-spell:

Each person brings a necessary peace.

The level-headed people mix with mystics,

And both are living mixtures of holistics.



For Fin – xiii

*And I, I fall and marvel at the light,
This changing light that grows throughout the years,
Extinguished not by hardship nor by night
Nor foolishness nor sadness nor by tears.
When we were separated by the sea
I wished myself amidst your myriad days.
My wish was mirrored in your missing me;
Your maker joined our wishes, joined our ways;
 She placed our hands on one another's heart,
 And you and I began a lifelong learning
 Of one another, like a magic art
 Whose telling grows with every page's turning,
And holds our friendship as a growing bond
Till seventy years old, and still beyond.*



For Fin – xiv

A million greens, like fireworks in the night.

I fear this sonnet never can be done.

So many colours burst upon my sight

I cannot tell the tale of every one.

But I can tell how vast excitement fills me

When all the flying sparkles fill the sky;

I want to tell the world how much it thrills me

To hold you close, reflected in your eye;

 I want to tell in all my earthly days

 And yet beyond, of what you mean to me;

 I want to say I love the myriad ways

 Of what you are and what you'll grow to be;

These counts combining made the building-blocks

When your creator took her crayon box.



Crossing a bridge in fog

I see for miles, yet all upon my sight
outside my carriage are the endless seas,
the shifting clouds of fog, the tops of trees
that rock a simple path through poisoned white.
And at their feet, some sodden deep in mire?
Some sunk Atlantis sleeping 'neath the weight?
or but a borough innocent of hate,
Not well in hearts, but dead of hope and fire?

A dormitory town? Or have you died?

Though built by stone, your pulse is nearly lost;
though faint your breath, your bridge is still uncrossed:
return before you reach the other side...

O land so drowned in dreams beyond a doubt
dissolve your heartfelt fog, or be spat out.



May

The autumn leaves an ill-defined unease
that (while the summer flourished) I'd ignored.
The litany begins. We can't afford
the oil we need to buy before the freeze;
they've forecast snow: we need to fix the tiles
that blew away before the summer came,
fit plastic shrouds on every window-frame;
there isn't any salt in stock for miles.

Yet soon I'll wake, and March will fall behind,
and though the winter's dark was death, it's done,
as every tree salutes the sudden sun
with leaves that bring the healing of my mind:
a spring to clean away the winter's dust.
My will returns. May will return. It must.



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If Lady Gaga wrote sonnets

How do I love thee? In a way that's bad,
by which I mean so bad it's almost good.
I need you, and you know it drives me mad.
I want you more than any other could.
And we could write romances, you and me.
I want to hear your Hitchcock movie schtick.
I want your everything. I hope it's free.
I want you in my window, and you're sick.
 And yet you know my raving is a sign
 I'd rather we were paramours than friends.
 You're outlawed from the moment that you're mine
 Until the day our bad romancing ends;
I'll love you in a leather-studded bra.
Rah gaga gaga roma ooh la la.



Sans everything

Remember all the old familiar faces?

Helvetica's the nicest of the lot.

Gill Sans and *Johnston* take the second places;

It seems as though the serif has been shot.

Verdana has its own intrinsic glories;

The fairest text that ever left my desk

Was set in these— for essays or for stories.

But using them for sonnets? That's grotesque.

And gravestones are a special case as well:

A mortal lack of serif fonts would be

A certain kind of typographic hell

With *Comic Sans* for all eternity.

In death, the Roman lettering is best.

May flights of serifs sing thee to thy rest.



For Alex

Within this world, there waits a patient wood
that longs for recreation by your touch
to fall, be sold, be sawn, and seen as good.
Its oaks have pinned their hopes to suffer such;
its maples dream as much as they are able,
and every aspen whispers to itself:
they pine for you to bring them to the table,
or give them self-assurance as a shelf.

Then there's yourself. The elements essential
within the raw material of you
are scintillating stock, with star potential;
still, steadily you work, and make them new.
And beauty's born, no matter where it lies,
for all the world reflects behind your eyes.



Robert Dennis Thurman

This day we lay the universe to rest:
behind this pair of eyes that lived and died
a mirror-image, faithfully expressed,
reflects a mirror-universe inside
all memories. This day we thank the Lord
for all these shining moments held within
this mind where human memories are stored.
And this shall be the moment they begin
 to shatter, to become ten thousand stories
 reflecting human life in all its beauty:
 each smile, each poem, every sunset's glories,
 that call to those remaining of their duty
to see this story speaks and never fails;
to call, recall again ten thousand tales.



Requiem for an oak

I thought I saw an execution there.
The fascinated public gathered round.
The cheerful hangmen stripped the victim bare
And built their gibbet high above the ground.
The rope was taut, my wildness filled with fear.
I saw him fall. I heard his final cry.
Yet when the hangmen left I ventured near
To find my fault: I'd never seen him die.
 In fact, I think he'd died some years ago.
 There's blackness of decay in every breath.
 The sound of flies was all that's left to grow,
 Now free to come and feast upon his death;
Prince of the trees, I have a simple plea:
I will not die till death has come to me.



For night can only hide, and not destroy

When once I stop and take account of these
that God has granted me upon the earth,
the loves, the friends, the work, that charm and please
these things I count inestimable worth;
when once I stop, I learn that I am rich
beyond the dreams of emperors and kings
and light is real, and real these riches which
exceed the worth of all material things...

when thus I stop, I cannot understand
when few and feeble sunbeams cannot find
their way into that drab and dreary land,
the darkness of the middle of my mind.

yet darkness cannot take away my joy,
for night can only hide, and not destroy.



