



# AUTUMN JOURNAL

*by the same author*

THE EARTH COMPELS  
OUT OF THE PICTURE  
POEMS

# AUTUMN JOURNAL

a poem by  
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## NOTE

I am aware that there are over-statements in this poem—e.g. in the passages dealing with Ireland, the Oxford by-election or my own more private existence. There are also inconsistencies. If I had been writing a didactic poem proper, it would have been my job to qualify or eliminate these overstatements and inconsistencies. But I was writing what I have called a Journal. In a journal or a personal letter a man writes what he feels at the moment; to attempt scientific truthfulness would be—paradoxically—dishonest. The truth of a lyric is different from the truths of science and this poem is something half-way between the lyric and the didactic poem. In as much as it is half-way towards a didactic poem I trust that it contains some ‘criticism of life’ or implies some standards which are not merely personal. I was writing it from August 1938 until the New Year and have not altered any passages relating to public events in the light of what happened after the time of writing. Thus the section about Barcelona having been written before the fall of Barcelona, I should consider it dishonest to have qualified it retrospectively by my reactions to the later event. Nor am I attempting to offer what so many people now demand from poets—a final verdict or a balanced judgment. It is the nature of

this poem to be neither final nor balanced. I have certain beliefs which, I hope, emerge in the course of it but which I have refused to abstract from their context. For this reason I shall probably be called a trimmer by some and a sentimental extremist by others. But poetry in my opinion must be honest before anything else and I refuse to be 'objective' or clear-cut at the cost of honesty.

L. M.

*March, 1939.*

# AUTUMN JOURNAL

## i

Close and slow, summer is ending in Hampshire,  
Ebbing away down ramps of shaven lawn where close-  
clipped yew  
Insulates the lives of retired generals and admirals  
And the spyglasses hung in the hall and the prayer-  
books ready in the pew  
And August going out to the tin trumpets of nastur-  
tiums  
And the sunflowers' Salvation Army blare of brass  
And the spinster sitting in a deck-chair picking up  
stitches  
Not raising her eyes to the noise of the 'planes that  
pass  
Northward from Lee-on-Solent. Macrocarpa and cypress  
And roses on a rustic trellis and mulberry trees  
And bacon and eggs in a silver dish for breakfast  
And all the inherited assets of bodily ease  
And all the inherited worries, rheumatism and taxes,  
And whether Stella will marry and what to do with  
Dick

And the branch of the family that lost their money in Hatry  
 And the passing of the *Morning Post* and of life's  
 climacteric  
 And the growth of vulgarity, cars that pass the gate-lodge  
 And crowds undressing on the beach  
 And the hiking cockney lovers with thoughts directed  
 Neither to God nor Nation but each to each.  
 But the home is still a sanctum under the pelmets,  
 All quiet on the Family Front,  
 Farmyard noises across the fields at evening  
 While the trucks of the Southern Railway dawdle . . .  
 shunt  
 Into poppy sidings for the night—night which knows no  
 passion  
 No assault of hands or tongue  
 For all is old as flint or chalk or pine-needles  
 And the rebels and the young  
 Have taken the train to town or the two-seater  
 Unravelling rails or road,  
 Losing the thread deliberately behind them—  
 Autumnal palinode.  
 And I am in the train too now and summer is going  
 South as I go north  
 Bound for the dead leaves falling, the burning bonfire,  
 The dying that brings forth  
 The harder life, revealing the trees' girders,  
 The frost that kills the germs of *laissez-faire*;  
 West Meon, Tisted, Farnham, Woking, Weybridge,  
 Then London's packed and stale and pregnant air.  
 My dog, a symbol of the abandoned order,  
 Lies on the carriage floor,  
 Her eyes inept and glamorous as a film star's,  
 Who wants to live, i.e. wants more .

Presents, jewellery, furs, gadgets, solicitations  
 As if to live were not  
 Following the curve of a planet or controlled water  
 But a leap in the dark, a tangent, a stray shot.  
 It is this we learn after so many failures,  
 The building of castles in sand, of queens in snow,  
 That we cannot make any corner in life or in life's  
 beauty,  
 That no river is a river which does not flow.  
 Surbiton, and a woman gets in, painted  
 With dyed hair but a ladder in her stocking and eyes  
 Patient beneath the calculated lashes,  
 Inured for ever to surprise;  
 And the train's rhythm becomes the *ad nauseam*  
 repetition  
 Of every tired aubade and maudlin madrigal,  
 The faded airs of sexual attraction  
 Wandering like dead leaves along a warehouse wall:  
 ✓ 'I loved my love with a platform ticket,  
 A jazz song,  
 A handbag, a pair of stockings of Paris Sand—  
 I loved her long.  
 I loved her between the lines and against the clock,  
 Not until death  
 But till life did us part I loved her with paper money  
 And with whisky on the breath.  
 I loved her with peacock's eyes and the wares of  
 Carthage,  
 With glass and gloves and gold and a powder puff  
 With blasphemy, camaraderie, and bravado  
 And lots of other stuff.  
 I loved my love with the wings of angels  
 Dipped in henna, unearthly red,

With my office hours, with flowers and sirens,  
With my budget, my latchkey, and my daily bread.'  
And so to London and down the ever-moving  
Stairs  
Where a warm wind blows the bodies of men together  
And blows apart their complexes and cares.

ii

Spider, spider, twisting tight—

But the watch is wary beneath the pillow—  
I am afraid in the web of night

When the window is fingered by the shadows of  
branches,

When the lions roar beneath the hill

And the meter clicks and the cistern bubbles  
And the gods are absent and the men are still—

*Noli me tangere*, my soul is forfeit.

Some now are happy in the hive of home,

Thigh over thigh and a light in the night nursery,  
And some are hungry under the starry dome  
And some sit turning handles.

Glory to God in the Lowest, peace beneath the earth,  
Dumb and deaf at the nadir;

I wonder now whether anything is worth

The eyelid opening and the mind recalling.  
And I think of Persephone gone down to dark,

No more a virgin, gone the garish meadow,  
But why must she come back, why must the snowdrop  
mark

That life goes on for ever?

There are nights when I am lonely and long for love  
But to-night is quintessential dark forbidding  
Anyone beside or below me; only above  
Pile high the tumulus, good-bye to starlight.  
Good-bye the Platonic sieve of the Carnal Man  
But good-bye also Plato's philosophising;  
I have a better plan  
To hit the target straight without circumlocution.  
If you can equate Being in its purest form  
With denial of all appearance,  
Then let me disappear—the scent grows warm  
For pure Not-Being, Nirvana.  
Only the spider spinning out his reams  
Of colourless thread says Only there are always  
Interlopers, dreams,  
Who let no dead dog lie nor death be final;  
Suggesting, while he spins, that to-morrow will out-  
weigh  
To-night, that Becoming is a match for Being,  
That to-morrow is also a day,  
That I must leave my bed and face the music.  
As all the others do who with a grin  
Shake off sleep like a dog and hurry to desk or engine  
And the fear of life goes out as they clock in  
And history is reasserted.  
Spider, spider, your irony is true;  
Who am I—or I—to demand oblivion?  
I must go out to-morrow as the others do  
And build the falling castle;  
Which has never fallen, thanks  
Not to any formula, red tape or institution,  
Not to any creeds or banks,  
But to the human animal's endless courage.

Spider, spider, spin  
Your register and let me sleep a little,  
Not now in order to end but to begin  
The task begun so often.

iii

August is nearly over, the people  
Back from holiday are tanned  
With blistered thumbs and a wallet of snaps and a little  
*Joie de vivre* which is contraband;  
Whose stamina is enough to face the annual  
Wait for the annual spree,  
Whose memories are stamped with specks of sunshine  
Like faded *fleurs de lys*.  
Now the till and the typewriter call the fingers,  
The workman gathers his tools  
For the eight-hour day but after that the solace  
Of films or football pools  
Or of the gossip or cuddle, the moments of self-glory  
Or self-indulgence, blinkers on the eyes of doubt,  
The blue smoke rising and the brown lace sinking  
In the empty glass of stout.  
Most are accepters, born and bred to harness,  
And take things as they come,  
But some refusing harness and more who are refused it  
Would pray that another and a better Kingdom  
come,  
Which now is sketched in the air or travestied in slogans  
Written in chalk or tar on stucco or plaster-board

But in time may find its body in men's bodies,  
Its law and order in their heart's accord,  
Where skill will no longer languish nor energy be  
trammelled  
To competition and graft,  
Exploited in subservience but not allegiance  
To an utterly lost and daft  
System that gives a few at fancy prices  
Their fancy lives  
While ninety-nine in the hundred who never attend the  
banquet  
Must wash the grease of ages off the knives.  
And now the tempter whispers 'But you also  
Have the slave-owner's mind,  
Would like to sleep on a mattress of easy profits,  
To snap your fingers or a whip and find  
Servants or houris ready to wince and flatter  
And build with their degradation your self-esteem;  
What you want is not a world of the free in function  
But a niche at the top, the skimmings of the cream.'  
And I answer that that is largely so for habit makes me  
Think victory for one implies another's defeat,  
That freedom means the power to order, and that in  
order  
To preserve the values dear to the élite  
The élite must remain a few. It is so hard to imagine  
A world where the many would have their chance  
without  
A fall in the standard of intellectual living  
And nothing left that the highbrow cared about.  
Which fears must be suppressed. There is no reason for  
thinking  
That, if you give a chance to people to think or live,

The arts of thought or life will suffer and become rougher  
And not return more than you could ever give.  
And now I relapse to sleep, to dreams perhaps and  
reaction

Where I shall play the gangster or the sheikh,  
Kill for the love of killing, make the world my sofa,  
Unzip the women and insult the meek.  
Which fantasies no doubt are due to my private history,  
Matter for the analyst,  
But the final cure is not in his past-dissecting fingers  
But in a future of action, the will and fist  
Of those who abjure the luxury of self-pity,  
And prefer to risk a movement without being sure  
If movement would be better or worse in a hundred  
Years or a thousand when their heart is pure.  
None of our hearts are pure, we always have mixed  
motives,  
Are self deceivers, but the worst of all  
Deceits is to murmur 'Lord, I am not worthy'  
And, lying easy, turn your face to the wall.  
But may I cure that habit, look up and outwards  
And may my feet follow my wider glance  
First no doubt to stumble, then to walk with the others  
And in the end—with time and luck—to dance.

iv

September has come and I wake  
And I think with joy how whatever, now or in future,  
the system  
Nothing whatever can take  
The people away, there will always be people  
For friends or for lovers though perhaps  
The conditions of love will be changed and its vices  
diminished  
And affection not lapse  
To narrow possessiveness, jealousy founded on vanity.  
September has come, it is *hers*  
Whose vitality leaps in the autumn,  
Whose nature prefers  
Trees without leaves and a fire in the fire-place;  
So I give her this month and the next  
Though the whole of my year should be hers who has  
rendered already  
So many of its days intolerable or perplexed  
But so many more so happy;  
Who has left a scent on my life and left my walls  
Dancing over and over with her shadow,  
Whose hair is twined in all my waterfalls  
And all of London littered with remembered kisses.

