

PART ONE

DULCE LUMEN

For my Mother

Dark night, soul's night,
my night enduring;
silence of the dark broken,
dawn-dove returning.

First light, day-light,
my light assuring;
waited-for word spoken,
tongues of flame burning.

HOW THINGS HAPPEN

Our meeting was beyond analysis
it happened
like sunlight catching a seagull
two seagulls
so that they fly in the gleam of it.

We were going the same way
as it happened
although we did not stop to ask
nor did we
think of going separately.

We were hoping the same world
would happen
though we did not compare notes
try to define
the method or the end of it.

We did not think of love.
If it happens
it will be beyond analysis
like two seagulls
caught in a shaft of sun.

KORAI

(in the Akropolis museum)

How do they smile
the korai
without eyes?

just lips and tight
high-set breasts,
stiff arms and ringlets?

Without eyes
a smile is only inward.
The eyes of the korai
are buried beneath the stone
of their small hard breasts,

for they smile with the heart
which was long long since
denied the light.
For thousands of years
their light has been shut
in darkness of stone

and endlessly watching
their eyeless smile
has said
'I know myself'
through carved girlish lips.

WITH GRATITUDE TO INDIA

I was a baby in India
born among dark eyes and thin limbs
handled by slim fingers
bounced by bangles
and held high among the turbans,
surrounded by the light sari
black knot of hair
suggestion of spice,
wrapped up only by those songs
that spiral the spirit out of the dust
and lay it down again to sleep.

I crawled among bright toenails
ticked off ants by the gross
or touched the lizard in his cold quickness;
toddled past wilting bougainvillaea
to watch hoopoes on the mai-dan,
caught flashes of minivet, oriole and bulbul
and peered up into huge flowers
on tree after tree
as I broke into their shade.

Never left with a strange
babysitter
I was part of the parties, parades,
the bazaar,
could swallow the stench and listen
to the poetry of bargaining;
hearts' desire was to drink cool water
or chew a sugar-cane
and flap off the flies.

I had dysentery, sickness, paleness
boiled buffalo milk,
no welfare vitamins, no plastic pants.
The sun was a fiend, the rain was a friend
the stars only just out of reach.

Expressions were always changing:
a smile latent in sorrow
and a love in anger;
tears happened with laughter
but patience presided over every mood.

To have first found the world
in abundant India
is my life's greatest privilege.

WINTER SUNRISE IN EDINBURGH

The huge pale sun behind the Braid Hills
rising
glints on the city in wands of slanting light

The threadbare half-moon hangs above
Corstorphine
where winter branches stretch and silhouette

With sunrise in her hair the girl Queen
Mary
rode to dying Darnley out at Kirk o' Field

On such a frosty forenoon Cockburn left
the lawcourts
experienced the New Town, memorised the Old

Singing a cold cadence Fergusson
the poet

shivered down the Canongate with rhythm in his feet

And citizens of Edinburgh on this very
morning
set to partners, join hands and skip down the street

WINTER SUNSET IN EDINBURGH

The sunset at teatime is everywhere:
it gets in under averted eyes,
strays between grey thicknesses
of cloud,
in and out of branches and chimneys,
dashes itself against windows and walls,
and plays with children
on their way home from school.

The sunset is like a bright old lady
who puts on her old-fashioned finery
and makes a sudden sortie to
the library;
in and out of acquaintances and friends,
dashes her smiles against strangers and dogs,
and chats to children
on their way home from school.

PURITY

seen on the Meadows, Edinburgh

When I make a picture
I will put a black man
in bold headlines
running full-scale across the Meadows –

beside him a white dog
husky and blurred
in wavy outlines
skating the grassy surface in circles.

Sharp edged, bright-black
tropical man . . .
snow-soft, stark-white
arctic dog . . .
superimposed on the antique Meadows.

The trees are tense to the roots,
grass stretches, stones stare
from medical buildings,
as these two in their extreme purity
cut across our Middle Meadow Walk.

THE BALANCE OF THE BRAIN

Two hemispheres compose my human brain;
Twin gods or dual kings in joint command;
Moses and Aaron each direct a hand,
The one to know, the other to explain.

My shadow side, the left, the sinister
Controls that conscious cleverness we praise,
Deplores the contradictions of our ways,
Lord of language and of logic master.

But deft and dancing movement, recognition
Of faces, patterns turning towards light,
The melody for these plays on my right,
My hemisphere of swift and silent vision.

So balanced between tyranny and schism
The Yin and Yang of our fine microcosm.

ISLANDER

Long-legged heron
crested in head-scarf
flapping solitary along the road;
transparent as shells your skin,
wrinkled like rocks,
quiet as a calm sea.

All that you do not need
and have not craved
leaves you elegant
and single-minded
as you dive into pure waters
and exult in your daily catch.