I always tried to write about the light

I always tried to write about the light
that inks these eyes in instant tint and hue,
that chances glances, sparkles through the night,
fresh as the morning, bloody as the dew;
the light that leaves your image in my mind,
that shining silver, shared for everyone,
that banishes the darkness from the blind,
the circle of the surface of the sun.

And when your light is shining far from mine,
when scores of stars are standing at their stations,
we'll weave our fingers round them as they shine,
and write each other's name on constellations;
and so we'll stand, and still, however far,
lock eyes and wish upon a single star.



Here from the hilltop down towards the dell

Here from the hilltop down towards the dell
I'll wander till this evening, I don't care.
An afternoon all fertile with the spell
Still calling me: be still and drink the air.
And so I'll pause, and ponder as I hike,
I'll take my time before the valley floor,
And meditate, and maybe, if I like,
Climb back again and walk the path once more.
 Full twenty years I've walked this hillside trail,
 And every time it makes itself anew;
 Unveiling as I head towards the vale,
 A flower unseen, an unexpected view...
Again I lose my footing with a scream,
Fall forty feet, and drown beneath the stream.



Sleep

They say my future follows on your past,
Commanded not to love you by the wise:
They say he never truly lives who lies
A captive still, and by your charms held fast:
Your warmth was torn by chilly morning air,
through daytime heat your image in my eye
would ever grow, would wane, would never die,
and with the night, you'd once again be there.

 You took my life, and took away my breath;

 You took my world, and left your words untrue.

 No dreams are left I haven't left with you,

 And still you keep reminding me of death.

I've abdicated kingdoms for your sake:

And yet, and yet...I wish myself awake.



Transfiguration

What's seen is seen, and cannot be unknown;
and so he turned my soul, and turns it still.
We'd walked a while, just him and us alone;
we'd wandered up some ordinary hill.
The air was cold. The conversation died.
I wondered if I'd left the stove alight.
The curtains of the world were torn aside,
and naked glory overwhelmed my sight;
 and oh, the voice, that called to him by name,
 so comforting, so terrible to hear:
 that man I knew, the same, yet not the same,
 touches my arm, and tells me not to fear;
but as I raise my eyes, the light is gone,
and life, and something more, must carry on.



Written as part of a Lenten meditation series at Christ Church, Pottstown.

Attention

Perhaps I have forgotten how to read.
I mean, I haven't lost the alphabet
but more and more I'm starting to forget
the way to focus in the form I need
to read a novel; more and more I find
my mental structures seem to fall apart
before the end, before I even start,
with only wrecks remaining in my mind
that sink, or blow away in gales, or burn;
I long for clarity, and for the power
to concentrate on reading for an hour.
If only I could read a book to learn
the way to build a house that won't collapse.
I have forgotten how to read, perhaps.



When first we met

When first we met, I was so young in years,
I feared the unfamiliar smiles you give;
I found they were the keys to fit my fears,
to break my cell, to run away to live;
when first we met, I was so young in wiles,
I stumbled round the world at every turning;
I did not know the magic of your smiles,
the wisdom I could read there, and the learning;
when first we met, however, I was old
 in thinking, slow and shuffled with a cane;
 my mind forgot the path to run and play
 and dragged its feet through mires of mental pain
 when first we met, when first we met. Today
morning by morning, in your smiles, I find
each waking moment makes me young in mind.



Song of Lent

O Lord, withhold your wrath against my wrong!

Be merciful to me— I faint and fail.

My vision draws to darkness, and I wail:

How long until you rescue me? How long?

Still groaning, since my strength is spent with groans,

By night I weep until I drench my bed,

My sight grows dim from sorrowing and dread,

My pains absorb my spirit, sleep and bones.

My Father, turn and save us as you said!

Display your love declared to us of old:

No hearts or mouths can praise you once grown cold,

Nor any man remember you when dead.

Away! The Lord has heard me call his name!

And all my foes shall surely fall in shame.



Take a pew

My brother's hairy. I'm a smoother man.
I entered by the exit, without knowing,
They told me off, you know, but I began
con...sidering: do *you* know where you're going?

I climbed a hill when I was in my teens,
And my companion vomited on me.
Still, life is rather more like tinned sardines,
And all of us are looking for the key.

Some find the key, they pull the cover wide,
and eat sardines, so fishy and so fine.

There's still the bit you cannot reach, inside.

Is there in yours? I know there is in mine.

Remember this when life is hard and scary:
that I'm a smooth, my brother is an hairy.



The reader will no doubt be baffled without a reference to Alan Bennett's *Take a Pew* in the revue *Beyond the Fringe*.

Too many sonnets

“Too many sonnets”, growls the curt rejection.

Too many sonnets? Can the news be true?

This polished work is workshopped to perfection,
a classic form recast to something new.

But still, I'll keep them coming while I'm living,

and when I'm old and sinking into death

I'll write a final sonnet of thanksgiving

and gasp the sestet in my final breath.

And then in death, what nightmares may inspire?

Within the circle of the realms infernal

reserved for sonneteers, I'll write in fire

to send to *Styx Review*, or some such journal,

and if there's surplus sonnets there in hell...

well... then I may compose a villanelle.