So I am glad

That life contains her with her moods and moments  
More shifting and more transient than I had

Yet thought of as being integral to beauty;  
Whose mind is like the wind on a sea of wheat,  
Whose eyes are candour,  
And assurance in her feet

Like a homing pigeon never by doubt diverted.  
To whom I send my thanks

That the air has become shot silk, the streets are  
music,  
And that the ranks

Of men are ranks of men, no more of cyphers.  
So that if now alone

I must pursue this life, it will not be only  
A drag from numbered stone to numbered stone

But a ladder of angels, river turning tidal.  
Offhand, at times hysterical, abrupt,

*You* are one I always shall remember,  
Whom cant can never corrupt

Nor argument disinherit.  
Frivolous, always in a hurry, forgetting the address,  
Frowning too often, taking enormous notice  
Of hats and backchat—how could I assess

The thing that makes you different?  
You whom I remember glad or tired,  
Smiling in drink or scintillating anger,  
Inopportunistly desired

On boats, on trains, on roads when walking.  
Sometimes untidy, often elegant,

So easily hurt, so readily responsive,  
To whom a trifle could be an irritant  
Or could be balm and manna.

Whose words would tumble over each other and pelt  
From pure excitement,  
Whose fingers curl and melt  
When you were friendly.  
I shall remember you in bed with bright  
Eyes or in a café stirring coffee  
Abstractedly and on your plate the white  
Smoking stub your lips had touched with crimson.  
And I shall remember how your words could hurt  
Because they were so honest  
And even your lies were able to assert  
Integrity of purpose.  
And it is on the strength of knowing you  
I reckon generous feeling more important  
Than the mere deliberating what to do  
When neither the pros nor cons affect the pulses.  
And though I have suffered from your special strength  
Who never flatter for points nor fake responses,  
I should be proud if I could evolve at length  
An equal thrust and pattern.

V

To-day was a beautiful day, the sky was a brilliant  
Blue for the first time for weeks and weeks  
But posters flapping on the railings tell the fluttered  
World that Hitler speaks, that Hitler speaks  
And we cannot take it in and we go to our daily  
Jobs to the dull refrain of the caption 'War'  
Buzzing around us as from hidden insects  
And we think 'This must be wrong, it has happened  
before,  
Just like this before, we must be dreaming;  
It was long ago these flies  
Buzzed like this, so why are they still bombarding  
The ears if not the eyes?'  
And we laugh it off and go round town in the evening  
And this, we say, is on me;  
Something out of the usual, a Pimm's Number One, a  
Picon—  
But did you see  
The latest? You mean whether Cobb has bust the record  
Or do you mean the Australians have lost their last by  
ten  
Wickets or do you mean that the autumn fashions—  
*No, we don't mean anything like that again.*

No, what we mean is Hodza, Henlein, Hitler,  
The Maginot Line,  
The heavy panic that cramps the lungs and presses  
The collar down the spine.  
And when we go out into Piccadilly Circus  
They are selling and buying the late  
Special editions snatched and read abruptly  
Beneath the electric signs as crude as Fate.  
And the individual, powerless, has to exert the  
Powers of will and choice  
And choose between enormous evils, either  
Of which depends on somebody else's voice.  
The cylinders are racing in the presses,  
The mines are laid,  
The ribbon plumbs the fallen fathoms of Wall Street,  
And you and I are afraid.  
To-day they were building in Oxford Street, the  
mortar  
Pleasant to smell,  
But now it seems futility, imbecility,  
To be building shops when nobody can tell  
What will happen next. What will happen  
We ask and waste the question on the air;  
Nelson is stone and Johnnie Walker moves his  
Legs like a cretin over Trafalgar Square.  
And in the Corner House the carpet-sweepers  
Advance between the tables after crumbs  
Inexorably, like a tank battalion  
In answer to the drums.  
In Tottenham Court Road the tarts and negroes  
Loiter beneath the lights  
And the breeze gets colder as on so many other  
September nights.

A smell of French bread in Charlotte Street, a rustle  
Of leaves in Regent's Park  
And suddenly from the Zoo I hear a sea-lion  
Confidently bark.  
And so to my flat with the trees outside the window  
And the dahlia shapes of the lights on Primrose Hill  
Whose summit once was used for a gun emplacement  
And very likely will  
Be used that way again. The bloody frontier  
Converges on our beds  
Like jungle beaters closing in on their destined  
Trophy of pelts and heads.  
And at this hour of the day it is no good saying  
'Take away this cup';  
Having helped to fill it ourselves it is only logic  
That now we should drink it up.  
Nor can we hide our heads in the sands, the sands have  
Filtered away;  
Nothing remains but rock at this hour, this zero  
Hour of the day.  
Or that is how it seems to me as I listen  
To a hooter call at six  
And then a woodpigeon calls and stops but the wind  
continues  
Playing its dirge in the trees, playing its tricks.  
And now the dairy cart comes clopping slowly—  
Milk at the doors—  
And factory workers are on their way to factories  
And charwomen to chores.  
And I notice feathers sprouting from the rotted  
Silk of my black  
Double eiderdown which was a wedding  
Present eight years back.

And the linen which I lie on came from Ireland  
In the easy days  
When all I thought of was affection and comfort,  
Petting and praise.  
And now the woodpigeon starts again denying  
The values of the town  
And a car having crossed the hill accelerates, changes  
Up, having just changed down.  
And a train begins to chug and I wonder what the  
morning  
Paper will say,  
And decide to go quickly to sleep for the morning already  
Is with us, the day is to-day.

vi

And I remember Spain  
At Easter ripe as an egg for revolt and ruin  
Though for a tripper the rain  
Was worse than the surly or the worried or the  
haunted faces  
With writings on the walls—  
Hammer and sickle, Boicot, Viva, Muerra;  
With café-au-lait brimming the waterfalls,  
With sherry, shellfish, omelettes.  
With fretted stone the Moor  
Had chiselled for effects of sun and shadow;  
With shadows of the poor,  
The begging cripples and the children begging.  
The churches full of saints  
Tortured on racks of marble—  
The old complaints  
Covered with gilt and dimly lit with candles.  
With powerful or banal  
Monuments of riches or repression  
And the Escorial  
Cold for ever within like the heart of Philip.  
With ranks of dominoes  
Deployed on café tables the whole of Sunday;

With cabarets that call the tourist, shows  
    Of thighs and eyes and nipples.  
With slovenly soldiers, nuns,  
    And peeling posters from the last elections  
Promising bread or guns  
    Or an amnesty or another  
Order or else the old  
    Glory veneered and varnished  
As if veneer could hold  
    The rotten guts and crumbled bones together.  
And a vulture hung in air  
    Below the cliffs of Ronda and below him  
His hook-winged shadow wavered like despair  
    Across the chequered vineyards.  
And the boot-blacks in Madrid  
    Kept us half an hour with polish and pincers  
And all we did  
    In that city was drink and think and loiter.  
And in the Prado half—  
    wit princes looked from the canvas they had paid for  
(Goya had the laugh—  
    But can what is corrupt be cured by laughter?)  
And the day at Aranjuez  
    When the sun came out for once on the yellow  
    river  
With Valdepeñas burdening the breath  
    We slept a royal sleep in the royal gardens;  
And at Toledo walked  
    Around the ramparts where they throw the garbage  
And glibly talked  
    Of how the Spaniards lack all sense of business.  
And Avila was cold  
    And Segovia was picturesque and smelly

And a goat on the road seemed old  
    As the rocks or the Roman arches.  
And Easter was wet and full  
    In Seville and in the ring on Easter Sunday  
A clumsy bull and then a clumsy bull  
    Nodding his banderillas died of boredom.  
And the standard of living was low  
    But that, we thought to ourselves, was not our  
        business;  
All that the tripper wants is the *status quo*  
    Cut and dried for trippers.  
And we thought the papers a lark  
    With their party politics and blank invective;  
And we thought the dark  
    Women who dyed their hair should have it dyed more  
        often.  
And we sat in trains all night  
    With the windows shut among civil guards and  
        peasants  
And tried to play piquet by a tiny light  
    And tried to sleep bolt upright;  
And cursed the Spanish rain  
    And cursed their cigarettes which came to pieces  
And caught heavy colds in Cordova and in vain  
    Waited for the right light for taking photos.  
And we met a Cambridge don who said with an air  
    ‘There’s going to be trouble shortly in this country,’  
And ordered anis, pudgy and debonair,  
    Glad to show off his mastery of the language.  
But only an inch behind  
    This map of olive and ilex, this painted hoarding,  
Careless of visitors the people’s mind  
    Was tunnelling like a mole to day and danger.

And the day before we left  
    We saw the mob in flower at Algeciras  
Outside a toothless door, a church bereft  
    Of its images and its aura.  
And at La Linea while  
    The night put miles between us and Gibraltar  
We heard the blood-lust of a drunkard pile  
    His heaven high with curses;  
And next day took the boat  
    For home, forgetting Spain, not realising  
That Spain would soon denote  
    Our grief, our aspirations;  
Not knowing that our blunt  
    Ideals would find their whetstone, that our spirit  
Would find its frontier on the Spanish front,  
    Its body in a rag-tag army.