INTROSPECTION

Psyche in her night of love
lit a secret candle,
turned to see
Eros
asleep
nonchalant in beauty.

Not content with having love
exquisite at her side,
she bent to know
his features
exactly
holding the candle low.

Alas a drop of burning wax
fell upon Love's flesh;
injured he fled . . .
Psyche
for solace
composed a poem instead!

LIFE'S SUMMERTIME

It is not yesterday that I would have
return, to pioneer again that path
I cut. Nor care I for the aftermath
which hedges round the present life I live,
narrowing down the choices I must take
toward the future, and to my decline.
And yet without each effort now of mine
the world may be a future none can make.

I choose the sense of having loved to be
alive, and draw in fragrance from the past;
I balance amiably on present flowers
as each new moment sets another free;
and while the buzz of my intention lasts
I build my honeycomb of future powers.

BUDDHIST LIZARD

camouflaged in stone and dust
breathing with a slow pulse

long absorbed in meditation

pulse of long meditation
absorbed into stone and dust
slow breathing camouflaged

stone longs for camouflage
breathing absorbs dust
meditation slows the pulse

stone pulses long
dust camouflages slowly
meditation absorbed in breathing

meditation longs for absorption
stone camouflaged by dust
breathing slowly pulses –

then flick
 the fiery
 tongue
 of enlightenment

GLADIOLI

And unexpectedly you brought me flowers-
Gladioli –
All straight stiff stems and green
sharp leaves.
Tall and crisp, they've grown strong
wilfully;
but loop and lean
with languorous buds
as if such discipline at length gave way
to fragile love.

SUPPLICATION TO THE RIVER

River whom I worship
grant to my beloved
in your peaceful flowing
floods of peace.

Give him in your clarity

depths of dark wisdom.

Carve your fruitful valley
through the land of his living;
let mountains of the mind
stand courteously aside.

Bestow gracious trees
with branches inclining
reflected over surfaces of light,
and shade lent austere
along the moonlit quietude of night.

Let the wild waterfall
have no dominion over him
but cascade him into ecstasy
and gently return him.

Bear him in your current,
keep him in your course,
River, give to my beloved
everything I ask.

RELATIVITIES

Our guide knelt down
and drew in the dust with a stick.

Each dynasty lay for a moment –
before he wiped it away

Until I saw
Ramesses himself
stretch out a finger
and catch him up by the waist:

‘Where am I little brother?
and where are you
in that tiny speck on my toenail
of twentieth century dust?’

RECUMBENT BUDDHA

At Pollonnoruwa Buddha lies
light behind his veiled eyes

asleep in heavy stone yet most awake
lotus and impenetrable lake:
compassionate smile
immobile
but dancing in a whirl of energies
conflict caught in secret harmonies
movement in rock, solidity in sky
renunciation locked with liberty.

LIFE AND DEATH *(the Nile)*

House of aeons
tent of stone
mountain of dust
across the line
into neither nor

Mother of rivers
retreats for prayer
returns to the fields
religious her rhythm

but no trickle over
no rivulet running
no urgent escaping
beyond the divide

where 'the westerners'*
sequestered in night
sail underground

solidify silence
separate sense
perpetuate bone
structure and stone
distance alone
through time undulating
on fathoms of sand.

This side, this side
breeze over water
litter of life

here the fragile
exuberant green
groves of the living

here to step forward
consumed with life
claim the horizon

this side pain
cramped allocation
birth until death

this side love
to suckle the meadows
circulate laughter.

Beyond lie the perfect
dwellings of death

beyond is the desert
that lies between hearts
deserted for ever

beyond lies sand
that covers, conserves
but never restores.

No horizon but Kheops is huge there
no suggestion but Kephren prevails
Mykerinos has to be mentioned

one bead-blue scarab
scuttling in sandstone
is greater than these

one living cell
forms a pyramid
of unending life.

* 'the westeners': Ancient Egyptian term for the dead, buried on the west bank of the Nile (often in ritual barges) in the direction of the setting sun.

PART TWO

TRISTE NUMEN
For my Companions

GRIEF

I went to church but could not sing my tears;
I sat in silence but my tears were loud;
I prayed, but every word became a tear
that uttered filled again, that speaking flowed.

No escape from tears except in blood
and no escape from blood except in death
and no escape from death except in one
who enters in my every dying breath,

who suffers in me . . . every tear is his . . .
who bleeds within me, every wound he feels,
who dies my death and lets me live anew
his life that slowly, sorrowfully heals.

THE YOKE

A piece of wood I found, arched into a yoke
and trying felt it fitted to my neck
straitly across my shoulders, each end lying easy,
misshapen to my shape and formed for me.

Following a path that led me through a wood
I climbed towards open hill and sky
where larks ascending, burns descending harmonised
with solo call of curlew to my soul.