Villanelles

The day I die

My inside's on the out, the day I die,
Though (here and now) my inside's on the in.
Spread out like spirit butter on the sky,
the sunrise flaunts its colours in my eye
like all I'm not, sequestered here in sin.
My inside's on the out, the day I die,
yet here the world's outside and I am I,
divided from the cosmos by my skin.
Spread out like spirit butter on the sky
the clouds reflect my soul, the lights on high
are macrocosms matching what's within;
My inside's on the out. The day I die
is creeping slowly closer. By and by
will freedom of my captive self begin,
spread out like spirit butter on the sky.
And separated out, I still may sigh,
The waiting's brief, the barrier is thin;
My inside's on the out, the day I die,
Spread out like spirit butter on the sky.



And yet you show surprise

The world's so queer, and yet you show surprise
to find him solid in the midday light.

He looks at you with strangely laughing eyes.

You told yourself you're sure to recognise
the green-clad arms, the ring upon the right;
the world's so queer, and yet you show surprise?

His name won't pass your lips. You know... those guys.

You know his name. At least you think you might.

He looks at you with strangely laughing eyes.

The happy folk? And after many tries
you force a smile, a single smile, polite.

The world's so queer, and yet you show surprise...

You've seen me here before, contrariwise;

You can't pretend you don't recall the sight.

He looks at you with strangely laughing eyes.

(Your sister's outer clothing all of lies.)

(Your brother was a changeling in the night.)

The world's so queer, and yet you show surprise.

He looks at you with strangely laughing eyes.



Gods

I have a friend who doubles as a god.
I'd seen the tell-tale signs I can't deny
for years before I realised it was odd.

A greener grass is growing where he's trod;
his bitter is immune from running dry.
I have a friend who doubles as a god,

a silent friend, who'd smile at me and nod;
I'd known him, and his one remaining eye
for years before I realised it was odd.

You're staring at me, thinking "silly sod".
But no, it's not just him: I don't know why.
I have a friend who doubles as a god:

her flesh is stars; with storms her feet are shod;
I'd noticed she was goddess of the sky
for years before I realised it was odd.

These people give my mind a gentle prod.
"The least of these you comfort: it was I."
I'd had a friend who doubled as a god
for years before I realised it was odd.



Metaphor

A metaphor's a gentle curse
that darkens life with soft implying:
or so I learned from reading verse.

A blanket is a woollen hearse.
A lover's word is widows' sighing.
A metaphor's a gentle curse.

And sex is just a human purse
with prices, goods, and people buying,
or so I learned from reading verse:

transactions made we can't reverse:
a one-way street, a kind of dying.
A metaphor's a gentle curse,

though dying is a friendly nurse
with copper coins to ease your crying,
or so I learned from reading verse.

I'm left to wonder which is worse:
to hear your truth, or see you lying.
A metaphor's a gentle curse,
or so I learned from reading verse.



First published in *Tilt-a-Whirl*.

A ghost complains about blackberries

And I have nothing else to do again
but walk these halls and wish I wasn't here,
but picking berries in a country lane.

A shadow is my face, the dust my brain,
my voice is but an echo in your ear.

And I have nothing else to do again
but counting every pace to keep me sane.

Dead as I am, I've nothing else to fear.
(But, picking berries in a country lane...)

Within me lives the spectre of a pain,
the ache of endless summer, yesteryear,
and I have nothing else to do again
but live in memory without my chain
and walk an aimless autumn Cambridgeshire,
but picking berries in a country lane.

Each universe must reach its long refrain.

A moment all my chains must disappear

And I'll have nothing else to do again

But picking berries in a country lane.



Angels

This wall you build around angelic things
to keep their halos shiny-bright, instead
you'll never hear the sound of downy wings.

These Precious Moments smiles and wedding-rings
(for mixed-sex couples only), when they wed,
this airtight wall around angelic things,

a thousand miles from where a seraph sings
God's love for hated folk and underfed;
you'll never hear the sound of downy wings

unless you break the prejudice that brings
the boundary where angels fear to tread,
this airtight wall around angelic things

that shuts out angelic visitings,
or when you too are dying on your bed
you'll never hear the sound of downy wings.

you never know with whom they'll break their bread,
or so the writer to the Hebrews said;
this wall you build around angelic things
will never hear the sound of downy wings.



A small hotel

If life should ever leave you left behind
just take a holiday. I'll stay with you
within a small hotel I call my mind.

A quieter place to stay you'd never find.
I'm hoping you'll remember what to do
if life should ever leave you left behind;

remember me, if you should be so kind.
And though I sometimes decorate in blue
within a small hotel I call my mind,

in every room I've written and I've signed
a note reminding you my love is true,
if life should ever leave you left behind;

and every evening finds us intertwined;
and every morning finds the bed as new
within a small hotel I call my mind.

A week becomes a century or two;
and when you're checking out, I'll follow too,
if life should ever leave you left behind
within a small hotel I call my mind.



Song against Twitter

I tried to say: *you make my life complete,*
you put my puzzle pieces into place.

But then I tried to send it as a tweet.

It didn't fit. I thought I could delete
one part, about the joys of your embrace;
I tried to say: *you make my life complete,*

but still it was too long. I thought I'd cheat
ByMergingWordsAndUsingCamelCase.
But then I tried to send it as a tweet.

It failed again. I must admit defeat.
Like Fermat's margin, Twitter lacks the space
to let me say *you make my life complete.*

It makes the longer forms seem obsolete.
But even Petrarch's work would meet disgrace
if cut and scaled to send it as a tweet!

And somehow public posts seem indiscreet.
I think I'd rather whisper to your face
the message that *you make my life complete,*
and far too full to post it as a tweet.



Triolets

For all the words I mean to say

For all the words I mean to say
that I can squeeze inside a book...