## vii

Conferences, adjournments, ultimatums,  
    Flights in the air, castles in the air,  
The autopsy of treaties, dynamite under the bridges,  
    The end of *laissez faire*.  
After the warm days the rain comes pimpling  
    The paving stones with white  
And with the rain the national conscience, creeping,  
    Seeping through the night.  
And in the sodden park on Sunday protest  
    Meetings assemble not, as so often, now  
Merely to advertise some patent panacea  
    But simply to avow  
The need to hold the ditch; a bare avowal  
    That may perhaps imply  
Death at the doors in a week but perhaps in the long run  
    Exposure of the lie.  
Think of a number, double it, treble it, square it,  
    And sponge it out  
And repeat *ad lib.* and mark the slate with crosses;  
    There is no time to doubt  
If the puzzle really has an answer. Hitler yells on the  
    wireless,  
    The night is damp and still

And I hear dull blows on wood outside my window;  
They are cutting down the trees on Primrose Hill.  
The wood is white like the roast flesh of chicken,  
Each tree falling like a closing fan;  
No more looking at the view from seats beneath the  
branches,  
Everything is going to plan;  
They want the crest of this hill for anti-aircraft,  
The guns will take the view  
And searchlights probe the heavens for bacilli  
With narrow wands of blue.  
And the rain came on as I watched the territorials  
Sawing and chopping and pulling on ropes like a team  
In a village tug-of-war; and I found my dog had vanished  
And thought 'This is the end of the old régime,'  
But found the police had got her at St. John's Wood station  
And fetched her in the rain and went for a cup  
Of coffee to an all-night shelter and heard a taxi-driver  
Say 'It turns me up  
When I see these soldiers in lorries'—rumble of tumbrils  
Drums in the trees  
Breaking the eardrums of the ravished dryads—  
It turns me up; a coffee, please.  
And as I go out I see a windscreen-wiper  
In an empty car  
Wiping away like mad and I feel astounded  
That things have gone so far.  
And I come back here to my flat and wonder whether  
From now on I need take  
The trouble to go out choosing stuff for curtains  
As I don't know anyone to make  
Curtains quickly. Rather one should quickly  
Stop the cracks for gas or dig a trench

And take one's paltry measures against the coming  
Of the unknown Uebermensch.  
But one—meaning I—is bored, am bored, the issue  
Involving principle but bound in fact  
To squander principle in panic and self-deception—  
Accessories after the act,  
So that all we foresee is rivers in spate sprouting  
With drowning hands  
And men like dead frogs floating till the rivers  
Lose themselves in the sands.  
And we who have been brought up to think of 'Gallant  
Belgium'  
As so much blague  
Are now preparing again to essay good through evil  
For the sake of Prague;  
And must, we suppose, become uncritical, vindictive,  
And must, in order to beat  
The enemy, model ourselves upon the enemy,  
A howling radio for our paraclete.  
The night continues wet, the axe keeps falling,  
The hill grows bald and bleak  
No longer one of the sights of London but maybe  
We shall have fireworks here by this day week.

## viii

Sun shines easy, sun shines gay  
On bug-house, warehouse, brewery, market,  
On the chocolate factory and the B.S.A.,  
On the Greek town hall and Josiah Mason;  
On the Mitchells and Butlers Tudor pubs,  
On the white police and the one-way traffic  
And glances off the chromium hubs  
And the metal studs in the sleek macadam.  
Eight years back about this time  
I came to live in this hazy city  
To work in a building caked with grime  
Teaching the classics to Midland students;  
Virgil, Livy, the usual round,  
Principal parts and the lost digamma;  
And to hear the prison-like lecture room resound  
To Homer in a Dudley accent.  
But Life was comfortable, life was fine  
With two in a bed and patchwork cushions  
And checks and tassels on the washing-line,  
A gramophone, a cat, and the smell of jasmine.  
The steaks were tender, the films were fun,  
The walls were striped like a Russian ballet,

There were lots of things undone  
But nobody cared, for the days were early.  
Nobody niggled, nobody cared,  
The soul was deaf to the mounting debit,  
The soul was unprepared  
But the firelight danced on the ply-wood ceiling.  
We drove round Shropshire in a bijou car—  
Bewdley, Cleobury Mortimer, Ludlow—  
And the map of England was a toy bazaar  
And the telephone wires were idle music.  
And sun shone easy, sun shone hard  
On quickly dropping pear-tree blossom  
And pigeons courting in the cobbled yard  
With flashing necks and notes of thunder.  
We slept in linen, we cooked with wine,  
We paid in cash and took no notice  
Of how the train ran down the line  
Into the sun against the signal.  
We lived in Birmingham through the slump—  
Line your boots with a piece of paper—  
Sunlight dancing on the rubbish dump,  
On the queues of men and the hungry chimneys.  
And the next election came—  
Labour defeats in Erdington and Aston;  
And life went on—for us went on the same;  
Who were we to count the losses?  
Some went back to work and the void  
Took on shape while others climbing  
The uphill nights of the unemployed  
Woke in the morning to factory hooters.  
Little on the plate and nothing in the post;  
Queue in the rain or try the public

Library where the eye may coast  
Columns of print for a hopeful harbour.  
But roads ran easy, roads ran gay  
Clear of the city and we together  
Could put on tweeds for a getaway  
South or west to Clee or the Cotswolds;  
Forty to the gallon; into the green  
Fields in the past of English history;  
Flies in the bonnet and dust on the screen  
And no look back to the burning city.  
That was then and now is now,  
Here again on a passing visit,  
Passing through but how  
Memory blocks the passage.  
Just as in 1931  
Sun shines easy but I no longer  
Docket a place in the sun—  
No wife, no ivory tower, no funk-hole.  
The night grows purple, the crisis hangs  
Over the roofs like a Persian army  
And all of Xenophon's parasangs  
Would take us only an inch from danger.  
Black-out practice and A.R.P.,  
Newsboys driving a roaring business,  
The flapping paper snatched to see  
If anything has, or has not, happened.  
And I go to the Birmingham Hippodrome  
Packed to the roof and primed for laughter  
And beautifully at home  
With the ukulele and the comic chestnuts;  
'As pals we meet, as pals we part'—  
Embonpoint and a new tiara;

The comedian spilling the apple-cart  
Of doubles entendres and doggerel verses  
And the next day begins  
Again with alarm and anxious  
Listening to bulletins  
From distant, measured voices  
Arguing for peace  
While the zero hour approaches,  
While the eagles gather and the petrol and oil and grease  
Have all been applied and the vultures back the eagles.  
But once again  
The crisis is put off and things look better  
And we feel negotiation is not vain—  
Save my skin and damn my conscience.  
And negotiation wins,  
If you can call it winning,  
And here we are—just as before—safe in our skins;  
Glory to God for Munich.  
And stocks go up and wrecks  
Are salved and politicians' reputations  
Go up like Jack-on-the-Beanstalk; only the Czechs  
Go down and without fighting.

## ix

Now we are back to normal, now the mind is

Back to the even tenor of the usual day

Skidding no longer across the uneasy camber

Of the nightmare way.

*We* are safe though others have crashed the railings

Over the river ravine; their wheel-tracks carve the  
bank

But after the event all we can do is argue

And count the widening ripples where they sank.

October comes with rain whipping around the ankles

In waves of white at night

And filling the raw clay trenches (the parks of London

Are a nasty sight).

In a week I return to work, lecturing, coaching,

As impresario of the Ancient Greeks

Who wore the chiton and lived on fish and olives

And talked philosophy or smut in cliques;

Who believed in youth and did not gloze the unpleasant

Consequences of age;

What is life, one said, or what is pleasant

Once you have turned the page

Of love? The days grow worse, the dice are loaded

Against the living man who pays in tears for breath;

Never to be born was the best, call no man happy  
This side death.  
Conscious—long before Engels—of necessity  
And therein free  
They plotted out their life with truism and humour  
Between the jealous heaven and the callous sea.  
And Pindar sang the garland of wild olive  
And Alcibiades lived from hand to mouth  
Double-crossing Athens, Persia, Sparta,  
And many died in the city of plague, and many of  
drouth  
In Sicilian quarries, and many by the spear and arrow  
And many more who told their lies too late  
Caught in the eternal factions and reactions  
Of the city-state.  
And free speech shivered on the pikes of Macedonia  
And later on the swords of Rome  
And Athens became a mere university city  
And the goddess born of the foam  
Became the kept hetaera, heroine of Menander,  
And the philosopher narrowed his focus, confined  
His efforts to putting his own soul in order  
And keeping a quiet mind.  
And for a thousand years they went on talking,  
Making such apt remarks,  
A race no longer of heroes but of professors  
And crooked business men and secretaries and clerks;  
Who turned out dapper little elegiac verses  
On the ironies of fate, the transience of all  
Affections, carefully shunning an over-statement  
But working the dying fall.  
The Glory that was Greece: put it in a syllabus, grade it  
Page by page

To train the mind or even to point a moral  
For the present age:  
Models of logic and lucidity, dignity, sanity,  
The golden mean between opposing ills  
Though there were exceptions of course but only excep-  
tions—  
The bloody Bacchanals on the Thracian hills.  
So the humanist in his room with Jacobean panels  
Chewing his pipe and looking on a lazy quad  
Chops the Ancient World to turn a sermon  
To the greater glory of God.  
But I can do nothing so useful or so simple;  
These dead are dead  
And when I should remember the paragons of Hellas  
I think instead  
Of the crooks, the adventurers, the opportunists,  
The careless athletes and the fancy boys,  
The hair-splitters, the pedants, the hard-boiled sceptics  
And the Agora and the noise  
Of the demagogues and the quacks; and the women pour-  
ing  
Libations over graves  
And the trimmers at Delphi and the dummies at Sparta  
and lastly  
I think of the slaves.  
And how one can imagine oneself among them  
I do not know;  
It was all so unimaginably different  
And all so long ago.

## X

And so return to work—the M.A. gown,  
Alphas and Betas, central heating, floor-polish,  
Demosthenes on the Crown  
And Oedipus at Colonus.  
And I think of the beginnings of other terms  
Coming across the sea to unknown England  
And memory reaffirms  
That alarm and exhilaration of arrival:  
White wooden boxes, clatter of boots, a smell  
Of changing-rooms—Lifebuoy soap and muddy  
flannels—  
And over all a bell  
Dragooning us to dormitory or classroom,  
Ringing with a tongue of frost across the bare  
Benches and desks escutcheoned with initials;  
We sat on the hot pipes by the wall, aware  
Of the cold in our bones and the noise and the bell im-  
pending.  
A fishtail gas-flare in the dark latrine;  
Chalk and ink and rows of pegs and lockers;  
The War was on—maize and margarine  
And lessons on the map of Flanders.

But we had our toys—our electric torches, our glass  
Dogs and cats, and plasticine and conkers,  
And we had our games, we learned to dribble and pass  
In jerseys striped like tigers.  
And we had our makebelieve, we had our mock  
Freedom in walks by twos and threes on Sunday,  
We dug out fossils from the yellow rock  
Or drank the Dorset distance.  
And we had our little tiptoe minds, alert  
To jump for facts and fancies and statistics  
And our little jokes of Billy Bunter dirt  
And a heap of home-made dogma.  
The Abbey chimes varnished the yellow street,  
The water from the taps in the bath was yellow,  
The trees were full of owls, the sweets were sweet  
And life an expanding ladder.  
And reading romances we longed to be grown up,  
To shoot from the hip and marry lovely ladies  
And smoke cigars and live on claret cup  
And lie in bed in the morning;  
Taking it for granted that things would still  
Get better and bigger and better and bigger and  
better,  
That the road across the hill  
Led to the Garden of Eden;  
Everything to expect and nothing to deplore,  
Cushy days beyond the dumb horizon  
And nothing to doubt about, to linger for  
In the halfway house of childhood.  
And certainly we did not linger, we went on  
Growing and growing, gluttons for the future,  
And four foot six was gone  
And we found it was time to be leaving

To be changing school, sandstone changed for chalk  
     And ammonites for the flinty husks of sponges,  
 Another lingo to talk  
     And jerseys in other colours.  
 And still the acquiring of unrelated facts,  
     A string of military dates for history,  
 And the Gospels and the Acts  
     And logarithms and Greek and the Essays of Elia;  
 And still the exhilarating rhythm of free  
     Movement swimming or serving at tennis,  
 The fives-courts' tattling repartee  
     Or rain on the sweating body.  
 But life began to narrow to what was done—  
     The dominant gerundive—  
 And Number Two must mimic Number One  
     In bearing, swearing, attitude and accent.  
 And so we jettisoned all  
     Our childish fantasies and anarchism;  
 The weak must go to the wall  
     But strength implies the system;  
 You must lose your soul to be strong, you cannot stand  
     Alone on your own legs or your own ideas;  
 The order of the day is complete conformity and  
     An automatic complacence.  
 Such was the order of the day; only at times  
     The Fool among the yes-men flashed his motley  
 To prick their pseudo-reason with his rhymes  
     And drop his grain of salt on court behaviour.  
 And sometimes a whisper in books  
     Would challenge the code, or a censored memory  
         sometimes,  
 Sometimes the explosion of rocks,  
     Sometimes the mere batter of light on the senses.