Casually I stooped my neck beneath the yoke –
(a poet's burden surely is but light?)
but to my load was added those of other folk
whose lot I enter into when I write:
the varied, cruel yokes, ill-fitting, ill-contrived
beneath which we have laboured in our land.

Then I knew that lightly I had taken up
no yoke but cross-beam of a crucifix,
a weight for stumbling under, *dolorosa via*,
and no Cyrenian I, no Galilean.

ODE TO EDINBURGH

City of my north
of dispassionate views,
calculated contours –
to your volcanic remnants
we lift not eyes
but only intellect . . .

when rain and mist caliginous
obscure the skyline
we adhere to stone structure
and regain lucidity. . .

How sharply you defined me and indelibly!
Early I was persuaded
that nothing is but north
even east and west beyond our compass . . .

Much I admire uprighteousness
and your grey endurance
but it has cost me warmth.

Among the startling gorse
I am asunder
torn with endless loss;
identity is northern,
my south, my soul remedial
but unremedied
for ever.

INCANTATION

Not this sinking of the sun
in livid clouds
at Arisaig,
nor the darkly-gentian sea
and eagle-headed
Sgurr of Eigg

Not the flowing cormorant
from wave of sky
to cloud of sea,
nor the splashes of white sand
in rock black
severity

Not the salmon-yellow shells
sipped in and out
the shining tide,
nor the mauve and tawny flowers
wind-washed
on the mountainside –

These are blessings for the sense
but inwardly

I turn toward
people through the centuries here
sea-worn
rock-hard

Battered between land and sea
harvested
by sword and fire,
the legends of their tragedy
loom like islands
faint, now clear

Now as the sun suffuses all
in golden blood
and swords of light
I pledge my feeble watching love
to those whose lives
are here by right

DUNVEGAN, ISLE OF SKYE

the castle seen from across the loch at sunset

dying sunlight on Dunvegan
captured from the pale horizon

craven rocks around and moorlands
callous waters of the islands

bright the wing of boat and bird
golden seaweed, fling of cloud

between the hidden Hebrides
and the Cuillins, *Eumenides*

nothing sudden here nor violent
non-committal here and silent

deep the rift of land and heart
sealed with mist all love and hurt

accomplished now the heron's flight
posed and poised for the twilight

croaking takes up his position
we who come will ask no question

Dunvegan now with folded wing
watches its own voyaging

LETTER WRITTEN FROM GREECE

This letter I must write to you from Greece.

The poems you gave me by George Seferis
have weighed upon and wounded me
with their love and pain –

a pain that cannot be healed by love,
a love that pain has moulded.

Greece is a woman loved by a sculptor
and fashioned by his skilful hand,
but while he works she suffers
both pain and love.
When complete she stands
alone, exposed, in stone.

Love-offerings of the nations,
sacred sighs of pilgrims
do not heal the hurt;
the stone cannot live,
the love was worn away
and only pain remains
in broken limb
and eyeless head
or half a dancing foot.

I am in agony for the beauty
of Greece,
her ancient olives, her giant mountains,
her centaurs and chariots,
athletes and dancers,
her goats and black-robed shepherds,
little hunched churches,
terraces, homesteads
with bent, black women
holding a child, a pony, a garland . . .

The hurt spreads to my breasts
and narrows to the womb
down to that womb of Delphi
beneath the cleft rocks where the stream rises.

Here we were severed from our divine generatrix,
here we return in our dry season.

The slain python
coils slowly to life again.
Despite his lyricism
sober Apollo would have us slay and slay it
time and again
for reason's sake . . .

But the earth is moving on her inward tide.

Seductive is the sacred way
for love must unite with pain,
the omphalos and the oracle,
for continual recreation.
Death when pain prevails,
but when *agape* stills our ache
if even for a moment,
a moment's resurrection is released
and generates new stirrings
in the long poesis of the sons of men.

MAN AND NATURE

Our ancestors made temples out of trees
wherever grove or mountain spoke to them;
then changed the trees to stone and giant column
hacked from the hillside, unmoved by the breeze,
immortal because dead, no unction drawn
from earth's long *agape*, no strength received
from light and air, no blessed fruit conceived
to shed and share, no passive wisdom grown.

Those gods live on, whose temples lie in dust
with remnant rocks, like hard tears suppressed,
now sanctified by foliage and flower . . .
What need had they of monuments to power?

Earth sets her face lest we should turning see
her damaged flesh, her wounded deity.

IN THE FISHMONGERS

All over the fish
and the knife that continues to work
and the marble slab

and her own red hands
the tears flow salt
like a sauce.

How is it the squared body trembles
the dark head buries its raw nose
and starting eyes
in a rough roller towel?