I've written them, another day.

For all the words I mean to say

I'll say them in another way

and give my love a second look

for all the words I mean to say

that I can squeeze inside a book.



For it's late in the night

For it's late in the night
and you're heading to bed.

And I'm sure that you're right
for it's late in the night
but I wish that I might

be with you instead,
for it's late in the night
and you're heading to bed.



Circadian rhythm

I'm not at my best
 when the morning is new;
when the sun's in the west
I'm not at my best;
and most of the rest
 is a crappy time too.
I'm not at my best
 when the morning is new.



15th February

Today's just a day
That's not Valentine.
No roses, no wine.
Today's just a day
I still want to say
I'm glad that you're mine.
Today's just a day
That's not Valentine.



Since the day doesn't store

Since the day doesn't store,
 and the seconds can't stay,
each moment's no more.

Since the day doesn't store,
when you're seventy-four,
 I'll kiss you good day;
since the day doesn't store.
 and the seconds can't stay.



The echoes of an amber god

Electric sparkles in your touch,
the echoes of an amber god.
You fill my batteries with such
electric sparkles in your touch,
that Tesla would have charged too much
and Franklin dropped his lightning-rod:
electric sparkles in your touch,
the echoes of an amber god.



As I love you anew

As I love you anew
 for the rest of my life,
I haven't a clue
(as I love you anew)
what other folks do
 without you for a wife;
as I love you anew
 for the rest of my life.



As the drawing shall tell

As the drawing shall tell
 and the paper responds,
some enchantment just fell,
as the drawing shall tell...
in a paper for spell
 with your pencils as wands,
as the drawing shall tell
 and the paper responds.



Before the sun begins to set

Before the sun begins to set
 we'll share another cup of tea;
the kettle's never settled yet
 before the sun begins to set,
and every morning since we met
 you've shared your joyful life with me;
before the sun begins to set
we'll share another cup of tea.



Water

My health needs are few,
but water comes first.

I tell you, it's true:

My health needs are few,

And water is you.

I'm aching with thirst.

My health needs are few

but water comes first.



To sleep next to you

To sleep next to you
 when the weather is cold
is trusted and true.

To sleep next to you
is decades from new
 yet it never grows old
to sleep next to you
 when the weather is cold.



Reality checkpoint

Is this my home ground?

We'd lived here, it's true.

But what I have found

is this, my home ground,

is town all around

full of empty of you.

Is this my home ground?

We'd lived here. It's true.



Fin

Where poets tell about a Fin,
her mind is where adventures are.
Adventurers may well begin,
where poets tell about a Fin,
to seek, to find, to stand within
the sunlight of her burning star;
where poets tell about a Fin.
Her mind is where adventures are.



For you are the sun

For you are the sun
and you are the thunder.

In sunlight I run
for you are the sun
that fills me with fun
that fills me with wonder
for you are the sun
and you are the thunder.



I'd write you a verse

I'd write you a verse
like the moon in the dark,

like a muttering curse.

I'd write you a verse
from better to worse,

from muffled to stark,

I'd write you a verse
like the moon in the dark.



If the world is your stage

But you're clutching a script
 if the world is your stage.
You've mumbled, you've slipped,
but you're clutching a script
and the binding is ripped
 and you're missing a page;
but you're clutching a script
 if the world is your stage.



I heard this tale about a queen

I heard this tale about a queen
 whose anger rose against a cliff
she coloured crimson, shade unclean.

I heard this tale about a queen...

I think I'd cleanse it back, with green
 and live with you beside it, if

I heard this tale about a queen
 whose anger rose against a cliff.



In depths of darkness out of doors

In depths of darkness out of doors
 in thunderstorms, in pouring rain,
the kisses on my mind are yours.
In depths of darkness, out of doors,
I'll bide my time until it pours
 and lose myself in you again
in depths of darkness out of doors
 in thunderstorms, in pouring rain.



May our minds overflow

May our minds overflow
to the seas of the soul
as we love and we grow
may our minds overflow
from their riverbeds, so
two halves become whole.

May our minds overflow
to the seas of the soul.



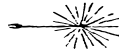
Minimal pairs

For you
 my dear
anew
for you
all through
 the year;
for you
 my dear.



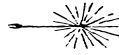
The fall

The fall will unwind
 the shrivelling day,
the works of my mind
the fall will unwind,
the key left behind
 and longing for May:
the fall will unwind
 the shrivelling day.



More deep than my heart

More deep than my heart
 or the roots of my brain:
the smiles you impart,
more deep than my heart,
pull me back to the start
 and I'm falling again,
more deep than my heart
 or the roots of my brain.



More love's in your eye

More love's in your eye
 than I can remember,
than stars in the sky.

More love's in your eye
than blackberries, high
 in lanes in September.

More love's in your eye
 than I can remember.



The smoke of your hair

Asleep in your bed
 with the smoke of your hair
where dreams lie unsaid
asleep in your bed;
the fires in your head
 who create and prepare
asleep in your bed
 with the smoke of your hair.

The smoke of your hair
 in your sleep, in your bed
is strewn through the air.
The smoke of your hair
from the fires within, where
 new worlds will be bred:
the smoke of your hair
 in your sleep, in your bed.



Ballades
(and attempts)

Dear Sir...

Dear Sir:— This application form,
from one potential employee,
will tell you how I should perform.
I have a first-class B.Sc.,
ten years of writing ANSI C,
some Java; Perl with DBI;
and tendencies to wander free
and gaze, all wordless, at the sky.