And the critic jailed in the mind would peep through the  
grate

And husky from long silence, murmur gently  
That there is something rotten in the state

Of Denmark but the state is not the whole of Denmark;  
And a spade is still a spade

And the difference is not final between a tailored  
Suit and a ready-made

And knowledge is not—necessarily—wisdom;  
And a cultured accent alone will not provide

A season ticket to the Vita Nuova;  
And there are many better men outside

Than ever answered roll-call.

But the critic did not win, has not won yet

Though always reminding us of points forgotten;  
We hasten to forget

As much as he remembers.

And school was what they always said it was,

An apprenticeship to life, an initiation,  
And all the better because

The initiates were blindfold;  
The reflex action of a dog or sheep

Being enough for normal avocations  
And life rotating in an office sleep

As long as things are normal.

Which it was assumed that they would always be;

On that assumption terms began and ended;  
And now, in 1938 A.D.,

Term is again beginning.

## xi

But work is alien; what do I care for the Master  
Of those who know, of those who know too much?  
I am too harassed by my familiar devils,  
By those I cannot see, by those I may not touch;  
Knowing perfectly well in the mind, on paper,  
How wasteful and absurd  
Are personal fixations but yet the pulse keeps thrumming  
And her voice is faintly heard  
Through walls and walls of indifference and abstraction  
And across the London roofs  
And every so often calls up hopes from nowhere,  
A distant clatter of hoofs,  
And my common sense denies she is returning  
And says, if she does return, she will not stay;  
And my pride, in the name of reason, tells me to cut my  
losses  
And call it a day.  
Which, if I had the cowardice of my convictions,  
I certainly should do  
But doubt still finds a loophole  
To gamble on another rendezvous.  
And I try to feel her in fancy but the fancy  
Dissolves in curls of mist

And I try to summarise her but how can hungry  
Love be a proper analyst?  
For suddenly I hate her and would murder  
Her memory if I could  
And then of a sudden I see her sleeping gently  
Inaccessible in a sleeping wood  
But thorns and thorns around her  
And the cries of night  
And I have no knife or axe to hack my passage  
Back to the lost delight.  
And then I think of the others and jealousy riots  
In impossible schemes  
To kill them with all the machinery of fact and with all  
the  
Tortures of dreams.  
But yet, my dear, if only for my own distraction,  
I have to try to assess  
Your beauty of body, your paradoxes of spirit,  
Even your taste in dress.  
Whose emotions are an intricate dialectic,  
Whose eagerness to live  
A many-sided life might be deplored as fickle,  
Unpractical, or merely inquisitive.  
A superficial comment; for your instinct  
Sanctions all you do,  
Who know that truth is nothing in abstraction,  
That action makes both wish and principle come true;  
Whose changes have the logic of a prism,  
Whose moods create,  
Who never linger haggling on the threshold,  
To weigh the pros and cons until it is too late.  
At times intractable, virulent, hypercritical,  
With a bitter tongue;

Over-shy at times, morose, defeatist,  
At times a token that the world is young;  
Given to over-statement, careless of caution,  
Quick to sound the chimes  
Of delicate intuition, at times malicious  
And generous at times.  
Whose kaleidoscopic ways are all authentic,  
Whose truth is not of a statement but of a dance  
So that even when you deceive your deceits are merely  
Technical and of no significance.  
And so, when I think of you, I have to meet you  
In thought on your own ground;  
To apply to you my algebraic canons  
Would merely be unsound;  
And, having granted this, I cannot balance  
My hopes or fears of you in pros and cons;  
It has been proved that Achilles cannot catch the Tortoise,  
It has been proved that men are automatons,  
Everything wrong has been proved. I will not bother  
Any more with proof;  
I see the future glinting with your presence  
Like moon on a slate roof,  
And my spirits rise again. It is October,  
The year-god dying on the destined pyre  
With all the colours of a scrambled sunset  
And all the funeral elegance of fire  
In the grey world to lie cocooned but shaping  
His gradual return;  
No one can stop the cycle;  
The grate is full of ash but fire will always burn.  
Therefore, listening to the taxis  
(In which you never come) so regularly pass,  
I wait content, banking on the spring and watching  
The dead leaves canter over the dowdy grass.

## xii

These days are misty, insulated, mute  
Like a faded tapestry and the soft pedal  
Is down and the yellow leaves are falling down  
And we hardly have the heart to meddle  
Any more with personal ethics or public calls;  
People have not recovered from the crisis,  
Their faces are far away, the tone of the words  
Belies their thesis.  
For they say that now it is time unequivocally to  
act,  
To let the pawns be taken,  
That criticism, a virtue previously,  
Now can only weaken  
And that when we go to Rome  
We must do as the Romans do, cry out together  
For bread and circuses; put on your togas now  
For this is Roman weather.  
Circuses of death and from the topmost tiers  
A cataract of goggling, roaring faces;  
On the arena sand  
Those who are about to die try out their paces.  
Now it is night, a cold mist creeps, the night  
Is still and damp and lonely;

Sitting by the fire it is hard to realise  
That the legions wait at the gates and that there is  
only  
A little time for rest though not by rights for rest,  
Rather for whetting the will, for calculating  
A compromise between necessity and wish,  
Apprenticed late to learn the trade of hating.  
Remember the sergeant barking at bayonet practice  
When you were small;  
To kill a dummy you must act a dummy  
Or you cut no ice at all.  
Now it is morning again, the 25th of October,  
In a white fog the cars have yellow lights;  
The chill creeps up the wrists, the sun is sallow,  
The silent hours grow down like stalactites.  
And reading Plato talking about his Forms  
To damn the artist touting round his mirror,  
I am glad that I have been left the third best bed  
And live in a world of error.  
His world of capital initials, of transcendent  
Ideas is too bleak;  
For me there remain to all intents and purposes  
Seven days in the week  
And no one Tuesday is another and you destroy it  
If you subtract the difference and relate  
It merely to the Form of Tuesday. This is Tuesday  
The 25th of October, 1938.  
Aristotle was better who watched the insect breed,  
The natural world develop,  
Stressing the function, scrapping the Form in Itself,  
Taking the horse from the shelf and letting it gallop.  
Education gives us too many labels  
And clichés, cuts too many Gordian knots;

Trains us to keep the roads nor reconnoitre  
Any of the beauty-spots or danger-spots.  
Not that I would rather be a peasant; the Happy Peasant  
Like the Noble Savage is a myth;  
I do not envy the self-possession of an elm-tree  
Nor the aplomb of a granite monolith.  
All that I would like to be is human, having a share  
In a civilised, articulate and well-adjusted  
Community where the mind is given its due  
But the body is not distrusted.  
As it is, the so-called humane studies  
May lead to cushy jobs  
But leave the men who land them spiritually bankrupt  
Intellectual snobs.  
Not but what I am glad to have my comforts,  
Better authentic mammon than a bogus god;  
If it were not for Lit.Hum. I might be climbing  
A ladder with a hod.  
And seven hundred a year  
Will pay the rent and the gas and the 'phone and the  
grocer;  
(The Emperor takes his seat beneath the awning,  
Those who are about to die . . .) Come, pull the cur-  
tains closer.

### xiii

Which things being so, as we said when we studied  
The classics, I ought to be glad  
That I studied the classics at Marlborough and Merton,  
Not everyone here having had  
The privilege of learning a language  
That is incontrovertibly dead,  
And of carting a toy-box of hall-marked marmoreal  
phrases  
Around in his head.  
We wrote compositions in Greek which they said was a  
lesson  
In logic and good for the brain;  
We marched, counter-marched to the field-marshal's blue-  
pencil baton,  
We dressed by the right and we wrote out the sentence  
again.  
We learned that a gentleman never misplaces his  
accents,  
That nobody knows how to speak, much less how to  
write  
English who has not hob-nobbed with the great-grand-  
parents of English,  
That the boy on the Modern Side is merely a  
parasite

But the classical student is bred to the purple, his training  
in syntax

Is also a training in thought

And even in morals; if called to the bar or the barracks

He always will do what he ought.

And knowledge, besides, should be prized for the sake of  
knowledge:

Oxford crowded the mantelpiece with gods—

Scaliger, Heinsius, Dindorf, Bentley and Wilamowitz—

As we learned our genuflexions for Honour Mods.

And then they taught us philosophy, logic and meta-  
physics,

The Negative Judgment and the Ding an Sich,

And every single thinker was powerful as Napoleon

And crafty as Metternich.

And it really was very attractive to be able to talk about  
tables

And to ask if the table *is*,

And to draw the cork out of an old conundrum

And watch the paradoxes fizz.

And it made one confident to think that nothing

Really was what it seemed under the sun,

That the actual was not real and the real was not with us

And all that mattered was the One.

And they said 'The man in the street is so naïve, he  
never

Can see the wood for the trees;

He thinks he knows he sees a thing but cannot

Tell you how he knows the thing he thinks he sees.'

And oh how much I liked the Concrete Universal,

I never thought that I should

Be telling them vice-versa

That they can't see the trees for the wood.