Has she no escape
from this catch?
Must the knife continue to clean out
guts, bones, brains
until filleted
of emotion and female pride,
flat, cold on the slab
she can cease to weep and tremble?

BEREAVEMENT

As snow lies on a ploughed field
so does sorrow lie on my heart
O my father,
and it melts, it melts.

It does not melt all at once
but in little patches here and there
O my father,
and no-one sees.

My solid earth is ploughed up
with the sharpness of your dying
O my father,
and it hurts, it hurts.

That you were sick and needed death
that you had lived a goodly life
O my father,
I know, I know.

And people say they loved you well;
they praise you for your ways and works
O my father,
as you deserve.

They cannot tell how close and kind,
how set apart for me you were

O my father
in all the world.

This sorrow lies upon my heart
and sinks into the furrowed soil
O my father,
where it floods, it floods.

But as it coldly does its work
it is nourishing my depths
O my father,
and I grow, I grow.

EARLY PREGNANCY

My breasts are swollen
and I have to hold them
when I run downstairs . . .

My stomach sullen,
determined it will hate
the food it knows it wants.

My mind opaque,
no vision but the
inward certain evolution . . .

My nerves relax,
refuse to face another
day's demands each day.

My body aches
for sleep and for escape
to languid, liquid life.

I am a universe:
My womb is very earth
wherein the spirit grows . . .

And time fulfilled,
the spirit will give forth
its naked revelation.

MOTHER FORGIVE

I am a mother
and because a mother, mainly and most of me
always a mother.

Vigil I keep
against the hurt of children
and now for a lass dead in Belfast
ten years old and grown all-girl
with freckles clustered round expectant eyes.

Holy innocents
and another Rachel flung abruptly into mourning.
Do not offer comfort
there is none
none
for the children are not –
an amputation with no sealing of the flesh
no ending to the motherhood.

Girls have been killed by *homo fanaticus*:
Iphigenia sacrificed to the winds of change,
Jephthah's spontaneous daughter
caught in a web of religious observance,
and Ann Frank
chosen among the chosen
blessed among virgins
as she wrote her daily *magnificat*.

This girl was blown to bits for nothing
and we all, the very heartland of us
ancient shrine and city centre of us
all that grows *sapiens* of us
shattered with her.
We choose extinction in killing our children
when even Rachel's sobs will slowly cease.

Little girl
for you and your ten years of little womanhood
our grief is such to close the very womb –
barrenness is all.
The man-made tree stands with stark arms spread;
(do we think we know what we are doing?)
upon it, votive, I hang this bitter verse
saying
mother forgive?

WESTERN PURDAH

She is veiled in children:
no-one can see her.

Her eyes reconnoitre
through the grille of twisting, childish fingers;
delicate sandals walk the path of wifeliness;
hands emerge, ringed in capable motherhood.

Folds of material hide her:
on one side those she fetches for lunch,
on the other those she carries in the evening;
the morning is pleated with housework
and covers thickly her whole back.
Head and neck are invisible,
swathed in all the times she can't recount
what she was doing.

No-one can find her:
lovers cannot reach
nor statistics pry into;
committees cannot drag her out
nor friends fuss around;
relations do not stay long;
the burquah is ready at night
to put on like a dressing-gown
whenever someone wakes.

Terribly now, after twenty years,
the purdah is removed in sudden gashes;
for the first time she is uncovered
when youth has withered.

But Allah is merciful even to western mothers:
age itself will conceal us
until we take the ultimate veil.

DISSIDENTS

Russia grows accustomed now to heroes.
If we had half as many in our land
we might yet turn again and lead the world
away from progress into plenitude.

Time and again a Russian hero stands
upon the stage set up, where he alone
is not an actor, where the audience know

their cues, except a single relative
allowed within to suffer, not to speak.

Hubris encroaches every boundary
and nemesis will not discriminate
between our international sheep and goats.

The globe shall be the theatre for these men,
whether concealed or held before our eyes,
and we, spectators, purged to purity.

HOSPITALISATION

Illness tossed you over the rails
of our world.
The huge hospital swallowed you
then swam away
to go through its routines with you
deep and distant.

I could no more than paddle in
that element
but came often to watch from the shore
and scan the surface.

After a secret number of days
and hidden nights,
after fathomless hours enclosed
in the whale's belly
floating on tides of attention
and murmurs of movement,
the hospital will spit you out again
at my feet.

The sand is suddenly swept with
scuttling pebbles
sprays of scum and shells
as you come up on it.
I begin to lead you home, only
to discover
we are on a foreign shore.

OLD FOLK AT A FUNERAL

We swirl around each others' funerals
like leaves falling fast,
say 'My dear how good to see you'
perhaps for the last
time – and memory filters through the tears –
'My dear, life was good and you were part
of my good years.'