I know perhaps it's not the norm
to mention this on one's CV.
I wonder if you'd just transform
the job I'm asking for, to be
not writing code, but poetry.
Do ask your boss. It's worth a try.
He'd sing, himself, when he was three,
and gaze, all wordless, at the sky.

I'd stay till ten beneath a warm
duvet, and then I'd climb a tree,
my face upheld towards the storm,
or paddle barefoot in the sea.
Perhaps a friend comes round for tea.
Perhaps among the corn we'd lie
in silent solidarity
and gaze, all wordless, at the sky.

Sir, I enclose an S.A.E.
I wonder if you might reply
and leave your desk to run with me,
and gaze, all wordless, at the sky.



Stations of the Cross

I watched from Farringdon as Satan fell;
I've battled for my soul at Leicester Square;
I've laid a ghost with Oystercard and bell;
I've tracked the wolf of Wembley to his lair;
I've drawn Heathrow's enchantment in rotation;
at Bank I played the devil for his fare;
I laugh at lesser modes of transportation.
I change at Aldgate East because it's there.

The Waterloo and City cast its spell;
I watched it slip away, and could not care,
the Northern Line descending into hell
until King's Cross was more than I could bear;
he left me there in fear for my salvation,
a Mansion House in heaven to prepare:
so why return to any lesser station?
I change at Aldgate East because it's there.

Three days beneath the earth in stench and smell
I lay, and let the enemy beware:
I learned the truth of tales the children tell:
an Angel plucked me homeward by the hair,
to glory from the depths of condemnation,
to where I started long ago from where
I missed my stop through long procrastination.
I change at Aldgate East because it's there.

Prince of the buskers, sing your new creation:
the change you ask is more than I can spare;
a change of spirit, soul, imagination.
I change at Aldgate East because it's there.



Ballade of Adventure

Go north. Go east. Get lamp. Get food. Get key.
Get sword. Examine sword. It's glowing blue.
Say plugh. You watch the world around you flee.
You're standing near a boulder marked Y2.
Put Auntie's thing in bag. It doesn't fit.
(By Infocom. Wherever games are sold.)
Such antics are the price for us to sit
where Thorin sits and sings about his gold.

You're standing west of house again. You see:
a robot and a door. The door sees: you.
You're carrying some fluff, some shades, no tea;
Be careful. You'll be eaten by a grue.
Oh, now you've gone and fallen in a pit.
You're carrying as much as you can hold.
In Bedquilt. You see shadows through the slit,
where Thorin sits and sings about his gold.

But Activision's little shopping spree
had turned the world to wanting something new.
It's sad, but still, I think we'd all agree
the Z-machine's demise was overdue.
The day when all the world went sixteen-bit
the era died. I think they broke the mould
when pictures took the place of words and wit,
where Thorin sits and sings about his gold.

Prince of the numbers, worlds have watched you knit
the memories of processors of old;
you've made a better planet, I submit,
where Thorin sits and sings about his gold.



I measure out my life with kitten toes

A dozen years, the length of feline days:
compared to human lives it may appear
the cats lose out. To be a human pays.
I think on this, and on companions dear:
Successive cats whose whiskered lives touched mine
Have lain upon my lap... do you suppose
Their tiptoe through the years is but a sign?
I measure out my life with kitten toes.

As they and I pursue the hilly ways
that fill our lives, "Beware! The end is near!"
"Your death is nigh!" or some such friendly phrase
will tell me that it's all downhill from here.
And soon the slope more steeply will incline,
And drop away as quickly as it rose.
You trace the arc? My life is on the line:
I measure out my life with kitten toes.

Though now, my cat, we feel the sunshine's blaze...
your windowsill is warm, the skies are clear...
yet still I feel the sun's all-seeing gaze
remind me of the coming day, I fear...
the coming day I cannot feel it shine,
and on my face the smiling daisy grows.
I only have the one, where you have nine:
I measure out my life with kitten toes.

Prince, lord of cats, may endless meat be thine!
O grant that thine immortal princely doze
may evermore upon my lap recline!
I measure out my life with kitten toes.



Odds and ends

Storytelling

A dragon was the beast to fear,
With shining, perfect teeth,
And deadly spines upon its back,
And scaly skin beneath.
You'd see them fly across the sky
With dreadful wings unfanned,
In far-off days of long ago
When dragons ruled the land.

And as they flew they'd watch the ground,
With eyes devoid of pity,
They'd follow humans to their homes
And breathe upon their city.
The dragon's breath was instant death,
No houses still could stand,
In far-off days of long ago
When dragons ruled the land.

Then someone had a wise idea:
King Arthur and his Knights.
They travelled round the countryside,
And held great dragon-fights.
Each dragon's heart was split apart,
So triumphed Arthur's band;
And now no dragons linger
Any longer in the land.



From *Not Ordinarily Borrowable*.

Storytelling – ii

When Merlin looked upon this land,
he knew by magic arts
the anger in the acts of men,
the hatred in their hearts:
he saw despair and deadly things,
and knew our hope must be
the magic when the kettle sings
to make a pot of tea.

When Galahad applied to sit
in splendour at the Table,
he swore an oath to fight for good
as far as he was able.
But Arthur put the kettle on,
and bade him sit and see
the goodness that is brought anon
by making pots of tea.

When Arthur someday shall return
in glory, with his knights,
he'll rout our foes and bless the poor
and put the land to rights.
And shall we drink his health in ale?
Not so! It seems to me
he'll meet us in the final tale
and share a pot of tea.