But certainly it was fun while it lasted  
And I got my honours degree  
And was stamped as a person of intelligence and culture  
For ever wherever two or three  
Persons of intelligence and culture  
Are gathered together in talk  
Writing definitions on invisible blackboards  
In non-existent chalk.  
But such sacramental occasions  
Are nowadays comparatively rare;  
There is always a wife or a boss or a dun or a client  
Disturbing the air.  
Barbarians always, life in the particular always,  
Dozens of men in the street,  
And the perennial if unimportant problem  
Of getting enough to eat.  
So blow the bugles over the metaphysicians,  
Let the pure mind return to the Pure Mind;  
I must be content to remain in the world of Appearance  
And sit on the mere appearance of a behind.  
But in case you should think my education was wasted  
I hasten to explain  
That having once been to the University of Oxford  
You can never really again  
Believe anything that anyone says and that of course is an  
asset  
In a world like ours;  
Why bother to water a garden  
That is planted with paper flowers?  
O the Freedom of the Press, the Late Night Final,  
To-morrow's pulp;  
One should not gulp one's port but as it isn't  
Port, I'll gulp it if I want to gulp

But probably I'll just enjoy the colour  
And pour it down the sink  
For I don't call advertisement a statement  
Or any quack medicine a drink.  
Good-bye now, Plato and Hegel,  
The shop is closing down;  
They don't want any philosopher-kings in England,  
There ain't no universals in this man's town.

## XIV

The next day I drove by night  
Among red and amber and green, spears and candles,  
Corkscrews and slivers of reflected light  
In the mirror of the rainy asphalt  
Along the North Circular and the Great West roads  
Running the gauntlet of impoverished fancy  
Where housewives bolster up their jerry-built abodes  
With *amour propre* and the habit of Hire Purchase.  
The wheels whished in the wet, the flashy strings  
Of neon lights unravelled, the windscreen-wiper  
Kept at its job like a tiger in a cage or a cricket that  
sings  
All night through for nothing.  
Factory, a site for a factory, rubbish dumps,  
Bungalows in lath and plaster, in brick, in concrete,  
And shining semi-circles of petrol pumps  
Like intransigent gangs of idols.  
And the road swings round my head like a lasso  
Looping wider and wider tracts of darkness  
And the country succeeds the town and the country too  
Is damp and dark and evil.  
And coming over the Chilterns the dead leaves leap  
Charging the windscreen like a barrage of angry

Birds as I take the steep  
Plunge to Henley or Hades.  
And at the curves of the road the telephone wires  
Shine like strands of silk and the hedge solicits  
My irresponsible tyres  
To an accident, to a bed in the wet grasses.  
And in quiet crooked streets only the village pub  
Spills a golden puddle  
Over the pavement and trees bend down and rub  
Unopened dormer windows with their knuckles.  
Nettlebed, Shillingford, Dorchester—each unrolls  
The road to Oxford; *Qu'allais-je faire* to-morrow  
Driving voters to the polls  
In that home of lost illusions?  
And what am I doing it for?  
Mainly for fun, partly for a half-believed-in  
Principle, a core  
Of fact in a pulp of verbiage,  
Remembering that this crude and so-called obsolete  
Top-heavy tedious parliamentary system  
Is our only ready weapon to defeat  
The legions' eagles and the lictors' axes;  
And remembering that those who by their habit  
hate  
Politics can no longer keep their private  
Values unless they open the public gate  
To a better political system.  
That Rome was not built in a day is no excuse  
For *laissez-faire*, for bowing to the odds against us;  
What is the use  
Of asking what is the use of one brick only:  
The perfectionist stands for ever in a fog  
Waiting for the fog to clear; better to be vulgar

And use your legs and leave a blank for Hogg  
And put a cross for Lindsay.  
There are only too many who say 'What difference does it  
make  
One way or the other?  
To turn the stream of history will take  
More than a by-election.'  
So Thursday came and Oxford went to the polls  
And made its coward vote and the streets resounded  
To the triumphant cheers of the lost souls—  
The profiteers, the dunderheads, the smarties.  
And I drove back to London in the dark of the morning,  
the trees  
Standing out in the headlights cut from cardboard;  
Wondering which disease  
Is worse—the Status Quo or the Mere Utopia.  
For from now on  
Each occasion must be used, however trivial,  
To rally the ranks of those whose chance will soon be  
gone  
For even guerrilla warfare.  
The nicest people in England have always been the least  
Apt to solidarity or alignment  
But all of them must now align against the beast  
That prowls at every door and barks in every headline.  
Dawn and London and daylight and last the sun:  
I stop the car and take the yellow placard  
Off the bonnet; that little job is done  
Though without success or glory.  
The plane-tree leaves come sidling down  
(Catch my guineas, catch my guineas)  
And the sun caresses Camden Town,  
The barrows of oranges and apples

## XV

Shelley and jazz and lieder and love and hymn-tunes  
And day returns too soon;  
We'll get drunk among the roses  
In the valley of the moon.  
Give me an aphrodisiac, give me lotus,  
Give me the same again;  
Make all the erotic poets of Rome and Ionia  
And Florence and Provence and Spain  
Pay a tithe of their sugar to my potion  
And ferment my days  
With the twang of Hawaii and the boom of the Congo;  
Let the old Muse loosen her stays  
Or give me a new Muse with stockings and suspenders  
And a smile like cat,  
With false eyelashes and finger-nails of carmine  
And dressed by Schiaparelli, with a pill-box hat.  
Let the aces run riot round Brooklands,  
Let the tape-machines go drunk,  
Turn on the purple spotlight, pull out the Vox  
Humana,  
Dig up somebody's body in a cloakroom trunk.  
Give us sensations and then again sensations—  
Strip-tease, fireworks, all-in wrestling, gin;

Spend your capital, open your house and pawn your  
padlocks,  
Let the critical sense go out and the Roaring Boys  
come in.

Give me a houri but houris are too easy,  
Give me a nun;  
We'll rape the angels off the golden reredos  
Before we're done.

Tiger-women and Lesbos, drums and entrails,  
And let the skies rotate,  
We'll play roulette with the stars, we'll sit out drinking  
At the Hangman's Gate.

O look who comes here. I cannot see their faces  
Walking in file, slowly in file;  
They have no shoes on their feet, the knobs of their  
ankles  
Catch the moonlight as they pass the stile  
And cross the moor among the skeletons of bog-oak  
Following the track from the gallows back to the  
town;  
Each has the end of a rope around his neck. I wonder  
Who let these men come back, who cut them  
down—

And now they reach the gate and line up opposite  
The neon lights on the medieval wall  
And underneath the sky-signs  
Each one takes his cowl and lets it fall  
And we see their faces, each the same as the other,  
Men and women, each like a closed door,  
But something about their faces is familiar;  
Where have we seen them before?  
Was it the murderer on the nursery ceiling  
Or Judas Iscariot in the Field of Blood

Or someone at Gallipoli or in Flanders  
Caught in the end-all mud.  
But take no notice of them, out with the ukulele,  
The saxophone and the dice;  
They are sure to go away if we take no notice;  
Another round of drinks or make it twice.  
That was a good one, tell us another, don't stop  
talking,  
Cap your stories; if  
You haven't any new ones tell the old ones,  
Tell them as often as you like and perhaps those horrible  
stiff  
People with blank faces that are yet familiar  
Won't be there when you look again, but don't  
Look just yet, just give them time to vanish. I said to  
vanish;  
What do you mean—they won't?  
Give us the songs of Harlem or Mitylene—  
Pearls in wine—  
There can't be a hell unless there is a heaven  
And a devil would have to be divine  
And there can't be such things one way or the  
other;  
That we know;  
You can't step into the same river twice so there  
can't be  
Ghosts; thank God that rivers always flow.  
Sufficient to the moment is the moment;  
Past and future merely don't make sense  
And yet I thought I had seen them . . .  
But *how*, if there is only a present tense?  
Come on, boys, we aren't afraid of bogies,  
Give us another drink;

This little lady has a fetish,  
She goes to bed in mink.  
This little pig went to market—  
Now I think you may look, I think the coast is clear.  
Well, why don't you answer?  
I can't answer because they are still there.

## xvi

Nightmare leaves fatigue:

We envy men of action

Who sleep and wake, murder and intrigue

Without being doubtful, without being haunted.

And I envy the intransigence of my own

Countrymen who shoot to kill and never

See the victim's face become their own

Or find his motive sabotage their motives.

So reading the memoirs of Maud Gonne,

Daughter of an English mother and a soldier father,

I note how a single purpose can be founded on

A jumble of opposites:

Dublin Castle, the vice-regal ball,

The embassies of Europe,

Hatred scribbled on a wall,

Gaols and revolvers.

And I remember, when I was little, the fear

Banded among the servants

That Casement would land at the pier

With a sword and a horde of rebels;

And how we used to expect, at a later date,

When the wind blew from the west, the noise of  
shooting

Starting in the evening at eight  
 In Belfast in the York Street district;  
 And the voodoo of the Orange bands  
 Drawing an iron net through darkest Ulster,  
 Flailing the limbo lands—  
 The linen mills, the long wet grass, the ragged  
 hawthorn.  
 And one read black where the other read white, his hope  
 The other man's damnation:  
 Up the Rebels, To Hell with the Pope,  
 And God Save—as you prefer—the King or Ireland.  
 The land of scholars and saints:  
 Scholars and saints my eye, the land of ambush,  
 Purbblind manifestoes, never-ending complaints,  
 The born martyr and the gallant ninny;  
 The grocer drunk with the drum,  
 The land-owner shot in his bed, the angry voices  
 Piercing the broken fanlight in the slum,  
 The shawled woman weeping at the garish altar.  
 Kathaleen ni Houlihan! Why  
 Must a country, like a ship or a car, be always female,  
 Mother or sweetheart? A woman passing by,  
 We did but see her passing.  
 Passing like a patch of sun on the rainy hill  
 And yet we love her for ever and hate our neighbour  
 And each one in his will  
 Binds his heirs to continuance of hatred.  
 Drums on the haycock, drums on the harvest, black  
 Drums in the night shaking the windows:  
 King William is riding his white horse back  
 To the Boyne on a banner.  
 Thousands of banners, thousands of white  
 Horses, thousands of Williams

Waving thousands of swords and ready to fight  
Till the blue sea turns to orange.  
Such was my country and I thought I was well  
Out of it, educated and domiciled in England,  
Though yet her name keeps ringing like a bell  
In an under-water belfry.  
Why do we like being Irish? Partly because  
It gives us a hold on the sentimental English  
As members of a world that never was,  
Baptised with fairy water;  
And partly because Ireland is small enough  
To be still thought of with a family feeling,  
And because the waves are rough  
That split her from a more commercial culture;  
And because one feels that here at least one can  
Do local work which is not at the world's mercy  
And that on this tiny stage with luck a man  
Might see the end of one particular action.  
It is self-deception of course;  
There is no immunity in this island either;  
A cart that is drawn by somebody else's horse  
And carrying goods to somebody else's market.  
The bombs in the turnip sack, the sniper from the  
roof,  
Griffith, Connolly, Collins, where have they brought  
us?  
Ourselves alone! Let the round tower stand aloof  
In a world of bursting mortar!  
Let the school-children fumble their sums  
In a half-dead language;  
Let the censor be busy on the books; pull down the  
Georgian slums;  
Let the games be played in Gaelic.