Hard around a winter wind blows
against our lips.
Winter is for dying. 'See you next year'
almost slips
out, forced back with sharp gust of doubt.

'How much older the children look – how old
while we look much as always I am told,
as when we used to meet – do you remember
what I remember,
incident, occasion?'
(But we recognise each other
only in imagination;
we who were caught up
momentarily together
in eternal celebration.)

I and you:
my good was always intertwined with you.
You and I:
we know already partly what it is to die
having lived our season's summer through
and said goodbye.

We drift away, eyes water, scarves
pulled tighter –
Leaves are few on the branches now
and our hold is lighter.

OLD AGE AND DYING

One cup you did not taste
Jesus,
the cup of old-age,
of waiting to die
helpless and in pain.

You, with all your powers
Jesus,

of mind and body,
faced death
in throbs of blood and sweat.

Your friends left you alone
and slept,
then ran away
from the violence
of strength meeting death.

But our beloved dies
slowly,
in extreme weakness,
in distress,
in semi-consciousness.

We can watch and pray
the days and nights,
but we pray
not for the cup to pass
but to be quickly drained.

Pour into him
now, Jesus;
for you became death,
the cup becomes you
drop by drop.

It is finished now
for him.
He has made the final
utmost effort
to hold the cup,

with weak fingers
Jesus,
and spent mind,
panting and thirsting
to drink you in death.

LEPERS

(on seeing a book of sketches)

Eyes that mirror
rejection
limbs in attitudes
of self-protection,
yet – yet –

such mutilated
longing to be held
whole in the body of mankind.

I, too, am a leper
but my disease is of the soul:
until – until –
I join hands with the handless
and heal my sores
in their love.

MYRRH IS MINE

Close, masked eyes of mine:
darkness now confine
your gaze to inward view and vision only.
 No outward hint of light
 shall more reward your sight,
sunken in the blindness of the lonely.

Shut, shuttered ears of mine:
silence now assign
your sounds to inward voice and music only.
 No mutual consolation,
 no word of invitation,
sealed within the sorrow of the lonely.

Hands, reach not forth, nor touch:
nothing hold, nor clutch
for what you treasure most you are destroying . . .
 twist in clenched despair,
 gesticulate in air,
henceforth your only clasp shall be in praying.

Isolated, kneeling,
severed from all feeling –
crushed the corpus of my hard believing.
 Renunciation fills,
 evaporates, distills,
as drops of myrrh to sanctify my grieving.

PART THREE

SUAVE LUMEN LUMINUM
For those who have given me light

IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE

What shape has our significance?
The form of human excellence . . .

Is that high or low?
Neither: it must grow . . .

The outline, is it clear?
Not when we are near . . .

How shall it be defined?
That which has no end . . .

The centre, inmost core?
Open space is there . . .

Is it deep or light?
Ever beyond our sight . . .

Is it truly beautiful?
Indeed, but terrible . . .

To take it must we suffer?
The pain is like no other . . .

Will it bring Shalom?
We have no other home.

ROOTS

The great 'ROOTS' myth
has tugged us back to harbour
over seas of nostalgia.

Lined up on the jetty
we expect to find our forebears
waiting with welcome

and praise for our returning
to seek and recognise them
and the part they play in us.

Shall we discover suffering

of theirs, or injustice
that cries still in our lives . . .

to explain our resentments,
sense of incompleteness,
of nowhere innocent to go?

But the quayside is deserted –
Gone the ancient homestead;
the ghostly villagers

all dispersed, as their genes are,
in the code of evolution
and the creed of transformation.

Roots-fragile, fractured,
remain even after the axe has struck
entangled in deep hard earth.

Root of Man, Son of Man,
bear fruit in my humanity!

TORNESS 1979

birds are running over the sand
in endless circles

breezes are running over the water
in endless ripples

sunlight is running over the pebbles
in endless diamonds

birds take wing
over low laps of water

breezes take wing
over low levels of cloud

sunlight takes wing
low over the earth

a toddler in a T-shirt
waddles the water's edge

dogs chase each other
widely over the sand

a lark, charged with love rockets into song

but within mankind the molecule of power
remains unstable
and runs through the world
in circles, ripples, diamonds,
over water, cloud, earth,
until nothing more arises
 alive or a-love.

WOMAN

Woman is
acute angles of feeling
wires exposed to the world
connected at the womb

Wild circuit
sending charges through
the reasoned running of mankind
which seizes up and shocks

Woman –
suffering senses dealing
bold news; expectant limbs
receive, baptise, fulfil

She is where
all things are made new
flow of blood and water
birth of God

GOSPEL

(inspired by the Don Cupitt programme on television after Easter 1977)

Who is this ugly, fierce-eyed man
old for his years
and stooped,
who beats his way through the country
with urgent
awkward gait
and stark gestures of warning?