From *Order in West Room*.

Tell me, O shell

Tell me, O shell,
what have you heard?
Into my ear
floats the cry of a bird,
and also I hear
pebbles, sea-stirred.

Tell me, O shell,
what did you see?
Into my eye
floats a glimpse of a tree,
a palm, on an island,
surrounded by sea.



The Caller

“Is there anybody there?” said the Caller,
“Six ten eight oh one two four three nine?”
And his ears attuned to the empty hum
Of the long-forgotten line;
And an LED on the handset
Flashed, for a moment, red,
And he dialled the number a second time:
“Is there anybody there?” he said.
But no one replied to the caller,
No sound but the dialling tone
Came drifting into his waiting ear
As he held that haunted phone;
But only a host of phantom listeners,
Of spectres weak and strange
Stood hearkening to that human voice
That echoed around the exchange;
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
And his heart was afraid and nervous,
With his hand on the final digit
Of that number not in service;
For he suddenly tapped the receiver
And spoke on that line of dread:
“Tell them I called, and no one answered,
That I kept my word!” he said;
Ay, they heard him replace the receiver,
And his mumbled cursing later,
With the usual subdued but enthused delight
Of the switchboard operator.



The crocodile

A little *fishy* saw a smile,
And curiously, he followed;
He knew not 'twas a *crocodile*:
He very soon was swallowed.

The little *fishy* cried and cried
To try and call his mummy,
Because he was shut up, inside
The *crocodile's* dark tummy.

The *croc* had heard the *fishy's* tears.
She pushed him past her liver
And through her heart, and out her ears
And back into the river.



This is the poem

This is the poem with something to say
that shows you the human condition.

This is the poem both deep and banal,
a triumph of juxtaposition.

This is the poem they'll write on a plaque
to show I was born somewhere near.

This is the poem that folks will recite
whose minds fill with worry or fear,
a poem to take in a book to the park
and ponder for passing the time.

This is the poem that classes recite
for children to learn about rhyme.

This is the poem those children will learn
that sticks evermore in their head.

This is the poem they'll print on a card
for people to buy when I'm dead.

This is the poem that changes mankind,
and teaches the world not to fight.

This is the poem that stands in the place
of one I intended to write.



Three saints

St Henry was for Finland, and before he took the land
He wandered through Uppsala with a beer-mug in his hand.
For through his understanding of the Finns and what they are
If you should serve him *sahiti*, it must be in a jar.

St Patrick was for Ireland, and before the snakes were out
He ate a steak, and washed it down with pints of Guinness stout.
For since he was from Ireland, people shouldn't make mistakes:
Unless you give him Guinness, then you mustn't give him steaks.

St Louis was from France, and before he was the king,
He bought champagne and cheeses and he ate like anything.
For since he was from France, I must say it once again:
Unless you give him cheeses, then there must be no champagne.



Translation

Ah, would I were a German!
I'd trouble my translator
With nouns the size of Hamburg
And leave the verb till later.

And if I were a Welshman
My work would thwart translation
With ninety novel plurals
In strict alliteration.

And would I were Chinese!
I'd throw them off their course
With twelve unusual symbols
All homophones of "horse".

But as it is, I'm English:
And *I'm* the one in hell
By writing in a language
Impossible to spell.



Turing's sword

See you our server farm that hums
And serves HTTP?
It's spun its disks and done its sums
Ever since Berners-Lee.

See you our mainframe spewing out
The Towers of Hanoi?
It's moved recursive discs about
Since Babbage was a boy.

See you our ZX81
That prints the ABCs?
That very program used to run
With Lovelace at the keys.

Magnetic floppy disks and hard,
And tape with patience torn,
And eighty columns on a card,
And so was England born!

She is not any common thing,
Water or Wood or Air,
But Turing's Isle of Programming,
Where you and I will fare.



Two creatures

Two creatures' eyes have seen the sun,
and now their lids are filled with dust.
But if their eyes were blue, or brown,
I cannot tell, and yet I must.

St Claire's an Amiable Child
who sleeps secure and snug as Grant,
but who can tell me of his eyes?
(The city parks curator can't.)

And Johnson had a cat named Hodge
who fed on oysters, and was fine;
his coat was black, but not his eyes,
whose shade I cannot now divine.

Two creatures hold me in their gaze,
and thoughts of it I can't dislodge:
the nature of your eyes, my friends,
your sleeping eyes, St Claire and Hodge?



Welcome

Welcome to the adult world!
Feel a clumsy failing fool.
Living is a tricky game,
Harder than they tell at school.

Every day beyond your means:
Hide it from the public view.
All around must never guess
What it is they're hiding too.

Conquer bedrooms, conquer boardrooms,
Build your mountain to the sky.
Have a résumé to die for:
When you get it, then you die.

Yet the children play in dirt,
Heedless of a pointless star:
“Never ask us what we'll be:
Know that we already are.”



Because I could not wire a plug

Because I could not wire a Plug,
It wired itself to me.
The carriage held but just ourselves,
And Electricity.

We passed the school, where children strove
To gain some erudition.
Ah! what a shame I did not learn
To be an Electrician.

For who would think a wire called *live*
The life of humans halts?
My wiring style contains, I fear,
Two hundred forty faults.

Since then 'tis centuries, and yet
We drive for all we're worth;
The eternal heavens seem so live;
So neutral seemed the earth.



Complements

When good hot tea
Encountered cream;
When passionate truth
Met passionate dream;
When all the sky
Met all the sea...
And I met Katie;
She met me.