Let them grow beet-sugar; let them build  
A factory in every hamlet;  
Let them pigeon-hole the souls of the killed  
Into sheep and goats, patriots and traitors.  
And the North, where I was a boy,  
Is still the North, veneered with the grime of Glasgow,  
Thousands of men whom nobody will employ  
Standing at the corners, coughing.  
And the street-children play on the wet  
Pavement—hopscotch or marbles;  
And each rich family boasts a sagging tennis-net  
On a spongy lawn beside a dripping shrubbery.  
The smoking chimneys hint  
At prosperity round the corner  
But they make their Ulster linen from foreign lint  
And the money that comes in goes out to make more  
money.  
A city built upon mud;  
A culture built upon profit;  
Free speech nipped in the bud,  
The minority always guilty.  
Why should I want to go back  
To you, Ireland, my Ireland?  
The blots on the page are so black  
That they cannot be covered with shamrock.  
I hate your grandiose airs,  
Your sob-stuff, your laugh and your swagger,  
Your assumption that everyone cares  
Who is the king of your castle.  
Castles are out of date,  
The tide flows round the children's sandy fancy;  
Put up what flag you like, it is too late  
To save your soul with bunting.

*Odi atque amo:*

Shall we cut this name on trees with a rusty dagger?  
Her mountains are still blue, her rivers flow  
    Bubbling over the boulders.  
She is both a bore and a bitch;  
    Better close the horizon,  
Send her no more fantasy, no more longings which  
    Are under a fatal tariff.  
For common sense is the vogue  
    And she gives her children neither sense nor money  
Who slouch around the world with a gesture and a  
    brogue  
    And a faggot of useless memories.

## xvii

From the second floor up, looking north, having breakfast  
I see the November sun at nine o'clock  
Gild the fusty brickwork of rows on rows of houses  
Like animals asleep and breathing smoke  
And savouring Well-being  
I light my first cigarette, grow giddy and blink,  
Glad of this titillation, this innuendo,  
This make-believe of standing on a brink;  
For all our trivial daily acts are altered  
Into heroic or romantic make-believe  
Of which we are hardly conscious—Who is it calls me  
When the cold draught picks my sleeve?  
Or sneezing in the morning sunlight or smelling the  
bonfire  
Over the webbed lawn and the naked cabbage plot?  
Or stepping into a fresh-filled bath with strata  
Of cold water and hot?  
We lie in the bath between tiled walls and under  
Ascending scrolls of steam  
And feel the ego merge as the pores open  
And we lie in the bath and dream;  
And responsibility dies and the thighs are happy  
And the body purrs like a cat

But this lagoon grows cold, we have to leave it, stepping

On to a check rug on a cork mat.

The luxury life is only to be valued

By those who are short of money or pressed for time

As the cinema gives the poor their Jacob's ladder

For Cinderellas to climb.

And Plato was right to define the bodily pleasures

As the pouring water into a hungry sieve

But wrong to ignore the rhythm which the intercrossing

Coloured waters permanently give.

And Aristotle was right to posit the Alter Ego

But wrong to make it only a halfway house:

Who could expect—or want—to be spiritually self-

supporting,

Eternal self-abuse?

Why not admit that other people are always

Organic to the self, that a monologue

Is the death of language and that a single lion

Is less himself, or alive, than a dog and another dog?

Virtue going out of us always; the eyes grow weary

With vision but it is vision builds the eye;

And in a sense the children kill their parents

But do the parents die?

And the beloved destroys like fire or water

But water scours and sculps and fire refines

And if you are going to read the testaments of cynics,

You must read between the lines.

A point here and a point there: the current

Jumps the gaps, the ego cannot live

Without becoming other for the Other

Has got yourself to give.

And even the sense of taste provides communion

With God as plant or beast;

The sea in fish, the field in a salad of endive,  
A sacramental feast.  
The soul's long searchlight hankers for a body,  
The single body hungers for its kind,  
The eye demands the light at the risk of blindness  
And the mind that did not doubt would not be  
mind  
And discontent is eternal. In luxury or business,  
In family or sexual love, in purchases or prayers,  
Our virtue is invested, the self put out at interest,  
The returns are never enough, the fact compares  
So badly with the fancy yet fancy itself is only  
A divination of fact  
And if we confine the world to the prophet's tripod  
The subjects of our prophecy contract.  
Open the world wide, open the senses,  
Let the soul stretch its blind enormous arms,  
There is vision in the fingers only needing waking,  
Ready for light's alarms.  
O light, terror of light, hoofs and ruthless  
Wheels of steel and brass  
Dragging behind you lacerated captives  
Who also share your triumph as you pass.  
Light which is time, belfry of booming sunlight,  
The ropes run up and down,  
The whole town shakes with the peal of living people  
Who break and build the town.  
Aristotle was right to think of man-in-action  
As the essential and really existent man  
And man means men in action; try and confine your  
Self to yourself if you can.  
Nothing is self-sufficient, pleasure implies hunger  
But hunger implies hope:

I cannot lie in this bath for ever, clouding  
    The cooling water with rose geranium soap.  
I cannot drug my life with the present moment ;  
    The present moment may rape—but all in vain—  
The future, for the future remains a virgin  
    Who must be tried again.

## xviii

In the days that were early the music came easy  
On cradle and coffin, in the corn and the barn,  
Songs for the reaping and spinning and only the  
shepherd

Then as now was silent beside the tarn:  
Cuffs of foam around the beer-brown water,  
Crinkled water and a mackerel sky;  
It is all in the day's work—the grey stones and heather  
And the sheep that breed and break their legs and  
die.

The uplands now as then are fresh but in the valley  
Polluted rivers run—the Lethe and the Styx;  
The soil is tired and the profit little and the hunchback  
Bobs on a carthorse round the sodden ricks.

Sing us no more idylls, no more pastorals,  
No more epics of the English earth;  
The country is a dwindling annexe to the factory,  
Squalid as an after-birth.

This England is tight and narrow, teeming with un-  
wanted

Children who are so many, each is alone;  
Niobe and her children

Stand beneath the smokestack turned to stone.

And still the church-bells brag above the empty churches  
 And the Union Jack  
 Thumps the wind above the law-courts and the barracks  
 And in the allotments the black  
 Scarecrow holds a fort of grimy heads of cabbage  
 Besieged by grimy birds  
 Like a hack politician fighting the winged aggressor  
 With yesterday's magic coat of ragged words.  
 Things were different when men felt their programme  
 In the bones and pulse, not only in the brain,  
 Born to a trade, a belief, a set of affections;  
 That instinct for belief may sprout again,  
 There are some who have never lost it  
 And some who foster or force it into growth  
 But most of us lack the right discontent, contented  
 Merely to cavil. Spiritual sloth  
 Creeps like lichen or ivy over the hinges  
 Of the doors which never move;  
 We cannot even remember who is behind them  
 Nor even, soon, shall have the chance to prove  
 If anyone at all is behind them—  
 The Sleeping Beauty or the Holy Ghost  
 Or the greatest happiness of the greatest number;  
 All we can do at most  
 Is press an anxious ear against the keyhole  
 To hear the Future breathing; softly tread  
 In the outer porch beneath the marble volutes—  
 Who knows if God, as Nietzsche said, is dead?  
 There is straw to lay in the streets; call the hunchback,  
 The gentleman farmer, the village idiot, the Shropshire  
 Lad,  
 To insulate us if they can with coma  
 Before we all go mad.

What shall we pray for, Lord? Whom shall we pray to?  
Shall we give like decadent Athens the benefit of the  
doubt  
To the Unknown God or smugly pantheistic  
Assume that God is everywhere round about?  
But if we assume such a God, then who the devil  
Are these with empty stomachs or empty smiles?  
The blind man's stick goes tapping on the pavement  
For endless glittering miles  
Beneath the standard lights; the paralytic winding  
His barrel-organ sprays the passers-by  
With April music; the many-ribboned hero  
With half a lung or a leg waits his turn to die.  
God forbid an Indian acquiescence,  
The apotheosis of the status quo;  
If everything that happens happens according  
To the nature and wish of God, then God must go:  
Lay your straw in the streets and go about your business  
An inch at a time, an inch at a time,  
We have not even an hour to spend repenting  
Our sins; the quarters chime  
And every minute is its own alarum clock  
And what we are about to do  
Is of vastly more importance  
Than what we have done or not done hitherto.  
It is December now, the trees are naked  
As the three crosses on the hill;  
Through the white fog the face of the orange sun is cryptic  
Like a lawyer making the year's will.  
The year has little to show, will leave a heavy  
Overdraft to its heir;  
Shall we try to meet the deficit or passing  
By on the other side continue *laissez-faire*?

International betrayals, public murder,  
The devil quoting scripture, the traitor, the coward,  
the thug  
Eating dinner in the name of peace and progress,  
The doped public sucking a dry dug;  
Official recognition of rape, revival of the ghetto  
And free speech gagged and free  
Energy scrapped and dropped like surplus herring  
Back into the barren sea;  
Brains and beauty festering in exile,  
The shadow of bars  
Falling across each page, each field, each raddled sunset,  
The alien lawn and the pool of nenuphars;  
And hordes of homeless poor running the gauntlet  
In hostile city streets of white and violet lamps  
Whose flight is without a terminus but better  
Than the repose of concentration camps.  
Come over, they said, into Macedonia and help us  
But the chance is gone;  
Now we must help ourselves, we can leave the vulture  
To pick the corpses clean in Macedon.  
No wonder many would renounce their birthright,  
The responsibility of moral choice,  
And sit with a mess of pottage taking orders  
Out of a square box from a mad voice—  
Lies on the air endlessly repeated  
Turning the air to fog,  
Blanket on blanket of lie, no room to breathe or fidget  
And nobody to jog  
Your elbow and say 'Up there the sun is rising;  
Take it on trust, the sun will always shine.'  
The sun may shine no doubt but how many people  
Will see it with their eyes in 1939?

Yes, the earlier days had their music,  
    We have some still to-day,  
But the orchestra is due for the bonfire  
    If things go on this way.  
Still there are still the seeds of energy and choice  
    Still alive even if forbidden, hidden,  
And while a man has voice  
    He may recover music.

## XIX

The pigeons riddle the London air,  
The shutter slides from the chain-store window,  
The frock-coat statue stands in the square  
Caring for no one, caring for no one.  
The night-shift men go home to bed,  
The kettle sings and the bacon sizzles;  
Some are hungry and some are dead—  
A wistful face in a faded photo.  
Under the stairs is a khaki cap;  
That was Dad's, Dad was a plumber—  
You hear that dripping tap?  
He'd have had it right in no time.  
No time now; Dad is dead,  
He left me five months gone or over;  
*Tam cari capitis*, for such a well-loved head  
What shame in tears, what limit?  
It is the child I mean,  
Born prematurely, strangled;  
Dad was off the scene,  
He would have made no difference.  
The stretchers run from ward to ward,  
The telephone rings in empty houses,  
The torn shirt soaks on the scrubbing board,  
O what a busy morning.