He bursts into my round of days,

commands that
I become his friend,
but I shudder at his gaunt gaze
and black,
unsoftened energy,
thorny hair and jutting bones.

What would some of my friends think?
Would it be fair
on the family?
How can I be sure I would
see eye to eye
with that medley
of his fans and followers?

Must I always decide now?
Or is it already
too late?
Powerful sections of society
have turned
against him
and those few friends have fled.

Was he arrested suddenly
at dawn and
taken away?
The various punishments dealt those
who do no wrong
all mean
we shall not see him again.

Whose are these dislocated wrists,
rent flesh,
heels spiked together?
In life he had no home, in death
they take his tortured
body from the tomb.
Not one whit shall remain to us.

We creep together in silence
hoping to pick up
the thread of daily life.
But the wounded God is among us,
his dangling fingers
say: 'You are my friends.
Take my violent drops of peace.'

I AM

I AM, he said
not of this world
Man's world divided,
not one tribe or other I
not this side or that,
not profit or loss I
not black man or white,
but daybreak and evening
spring break and falling
new-birth and dying;
man in the midstream
pass between mountains
no-man's-land, desert
the happening moment.

I AM, he said,
I have no division
into man or woman
into time or space.
What flames not for me-is dead,
is against me
that not against me-is with me
is life –
life for the New Age
happening always
LIFE-in-itself.

Door between neighbours
open am I,
child born of lovers
incarnate I
between Man and Nature
in works of Art,
between clashing armies
in blood, blood spilt.

I AM the Teacher, he said –
follow me;
I partake of wisdom –
you share with me.

I AM the Doctor, he said –
trust in me;

I partake of wholeness –
draw health from me.

Outcast of men I, beyond jurisdiction –
prophet and poet, I
beyond contradiction –
victim and priest I
enabling communion.

I AM the High King
whom to betray is treason,
but also the slave I
insulted without reason.
I AM without family
yet the Son of Man;
I AM without country
yet Israel's promised one.

My tent is pitched among you
in body, heart and mind;
where two or three are gathered
thereupon my dwelling find.
My glory is not hidden
from those with eyes to see
but I AM no different from you
so you seldom notice me –

except when I AM
all at once
I AM
and new worlds are born;
or slowly I become
so that death is transformed
taken up into me .
and my tabernacle of divinity.

The world is my tent
in the roaming universe
whose creator is Lord
of exploding stars
of all that becomes
and turns into me . . .

I AM, he said,
YOU ARE ME.

ELEMENTAL LOVE

To love and not to love, like rain,
to let the love run through

the earth and yet remain
between us two:
my clouds of love are gathered and break in slow tears
whenever cold confronts them, keenly blown from your despairs

To love and not to love, like sun,
to let the love-beams burn
and cherish life-buds new begun
to swell and yearn:
my particles of love keep recreating light
reflecting and rejoicing around star and satellite.

To love and not to love, like air,
not needing to be seen
but present everywhere
without, within:
so breathe me in and fill your every cell with love
and breathe me out, impurities of being to remove.

To love and not to love like god,
his angels and all saints;
To love for only good
without restraints:
Love, entering dark night is lost not comprehended,
Does of itself ignite, true light of life and self transcended.

IMPURE TRUTH

Truth
burns two-edged like a sword,
forces us into the world
from Our Edens of pure research.

Each experiment
picks another forbidden fruit
turns to share it
tasting of more lost innocence.

Good and Evil
grow on the same branch
of the Tree of Life
regardless of pure Science.

Eden is over
We have only the good earth
and each one keeper
of his brother.

POEM WITH A PURPOSE

God knows – I'm not a poet for pleasure –
shut up in the workshop of my mind
experimenting in the science of words,
in language for its own sake.

God knows – I want my poems read
not for literary fame, or fame at all
which would be pesticide to the poetic germ
allowing only those thick weeds to grow
which have become immune to it.

God knows – a poet is a messenger,
a fire-engine at full siren –
and poems are as dangerous to dump
as radioactive waste!

God knows – a poem is a thermal thing
that has been set alight and pulses on
until the heat contained within its form
has been conveyed, converted.

God knows – this is a poem for the world
and I press-ganged by love to work at it.
Poems will be made to serve some purpose
if they have no purpose of their own.

Science has been wielded as a weapon,
Religion has been made a slave,
Art has been manipulated . . .
We are not free in being purposeless,
but with purpose ever calling, pulling us.

Would we were free to show what we are –
the clear and colourful image of God,
creating and intending good things,
releasing love by loving,
transforming hate by suffering.

What a love awakened the atom –
a love for the world like God's,
sufficient to split up good and evil.

But ancient rocks of Caledonia
because they solidified for centuries,

Rocks of Ages,
these will be made into harbours for death.