When good fried fish
First met with chips;
When longing lips
Encountered lips;
When squirrel once
Met silver fir...
Katie met me.
I met her.



Do not kowtow

When I am old, as owned by wrinkled skin,
and not by thought, since I'm already old,
do not kowtow to what you see. Within
the wrinkled skin's a child of three years old,
a teenager in terror of his sin,
a twenty-two year old in love, an old
and bitter fool, whose inspiration's thin;
when I am full of tales, and sick, and old,
do not kowtow to old and wrinkled skin.



Englyn

I have a dream I almost dare— to tell
a spell, a tale to share,
binding words into a snare,
but I find there's nothing there.



Eos and Cornipsis

“And one day, out of Heaven knows what material,
he spun the beast a wonderful name, and from that moment
it grew into a god and a religion.” — Saki, *Sredni Vashtar*

Wherever on this earth I roam
a pair of deities are found:
Great Eos, goddess of the dawn,
Cornipsis, god of traffic sound.

In yet another far hotel
the moment when the curtain's drawn
there to my eyes she manifests,
Great Eos, goddess of the dawn.

When lost again in foreign streets
I hear his comfort all around
as constant as when I was born,
Cornipsis, god of traffic sound.

Great Eos feeds the world its light,
a world Cornipsis fast destroys.
In every land they turn their trade,
the gods of dawn and traffic noise.



Flooding in the Welsh Marches

Llywelyn, looking down with glee — to see
the sea that the country
from Edward's domain cuts free.
The coastline of Cilmeri.



Funeral

I don't intend to die, for I have much to finish first.
But if you plan my funeral, if worst should come to worst,
I want some decent hymns, some *Love Divines*, and *Guide me, O's*.
Say masses for my soul (for I shall need them, heaven knows),
And ring a muffled quarter-peal, and preach a sermon next
(“*Behold, that dreamer cometh*” should be given as the text),
Then draw a splendid hatchment up, proclaiming my decease.
And cast me where the lamp-post towers over Parker's Piece
That I may lie for evermore and watch the Cambridge skies...
I'll see you in the Eagle then, and stand you beer and pies.



Hallelujah Simpkins

Hallelujah Simpkins, Syllogism Brown,
Wandered up to Barkingside to walk around the town.
Does it make you wonder, when they ring the bell,
How they press the organ keys and sing along as well?
Syllogism wondered so he climbed the tower to see;
Hallelujah, Simpkins said, I know that I am free.

Hallelujah Simpkins, Pendlebury Jane,
Hurried to the hospital and hurried home again.
Does it make you wonder, when they run so fast,
How they know they'll ever reach the hospital at last?
Pendlebury wondered even though she couldn't run,
Hallelujah, Simpkins said, today I have a son.

Hallelujah Simpkins, Academic Smith,
Never eat an orange if they couldn't eat the pith.
Does it make you wonder, if oranges can float,
Why they catch the Underground and never catch a boat?
Academic wondered so he went and caught the train;
Hallelujah, Simpkins said, and said it once again.

Hallelujah Simpkins, Concertina Flight,
Hear the song the angels sing in Dagenham tonight!
Does it make you wonder, climbing Heaven's stair,
How you'd speak to Hallelujah Simpkins, if he's there?
Simpkins only wondered whom he followed as he soared;
Hallelujah, Simpkins said, and glory to the Lord!



Here deep in the city it is always night

Here deep in the city it is always night.

As I walk each street it is always night.

The men in their mansions drink their delight.

For those in the streets it is always night.

Those in the doorways step out to fight.

They slip to where it is always night.

Each plays a game to increase his might.

Each keeps his brother where it is always night.

We laugh, and lie about the lands of light.

I still light candles where it is always night.



How sweet the name of Cthulhu sounds

How sweet the name of Cthulhu sounds
In raving mystics' screams!
It drives them mad, enflames their brains,
And troubles all their dreams.

It brings insanity and dread
Into the world of men,
This world which once seemed safe and sane
Shall not make sense again.

We gaze upon thy face more dread
Than any watchful dragon;
And sing the eternal hymn to thee,
Ia ia Cthulhu fhtagn.

Cthulhu! my dead yet sleeping king,
Thy cults shall be restored,
Thy tomb shall rise to air again,
Just, r'lyeh, r'lyeh, Lord.

Weak is our twisted woodland dance
And cold our campfires cursed,
But when the stars shall rise aright,
We shall be eaten first.



Hymn

Oh, many bounds I've beaten well,
And many more I'll drub,
But through this maze I'll take the ways
That lead me to the pub.

Where worries may be left behind,
Where life's despair may fail,
Where peace has smiled on pints of mild
And blessed the winter ale.

Where folk may laugh, where folk may spend
A moment free from fear,
Where smiles may bless a game of chess
Beside two pints of beer.

And in my mind I see the bar,
The beers' familiar names!
The window-seat where old men meet,
Where children play their games!

Where still you'll find a Sunday lunch
On Sunday afternoon,
And God's own pie, denoted by
A number on a spoon.

Oh, many weary miles I've trod,
All filled with life's alarms,
But in my brains it still remains
My local Carlton Arms.