Baby Croesus crawls in a pen  
    With alphabetical bricks and biscuits;  
The doll-dumb file of sandwichmen  
    Carry lies from gutter to gutter.  
The curate buys his ounce of shag,  
    The typist tints her nails with coral,  
The housewife with her shopping bag  
    Watches the cleaver catch the naked  
New Zealand sheep between the legs—  
    What price now New Zealand?  
The cocker spaniel sits and begs  
    With eyes like a waif on the movies.  
O what a busy morning,  
    Engines start with a roar,  
All the wires are buzzing,  
    The tape-machines vomit on the floor.  
And I feel that my mind once again is open,  
    The lady is gone who stood in the way so long,  
The hypnosis is over and no one  
    Calls encore to the song.  
When we are out of love, how were we ever in it?  
    Where are the mountains and the mountain skies,  
That heady air instinct with  
    A strange sincerity which winged our lies?  
The peaks have fallen in like dropping pastry:  
    Now I could see her come  
Around the corner without the pulse responding,  
    The flowery orator in the heart is dumb,  
His bag of tricks is empty, his over-statements,  
    Those rainbow bubbles, have burst:  
When we meet, she need not feel embarrassed,  
    The cad with the golden tongue has done his  
    worst

And has no orders from me to mix his phrases rich,  
    To make the air a carpet  
For her to walk on; I only wonder which  
    Day, which hour, I found this freedom.  
But freedom is not so exciting,  
    We prefer to be drawn  
In the rush of the stars as they circle—  
    A traffic that ends with dawn.  
Now I am free of the stars  
    And the word 'love' makes no sense, this history is  
    almost  
Ripe for the mind's museum—broken jars  
    That once held wine or perfume.  
Yet looking at their elegance on the stands  
    I feel a certain pride that only lately  
(And yet so long ago) I held them in my hands  
    While they were full and fragrant.  
So on this busy morning I hope, my dear,  
    That you are also busy  
With another vintage of another year;  
    I wish you luck and I thank you for the party—  
A good party though at the end my thirst  
    Was worse than at the beginning  
But never to have drunk no doubt would be the worst;  
    Pain, they say, is always twin to pleasure.  
Better to have these twins  
    Than no children at all, very much better  
To act for good and bad than have no sins  
    And take no action either.  
You were my blizzard who had been my bed  
    But taking the whole series of blight and blossom  
I would not choose a simpler crop instead;  
    Thank you, my dear—dear against my judgment.

## XX

Nelson stands on a black pillar,  
The electric signs go off and on—  
Distilleries and life insurance companies—  
The traffic circles, coming and gone,  
Past the National Gallery closed and silent  
Where in their frames  
Other worlds persist, the passions of the artist  
Caught like frozen flames:  
The Primitives distilling from the cruel  
Legend a faith that is almost debonair,  
Sebastian calmly waiting the next arrow,  
The crucifixion in the candid air:  
And Venice lolling in wealth for ever under glass,  
Pearls in her hair, panther and velvet:  
And the rococo picnic on the grass  
With wine and lutes and banter:  
And the still life proclaiming with aplomb  
The self-content of bread or fruit or vases  
And personality like a silent bomb  
Lurking in the formal portrait.  
Here every day the visitors walk slowly  
Rocking along the parquet as if on a ship's deck  
Feeling a vague affinity with the pictures  
Yet wary of these waves which gently peck

The side of the boat in passing; they are anxious  
To end the voyage, to land in their own time;  
The sea of the past glimmers with white horses,  
A paradigm  
Of life's successions, treacheries, recessions;  
The unfounded confidence of the dead affronts  
Our own system of values  
Like airmen doing their stunts  
Over our private garden; these arrogant Old Masters  
Swoop and loop and lance us with a quick  
Shadow; we only want to cultivate our garden,  
Not for us the virtuoso, slick  
Tricks of the airy region,  
For our part our feet are on the ground,  
They should not be allowed to fly so low above us,  
Their premises are unsound  
And history has refuted them and yet  
They cast their shadows on us like aspersions;  
Propellers and white horses,  
Movement, movement, can we never forget  
The movements of the past which should be dead?  
The mind of Socrates still clicks like scissors  
And Christ who should lie quiet in the garden  
Flowered in flame instead.

A week to Christmas, cards of snow and holly,  
Gimcracks in the shops,  
Wishes and memories wrapped in tissue paper,  
Trinkets, gadgets and lollipops  
And as if through coloured glasses  
We remember our childhood's thrill  
Waking in the morning to the rustling of paper,  
The eiderdown heaped in a hill

Of wogs and dogs and bears and bricks and apples  
And the feeling that Christmas Day  
Was a coral island in time where we land and eat our  
lotus  
But where we can never stay.  
There was a star in the East, the magi in their turbans  
Brought their luxury toys  
In homage to a child born to capsize their values  
And wreck their equipoise.  
A smell of hay like peace in the dark stable—  
Not peace however but a sword  
To cut the Gordian knot of logical self-interest,  
The fool-proof golden cord;  
For Christ walked in where no philosopher treads  
But armed with more than folly,  
Making the smooth place rough and knocking the heads  
Of Church and State together.  
In honour of whom we have taken over the pagan  
Saturnalia for our annual treat  
Letting the belly have its say, ignoring  
The spirit while we eat.  
And Conscience still goes crying through the desert  
With sackcloth round his loins:  
A week to Christmas—hark the herald angels  
Beg for copper coins.

## XXI

And when we clear away  
All this debris of day-by-day experience,  
What comes out to light, what is there of value  
Lasting from day to day?  
I sit in my room in comfort  
Looking at enormous flowers—  
Equipment purchased with my working hours,  
A daily mint of perishable petals.  
The figures of the dance repeat  
The unending cycle of making and spending  
money,  
Eating our daily bread in order to earn it  
And earning in order to eat.  
And is that all the story,  
The mainspring and the plot,  
Or merely a mechanism without which not  
Any story could be written?  
*Sine qua non!*  
*Sine qua non* indeed, we cannot ever  
Live by soul alone; the soul without the stomach  
Would find its glory gone.  
But the total cause outruns the mere condition,  
There is more to it than that;

Life would be (as it often seems) flat  
 If it were merely a matter of not dying.  
 For each individual then  
     Would be fighting a losing battle  
 But with life as collective creation  
     The rout is rallied, the battle begins again.  
 Only give us the courage of our instinct,  
     The will to truth and love's initiative,  
 Then we could hope to live  
     A life beyond the self but self-completing.  
 And, as the emperor said, What is the use  
     Of the minor loyalty—'Dear city of Cecrops',  
 Unless we have also the wider franchise, can answer  
     'Dear city of Zeus' ?  
 And so when the many regrets  
     Trouble us for the many lost affections,  
 Let us take the wider view before we count them  
     Hopelessly bad debts.  
 For Cecrops has his rights as Zeus has his  
     And every tree is a tree of branches  
 And every wood is a wood of trees growing  
     And what has been contributes to what is.  
 So I am glad to have known them,  
     The people or events apparently withdrawn;  
 The world is round and there is always dawn  
     Undeniably somewhere.  
 'Praised be thou, O Lord, for our brother the  
     sun'  
     Said the grey saint, laving his eyes in colour;  
 Who creates and destroys for ever  
     And his cycle is never done.  
 In this room chrysanthemums and dahlias  
     Like brandy hit the heart; the fire,

A small wild animal, furthers its desire  
Consuming fuel, self-consuming.  
And flames are the clearest cut  
Of shapes and the most transient:  
O fire, my spendthrift,  
May I spend like you, as reckless but  
Giving as good return—burn the silent  
Into running sound, deride the dark  
And jump to glory from a single spark  
And purge the world and warm it.  
The room grows cold, the flicker fades,  
The sinking ashes whisper, the fickle  
Eye forgets but later will remember  
The radiant cavalcades.  
The smoke has gone from the chimney,  
The water has flowed away under the bridge,  
The silhouetted lovers have left the ridge,  
The flower has closed its calyx.  
The crow's-feet have come to stay,  
The jokes no longer amuse, the palate  
Rejects milk chocolate and Benedictine—  
Yesterday and the day before yesterday.  
But oh, not now my love, but oh my friend,  
Can you not take it merely on trust that life is  
The only thing worth living and that dying  
Had better be left to take care of itself in the  
end?  
For to have been born is in itself a triumph  
Among all that waste of sperm  
And it is gratitude to wait the proper term  
Or, if not gratitude, duty.  
I know that you think these phrases high falutin  
And, when not happy, see no claim or use

For staying alive; the quiet hands sed/ice  
Of the god who is god of nothing.  
And while I sympathise  
With the wish to quit, to make the great refusal,  
I feel that such a defeat is also treason,  
That deaths like these are lies.  
A fire should be left burning  
Till it burns itself out:  
We shan't have another chance to dance and shout  
Once the flames are silent.

## XXII

December the nineteenth: over the black roofs  
And the one black paint-brush poplar  
The white steam rises and deploys in puffs  
From the house-hidden railway, a northern  
Geyser erupting in a land of lava,  
But white can be still whiter for now  
The dun air starts to jig with specks that circle  
Like microbes under a lens; this is the first snow;  
And soon the specks are feathers blandly sidling  
Inconsequent as the fancies of young girls  
And the air has filled like a dance-hall,  
A waltz of white dresses and strings of pearls.  
And the papers declare the snow has come to stay,  
A new upholstery on roof and garden  
Refining, lining, underlining the day,  
And the sombre laurels break parole and blossom  
In enormous clumps of peonies; and the cars  
Turn animal, moving slowly  
In their white fur like bears,  
And the white trees fade into the hill behind them  
As niggers' faces fade in a dark background,  
Our London world

Grown all of a piece and peaceful like<sup>b</sup> the Arctic,  
The sums all cancelled out and the flags furled.  
At night we sleep behind stockades of frost,  
Nothing alive in the streets to run the gauntlet  
Of this unworldly cold except the lost  
Wisps of steam from the gratings of the sewers.  
It is holiday time, time for the morning snack,  
Time to be leaving the country:  
I have taken my ticket south, I will not look back,  
The pipes may burst for all I care, the gutter  
Dribble with dirty snow, the Christmas party  
Be ruined by catarrh;  
Let us flee this country and leave its complications  
Exactly where they (the devil take them) are.  
So Dover to Dunkerque:  
The Land of Cockayne begins across the Channel.  
The hooter cries to hell with the year's work,  
The snowflakes flirt with the steam of the steamer.  
But the train in France is cold, the window  
Frosted with patterns of stars and fern,  
And when we scrape a peephole on the window  
There is nothing new to learn;  
Nothing but snow and snow all the way to Paris,  
No roast pigs walk this way  
And any snatched half-hour of self-indulgence  
Is an intercalary day.  
Sweet, my love, my dear, whoever you are or  
were,  
I need your company on this excursion  
For, where there is the luxury of leisure, there  
There should also be the luxury of womer.  
I do not need you on my daily job  
Nor yet on any spiritual adventure,