Which of us wants, with reason,
by breeding evil to hatch the good?
To avoid the pinching of poverty
by stockpiling slow, unnatural deaths?

We drive ahead on the motorway
of manufactured needs with NO U TURNS –
unless we reach a roundabout Repentance
or opt out on the verge.

God knows how the double-glazing
of our double-thinking deludes us
while we keep indoors, indoors.

There is a dark room of the mind
where poets may develop words
while cathedrals of nuclear power are built
and skilled technicians are ordained as priests.

Did I elect the scientist as priest,
the public-relations man as politician,
the salesman as my evangelist,
the economist to extort my confession?

God knows – I have something to confess:
I have listened to patter about happiness
supermarketed in 57 varieties –
while the price was being paid by someone else.

God – do not bring us to the test
Let there be no more tests,
no more going on testing until the final test,
the one more slight accident . . .

Your kingdom is not paved with uranium,
but plutonium is a perfect hell
bubbling perpetually to the power of ten.

Deliver us from everlasting evil,
from a monstrous mutation within mankind
of the image in which he was made,

Now you know – I'm not a poet for pleasure
for happiness I would not lift a finger –
All I care for, all I work for, now, hereafter,
is a world in which children can play.

Poem – you are composed to agitate,
to ask what on earth the earth is for
and the mind of man when unmindful?

Our motorway will reach no destination
because its destination is extinction,

I will campaign for a campsite,
a workcamp for the New Way
where peace is made through peace
and a loving world through loving the world.

PEACE TREATY

(Egypt and Israel, March 1979)

Peace is not concocted
by speeches about children
and common creeds:
'the peace process'
like some computer programme.

The wily one smiles
when peace is waged
against him –
gives his hand
flatters
with a coiled word,

A comprehensive peace
might cover
a multitude
of semi-private wars.

Sister Egypt grows
new cells of civilisation.
In her chaotic, dusty
desert of freedom
fly particles of
peace.

Do not sweep them
under the prayer rug.

Pharaoh's daughter
raises her arms
likes the horns of Hathor,
and at once on her poll

a moonful of gold,
halo of contentedness.

So rises peace
and shines
between
even
the horns of our dilemma.

ST CHRISTOPHER

The load will not get lighter
(*peccata mundi*)
nor the force less fierce
of the waters' depth and distance.
It will always seem immense
and the burden (*qui tollis*)
intolerable.

Yet you will not weary
(well doing)
though young men faint;
another step assures you
the one you seem to carry
(*agnus dei*)
is he who carries you
like a lamb on his shoulder,
rejoicing, to the fold.

REMBRANDT

Homer: blind, envisioned,
Peter: flare-struck, fear-stricken,
Jeremiah: bathed in lamentation

Here glory slanting
upon Simeon in song
or the cradled Saviour –

There the questing question
in bewildered eyes
corrupted flesh,
seeing just beyond its own perimeter.

How long the night watch

bearing torches gleaming?
How long till dawn?

You enlightened the hour
of your appointed living in this world –
We see by it still
when we admit our darkness.

POETRY OF PERSONS

We love each other utterly
in sharing what we do not have;
we find each other finally
in losing what we cannot save.

We keep each other continually
in taking what we dare not hold;
we win each other daringly
when every treasure has been sold.

We fill each other with good things
when we hunger for the least
and receive the cup of blessing
uninvited to the feast.

We bring each other healing
in the strong herbs of silence;
we hear each other speaking
in the quiet voice of distance.

We come to know each other
accepting what we do not know;
we come to choose each other
whom we'd chosen long ago.

We see each other perfectly
in the beholding of the night;
we trust each other lastingly
in the unfolding of the light.

We complete each other constantly
but grow to a new whole;
we form a part of all that is
and all that is forms us a soul.

We love each other utterly
in sharing what we do not have;

we gather again abundantly
after the casting in the grave.

PILGRIMAGE TO DELPHI

We came to Delphi in the dark,
cloud-black mountain dark,
and darker dark.

The serpent road
so turned and twisted us
that we followed dumbly
with no sense of direction.
We wandered up the sacred way
trusting the eyes of the mind,
our inward light to guide us.

All that we had learnt
was no use:
we could not see our maps
nor use our calculations;
we had looked up the wrong references,
misjudged the distance;
our man-made clothes turned to rags
our food to poison;
we would never make it,
never find the way, or if we found it
lost the pace.

The air grew rare and colder;
it stung us in our isolation
and all about us
the mountains hid the sky.

At last dying
in our own determination
we sat beneath an olive tree,
decided to surrender
with all our self-made weapons.

At that moment our ears responded
to the sound of the stream
running underground.
We stumbled towards it, stooped,
groped for the cold on our fingers
and splashed it over us like fire.