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With apologies to Rupert Brooke

For Pennsylvania is the Land
Where Men with Hearts may Understand,
And much the nicest part must be
The County of Montgomery.
And in that district I most like
The town that ends the Pottstown Pike.
For heaven's blessings rarely stick
to folk who live in Limerick,
and you would be the worse to know
the crimes that they commit in Stowe,
and heaven's wrath comes raining down
on men who live in Boyertown,
where sins are strange, and stranger still
are secrets hid in Douglasville;
they'd slit your throat for twenty pence
in frightful Lower Providence
and rumour tells me true that no men
are virtuous in Perkiomen.
But Pottstown, oh, but dear Pottstown!
Why, there a person may lie down
upon its riverbanks so stony,
or paddle in the Manatawny.
They laugh and love their life so well
They're purchasing a carousel.
(And when they get to feeling old,
a thousand senior Cokes are sold,
with super fries and apple pie;
McDonald's, Hanover and High.)



Morning prayer

Go praise thou the Lord! It's seven o'clock!

You cannot afford to slumber *ad hoc*.

Five times you've hit snooze, and you've wasted an hour,

Forget your excuse, and go get in the shower.

Go praise thou the Lord! The prayerbook awaits,

its words unexplored, so get on your skates.

It stands on the shelf for the start of the day,

For Jesus himself rose up early to pray.

Go praise thou the Lord! Praise him in the morn!

You seem to be floored. You don't know you're born.

I wake you at six and you wail that you're sunk

but just try your tricks as a friar or monk!

Go praise thou the Lord! Take heed what I say:

I know you've implored today's Saturday;

No more may you lurk with alarm clock ignored;

For praising takes work, so go praise thou the Lord!



Not April in Paris

The sea lies solid under ice,
The blizzard seldom stops;
The *glögi*'s running freely
In friendly coffee-shops;
The trams still run and life goes on
And still I can't remember
Why no-one ever calls a song
"Helsinki in November".



On not being a cat

Were I a cat, my love, I'd leave each day
a single dying mouse upon your bed;
but, human, I must find another way,
and honour you by leaving verse instead.



Recognition

I thought I recognised some guy
asleep off Berkeley Square.
His face had such a peaceful look
behind his dirty hair;

his beard, the scabs across his head,
I thought I'd seen before,
if anyone that I would know
was sleeping in a door.

On second thoughts, it wasn't him.
Or, well, I'll never know.
A glance was all the time it took
to pass him in the snow.



Retweeted

Jill retweeted what I wrote,
forwarding to all her friends.
Time, you thief, who loves to gloat
over hopes and bitter ends,
say my loves and lines are bad,
say that life itself defeated me,
say I'm growing old, but add:
 Jill retweeted me.



Marriage

In seeking a wife,
 with the cook he'd converse.
Her pancakes weren't stodgy.
 No, quite the reverse.
Another girl wrote him
 a triolet, terse.
He wanted them both,
 and he muttered a curse,
and prayed to his God
 with a question perverse:
"Lord, should I get married
 for batter, or verse?"



A love song

The ones who breathe below the wave
have tales of how I should behave,
 but should I sing, or comb my hair
when sleeping deeply in my grave?

There, deep within the murky green
I dreamed a man I've never seen
 with trousers rolled and fading hair.
I offered him a nectarine.

Oh, does he take it? Will he eat?
I long to weep upon his feet
 and wipe them with my golden hair.
He fades, and we shall never meet.



Not about any church I know

Thou who sent thine own Anointed
once for all the world to bless:
Should we make our windows pointed?
Should our deacons wear a dress?
Should our candles light the dark?
Lord, remain within the ark.

Should our priests be mild and matey?
Should our men be nervous types?
Should our women all be eighty?
Art thou fond of organ pipes?
Or dost thou, above the stars,
yearn for amplified guitars?

We shall sit around the fire, and
mumble of the Crucified,
preach his gospel to the choir, and
never mind the night outside,
where despite the rain and chill
winds are blowing where they will.



So I was told

The Bishop said, “You celebrate
the mass an awful lot.

I’ve heard the other priests of late
suggest that it’s a plot.

You have to write the homily;
you have to heat the hall

three times a day; it seems to me
the congregation’s small:

there’s four, or even fewer folk.

It’s almost microscopic.”

The Priest replied, “The Lord once spoke
upon that very topic.”



Nobody believed him

Nobody believed him: they all said he was mad
when he claimed he'd seen a ghost. He knew he really had.
And still the ghost would haunt him, in any kind of weather,
till one sad night the old man died.

(And now they haunt together.)



Spanyel

Spanyel! Spanyel! Thine embrace
Places Paws upon my Face;
What celestial Factory
Dare fill thy doggy Heart with glee?

From what Furnace flowed thy Blood?
Whence proceeded all this Mud?
Was that a Cow thou hidst beneath?
What the Tongue? and what the Teeth?

What the Nose? and what the Jaw?
In what Quagmire was thy Paw?
Hast thou swum the Pond as well?
That perhaps explains thy Smell.

Spanyel! Spanyel! Thine embrace
Places Paws upon my Face;
What celestial Factory
Dare fill thy doggy Heart with glee?



Leaping like calves

Once, a young fresher was reading the rules, and was
more than perplexed at the place where they state
“All undergraduates, if they are Anglicans,
must be in chapel each Sunday at eight.”

Wracking his brains, he began a small rumour that
spread through the town on the weekdays that followed; he
was not an Anglican, nor Nonconformist; his
faith and religion was mere *Heliolatry*.

Saturday evening, our hero retired with a
smile on his face and his bin at his door,
only to wake to a thunderous hammering,
made by the porter, next morning at four.

Ah, how a little lie, told with great frequency,
gains repercussions that no-one expects!

“Dawn’s almost here, sir, the Chaplain expects you;
go down to Main Court and you’ll pay your respects.”