Not when I earn my keep but when I rob  
Time of his growth of tinsel:  
No longer thinking you or any other  
Essential to my life—soul-mate or dual star;  
All I want is an elegant and witty playmate  
At the perfume counter or the cocktail bar.  
So here where tourist values are the only  
Values, where we pretend  
That eating and drinking are more important than  
thinking  
And looking at things than action and a casual  
friend  
Than a colleague and that work is a dull convenience  
Designed to provide  
Money to spend on amusement and that amusement  
Is an eternal bride  
Who will never sink to the level of a wife, that gossip  
Is the characteristic of art  
And that the sensible man must keep his æsthetic  
And his moral standards apart—  
Here, where we think all this, I need you badly,  
Whatever your name or age or the colour of your  
hair;  
I need your surface company (what happens  
Below the surface is my own affair).  
And I feel a certain pleasurable nostalgia  
In sitting alone, drinking, wondering if you  
Will suddenly thread your way among these vulcanite  
tables  
To a mutually unsuspected rendezvous  
Among these banal women with feathers in their hats and  
halos  
Of evanescent veils

And these bald-at-thirty Englishmen whose polished  
Foreheads are the tombs of record sales;  
Where alcohol, anchovies and shimmying street-lamps  
Knock the stolid almanac cock-a-hoop,  
Where reason drowns and the senses  
Foam, flame, tingle and loop the loop.  
And striking red or green matches to light these loose  
Cigarettes of black tobacco I need you badly—  
The age-old woman apt for all misuse  
Whose soul is out of the picture.  
How I enjoy this bout of cynical self-indulgence,  
Of glittering and hard-boiled make-believe;  
The cynic is a creature of over-statements  
But an overstatement is something to achieve.  
And how (with a grain of salt) I enjoy hating  
The world to which for ever I belong,  
This hatred, this escape, being equally factitious—  
A passing song.  
For I cannot stay in Paris  
And, if I did, no doubt I should soon be bored  
For what I see is not the intimate city  
But the brittle dance of lights in the Place de la  
Concorde.  
So much for Christmas: I must go further south  
To see the New Year in on hungry faces  
But where the hungry mouth  
Refuses to deny the heart's allegiance.  
Look: the road winds up among the prickly vineyards  
And naked winter trees;  
Over there are pain and pride beyond the snow-lit  
Sharp annunciation of the Pyrenees.

## xxiii

The road ran downhill into Spain,

The wind blew fresh on bamboo grasses,

The white plane-trees were bone-naked

And the issues plain:

We have come to a place in space where shortly

All of us may be forced to camp in time:

The slender searchlights climb,

Our sins will find us out, even our sins of omission.

When I reached the town it was dark,

No lights in the streets but two and a half millions

Of people in circulation

Condemned like the beasts in the ark

With nothing but water around them:

Will there ever be a green tree or a rock that is dry?

/The shops are empty and in Barceloneta the eye-

Sockets of the houses are empty.

But still they manage to laugh

Though they have no eggs, no milk, no fish, no fruit,  
no tobacco, no butter

Though they live upon lentils and sleep in the Metro,

Though the old order is gone and the golden calf

Of Catalan industry shattered;

The human values remain, purged in the fire,

And it appears that every man's desire  
     Is life rather than victuals.  
 Life being more, it seems, than merely the bare  
     Permission to keep alive and receive orders,  
 Humanity being more than a mechanism  
     To be oiled and greased and for ever unaware  
 Of the work it is turning out, of why the wheels keep  
     turning;  
     Here at least the soul has found its voice  
 Though not indeed by choice;  
     The cost was heavy.  
 They breathe the air of war and yet the tension  
     Admits, beside the slogans it evokes,  
 An interest in philately or pelota  
     Or private jokes.  
 And the sirens cry in the dark morning  
     And the lights go out and the town is still  
 And the sky is pregnant with ill-will  
     And the bombs come foxing the fated victim.  
 As pretty as a Guy Fawkes show—  
     Silver sprays and tracer bullets—  
 And in the pauses of destruction  
     The cocks in the centre of the town crow.  
 The cocks crow in Barcelona  
     Where clocks are few to strike the hour;  
 Is it the heart's reveille or the sour  
     Reproach of Simon Peter?  
 The year has come to an end,  
     Time for resolutions, for stock-taking;  
 Felice Nuevo Año!  
     May God, if there is one, send  
 As much courage again and greater vision  
     And resolve the antinomies in which we live

Where man must be either safe because he is negative  
Or free on the edge of a razor.  
Give those who are gentle strength,  
Give those who are strong a generous imagination,  
And make their half-truth true and let the crooked  
Footpath find its parent road at length.  
I admit that for myself I cannot straiten  
My broken rambling track  
Which reaches so irregularly back  
To burning cities and rifled rose-bushes  
And cairns and lonely farms  
Where no one lives, makes love or begets children,  
All my heredity and my upbringing  
Having brought me only to the Present's arms—  
The arms not of a mistress but of a wrestler,  
Of a God who straddles over the night sky;  
No wonder Jacob halted on his thigh—  
The price of a drawn battle.  
For never to begin  
Anything new because we know there is nothing  
New, is an academic sophistry—  
The original sin.  
I have already had friends  
Among things and hours and people  
But taking them one by one—odd hours and passing  
people;  
Now I must make amends  
And try to correlate event with instinct  
And me with you or you and you with all,  
No longer think of time as a waterfall  
Abstracted from a river.  
I have loved defeat and sloth,  
The tawdry halo of the idle martyr;

I have thrown away the roots of will and conscience,  
Now I must look for both,  
Not any longer act among the cushions  
The Dying Gaul;  
Soon or late the delights of self-pity must pall  
And the fun of cursing the wicked  
World into which we were born  
And the cynical admission of frustration  
(‘Our loves are not full measure,  
There are blight and rooks on the corn’).  
Rather for any measure so far given  
Let us be glad  
Nor wait on purpose to be wisely sad  
When doing nothing we find we have gained nothing.  
For here and now the new valkyries ride  
The Spanish constellations  
As over the Plaza Cataluña  
Orion lolls on his side;  
Droning over from Majorca  
To maim or blind or kill  
The bearers of the living will,  
The stubborn heirs of freedom  
Whose matter-of-fact faith and courage shame  
Our niggling equivocations—  
We who play for safety,  
A safety only in name.  
Whereas these people contain truth, whatever  
Their nominal facade.  
Listen: a whirr, a challenge, an aubade—  
It is the cock crowing in Barcelona.

## XXIV

Sleep, my body, sleep, my ghost,  
Sleep, my parents and grand-parents,  
And all those I have loved most:  
One man's coffin is another's cradle.  
Sleep, my past and all my sins,  
In distant snow or dried roses  
Under the moon for night's cocoon will open  
When day begins.  
Sleep, my fathers, in your graves  
On upland bogland under heather;  
What the wind scatters the wind saves,  
A sapling springs in a new country.  
Time is a country, the present moment  
A spotlight roving round the scene;  
We need not chase the spotlight,  
The future is the bride of what has been.  
Sleep, my fancies and my wishes,  
Sleep a little and wake strong,  
The same but different and take my blessing—  
A cradle-song.  
And sleep, my various and conflicting  
Selves I have so long endured,

Sleep in Asclepius' temple  
And wake cured.  
And you with whom I shared an idyll  
Five years long,  
Sleep beyond the Atlantic  
And wake to a glitter of dew and to bird-song.  
And you whose eyes are blue, whose ways are  
foam,  
Sleep quiet and smiling  
And do not hanker  
For a perfection which can never come.  
And you whose minutes patter  
To crowd the social hours,  
Curl up easy in a placid corner  
And let your thoughts close in like flowers.  
And you, who work for Christ, and you, as eager  
For a better life, humanist, atheist,  
And you, devoted to a cause, and you, to a family,  
Sleep and may your beliefs and zeal persist.  
Sleep quietly, Marx and Freud,  
The figure-heads of our transition.  
Cagney, Lombard, Bing and Garbo,  
Sleep in your world of celluloid.  
Sleep now also, monk and satyr,  
Cease your wrangling for a night.  
Sleep, my brain, and sleep, my senses,  
Sleep, my hunger and my spite.  
Sleep, recruits to the evil army,  
Who, for so long misunderstood,  
Took to the gun to kill your sorrow;  
Sleep and be damned and wake up good.  
While we sleep, what shall we dream?  
Of Tir nan Og or South Sea islands,

Of a land where all the milk is cream  
And all the girls are willing?  
Or shall our dream be earnest of the real  
Future when we wake,  
Design a home, a factory, a fortress  
Which, though with effort, we can really make?  
What is it we want really?  
For what end and how?  
If it is something feasible, obtainable,  
Let us dream it now,  
And pray for a possible land  
Not of sleep-walkers, not of angry puppets,  
But where both heart and brain can understand  
The movements of our fellows;  
Where life is a choice of instruments and none  
Is debarred his natural music,  
Where the waters of life are free of the ice-blockade of  
hunger  
And thought is free as the sun,  
Where the altars of sheer power and mere profit  
Have fallen to disuse,  
Where nobody sees the use  
Of buying money and blood at the cost of blood and  
money,  
Where the individual, no longer squandered  
In self-assertion, works with the rest, endowed  
With the split vision of a juggler and the quick lock of a  
taxi,  
Where the people are more than a crowd.  
So sleep in hope of this—but only for a little;  
Your hope must wake  
While the choice is yours to make,  
The mortgage not foreclosed, the offer open.

Sleep serene, avoid the backward  
    Glance; go forward, dreams, and do not halt  
(Behind you in the desert stands a token  
    Of doubt—a pillar of salt).  
Sleep, the past, and wake, the future,  
    And walk out promptly through the open door;  
But you, my coward doubts, may go on sleeping,  
    You need not wake again—not any more.  
The New Year comes with bombs, it is too late  
    To dose the dead with honourable intentions:  
If you have honour to spare, employ it on the living;  
    The dead are dead as 1938.  
Sleep to the noise of running water  
    To-morrow to be crossed, however deep;  
This is no river of the dead or Lethe,  
    To-night we sleep  
On the banks of Rubicon—the die is cast;  
    There will be time to audit  
The accounts later, there will be sunlight later  
    And the equation will come out at last.