Garments fell from us,
water fed us like food,
our flesh was shining
as the inward light began to spread
first to our blood and heart,
then to lungs and limbs
and lastly to our minds,
(dear light that lights us all
as we enter the darkroom of the world.)

We fell asleep.

At dawn the olive tree spoke –
At dawn birds and flowers danced –
At dawn rocks opened
under every bush and blade –
(Apollo was playing on his lyre
and chords of sunlight streaked the morning).

We listened to the tree:
'Climb now to the oracle but ask no questions;
you do not know what to ask
and she cannot answer,
has never been able to speak directly
because the questions are always wrong.
Go up and wait in silence
until you are no longer aware
of your separate existence as a race apart,
until your conscious minds are conscious
only of their roots
in rock and plant and water,
in eagle, snake and lion.

Wait like the owl,
for you cannot see in the light of reason
and self-consciousness,
only in the dark of surrender
and at-one-ment.
You will know the voice of the oracle
for it will utter within you
individually
but when you try to voice her
words you will speak with one tongue.'

The sun was rising now
and bestowing beams of amber
on the face of the ravine.
We obeyed the tree in silence,
taking each step in pain, deliberately

like an old arthritic woman
with no oil in her joints.
When we were reduced to crawling
by the steepness of the rocks,
so that we were level
with the broken statues
and rubbled ruins
we felt less stiff, more graceful.

We reached the ruined temple
and sat on blocks of ancient stone
facing Apollo's racing chestnut steeds.
They blinded us with brilliant manes
and dizzied us with speed.

We shut our eyes
and waited like the owl
all ears.

None of us knew if the other had heard,
none of us knew for certain
if the voice we heard
was the word of the oracle.
None of us dared to speak
lest our message was not real,
was not the one the others received,
was self-suggested.

The daystream was running over the rim of the world;
Apollo's chariot was translucent
in pure wheels of ruby
but driving, departing,
behind the distant peaks.
Darkness would cover us with cold,
night would confuse us,
the moon would madden us . . .

In urgency as the last wingtip of the sun
was fading,
one of us spoke:
whether it was I or another
I cannot tell;
the voice was mine, the words were mine,
yet I could not hear myself speaking
but only my neighbour.
Afterwards we said the same:
each heard his own voice spoken by another.

First we whispered like a heart-beat

'Seek no power, seek no safety,
build no temple, build no churches,
hold no contest, hold no races,
offer no prizes, offer no bribes,
make no money, make no fortune.'

Then as we grew accustomed
to the manner of the message
we spoke more clearly like a drum-beat
'Stand on earth, stand in body,
walk in water, walk in feeling,
leap in air, leap in thinking,
trust the body, use the feelings,
move onward, upward in your mind;
but always keep the three in one –
nothing is alone and complete
except emptiness and pride.'

Now the last golden spokes
of the sun retreated
but the reflection still rested on the slope
and like a single eye
concentrated on the very place we stood,
for now we stood together
and spoke in chorus to fill the theatre,
the whole auditorium
of cliffs and hollows:
'Know you love, intend to love,
count no cost, dread no death,
life will live in the weak and poor,
truth will sing in the simple and small,

the way is to loose the cord
and cry out like a newborn child
severed from all source of strength-

Ask for love from the womb of the earth,
ask for peace from the turbulent stars,
ask no more, and save –
save
the world.'

We went from Delphi
like dolphins chasing
in the ocean of enlightenment,
the light made warm-blood in us,
the whole body full of light,
the mind's light and life's light,
gentle, self-renewing,

unextinguishable,
indwelling the dark waves of the world.

SPIRALS

In Celtic stones the serpents grow
continuing in spiral flow
from grave below
sinuous and slow
in and out of flesh they go.

On Christian crosses spirals bring
coils of life-power for the king
numbering
a secret sign of Spring
triple in ancestral ring.

In the belly of the god
in the shaping of the wood
the serpent rod
the sacrificial blood
the silent undeserved reward.

Slender-wristed dancing priest
celebrates the paschal feast
the burning beast
of scarlet sin released
arises white-and-golden fleeced.

In the stones of our despair
the silent spirallings of prayer
yet declare
the life and death we dare
sculpted in the love we share.

ISLAM

min
a
ret
place
of
fire
pharos
beacon
light
beckoning

the faithful
five times
a day
on and off
flashing
and
filtered
through carved
mashrabea
of the night

purifies
mind's light
of reason
lifts
pointed
slender
stem
of feeling

cleaves
the sky
spiralling
like smoke

above the domed
house of gathered
living

above the court
yard
of cleansed hearts
above pillared
terraces of prayer

where forehead
stoops to dent
hallowed dust
and palms open
holding nothing back

through minaret
like lightning
conducted

flames
one
true thought
ALLAH

