

# *A Year By The Lake*



*Poems by Dean Carter*

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## Introduction

These poems are the offspring of an illness. In February 2001 I was finally formally diagnosed as having the condition known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, or ME, after having come to a complete halt and becoming unable to work back in the previous April. My previous collection, *In Place*, was a celebration of place, ranging from the Firth of Forth in Scotland, to London's Hampstead Heath, to various locations in Norfolk, and to various places in the West country, where I'd finally settled, some celebrated (Lyme Regis, Cadbury Castle, Glastonbury Tor), and some not. Now, with the onset of the illness, my days of roving about freely from morning until night pen in hand were over, it seemed.

What I could do, however, was make it to my local beauty spot, the gardens and lake of Sherborne Castle, Dorset, originally the home of Sir Walter Raleigh, landscaped by Capability Brown, and owned by the Digby family. Accordingly, I made a virtue of necessity, and discovered that at least part of the learning process I was undergoing was to look in detail at the changes wrought by the 'big green clock' of nature in just one location, now that my usual assumed 'right' as a modern human of being able to rush around the face of the planet had been denied me. My weekly visits to the lake became the high spot of my life, and became part of my attempted recovery program, a process which is still ongoing.

Poetry, as far as I'm concerned, either happens to one or it doesn't—it cannot be forced. I consider myself a poetic disciple of the Romantic poets. Being in nature sends me into what used to be referred to as an 'artistic reverie', a sort of state of meditation, in which, if one can get rid of one's worldly 'mind-chatter', one falls under the spell of a sense of the sublime, of the one-ness at the heart of all things. Sometimes poems are the result, sometimes not.

By well into the summer of that year the form of the present work began to suggest itself to me, and I realised I had already written a good deal of material at the bidding of Sherborne Lake's *genius loci*. Although the poems are in chronological order, there is no reason especially for the reader to read them one after the other, although by the time the second 'Spring' section appears, there are inevitably references to the previous Spring's crop of poems. The last poem is a celebration of the birth of our wonderful twins, Rory and Tara. Perhaps proving that I am all-too human, there are just a few bleaker poems amidst all this heightened and exalted Nature-worship!

I sincerely hope that some of the sense of wonder, of one-ness, of there being an intelligent and loving design behind our universe that I have felt and to which I owe this spot so much gratitude will reach you from these pages and bring you too closer to your Highest Self.

Dean Carter, September 2002.

From *The Wisdom Of The Overself* by Dr. Paul Brunton.

*...biologists discover an amazing intelligence at work in the intricate formation and orderly maintenance of living organisms...physicists find an extraordinarily sagacious behaviour in the energies they investigate...Nature reflects a rational functioning throughout its vast domain. We may detect not only the intelligent system at the base of Nature but, in the graceful forms taken by mineral, acid, snow and ice crystals, for example, her artistry too. The presence of such orderliness in the cosmos shows it could not have come from an unintelligent source...*

*The materialist who sees only blind and unreasoning forces living in the universe is to be pitied for his own blindness and unreason.*

*...anyone with an eye to see can see that the universe reveals that it is being held in an intelligent and intelligible order. Arbitrary caprice did not create the world once upon a time. Blind disorder has not ruled it since then. There is true meaning, there is strict law, there is genuine coherence, there is a movement through stone to flower, through beast to man, through higher and higher levels of integration in this universal existence...Every part is bound to the whole. Everything thus tends to ultimate rightness. It is indeed comforting to perceive that the universe has such significant equilibrium at its secret core.*

*Spring*

## coup

*Paradise light, light of heaven,  
refracted through diaphanous willow's  
cascading lime-green mobile.  
Martins loop, join invisible dots, above a shifting bed  
of restless luminosity  
that kisses the water, the train  
of the sun's golden dress.  
Above my head, the nuthatch mining  
for his insect breakfast, breaking  
off bark shards which shower earthwards,  
fragments of the cedar mountain  
at the foot of which I sit.  
The stately heron's circuiting  
while every petal, leaf and stem  
shines, light drenched with April  
morning gladness.  
Boisterous gangs of great tits race in relays,  
Goldfinches play kiss-chase as they sing.  
How could nature poetry not be mystical?  
Mystical poetry not be natural?  
Crested grebes, a pair, ruffed, crowned  
Lord and Lady of the lake,  
in their heaven, dancing beak to beak.  
From a jewel clear sky fall freakish stray drops of rain  
as, serenely, past me sails the swan.  
Geese hold a silent conversation  
of neck gesture, glide angle,  
while wave mirrored light bars caress  
the ash's underlimb.  
The wind is doing weird things to the trees,  
taking their ghost skeletons, morphing them  
through multiple manifestations—heat shadow, fractal marionette—  
far more fascinating than any movie.  
What water does with light—  
breaks its bread, passing it round to feed the eye's  
hungry multitude, always leaving more left over.  
This trick, investigation without dismemberment, is one  
we've yet to learn.  
Platoons of daffodils everywhere you look.  
An army of occupation, no denying it now.  
These and loitering gangs of primroses make plain  
the overwhelming coup d'etat of Spring.*

primavera

*In the stillness the surface tending to diamonds.*

*The run of sounding water.*

*Rain reaching an arm over the other side of the hill  
a mile or so away.*

*I'm caught in a blossom drift  
while the lake's aspect changes utterly  
into a goose-pimplly solid-seeming skin  
beneath a dreadnought grey  
dead-seriousness of sky.*

*Martins loop, join invisible dots.*

*Someone's bedecked the statue with daisy chains—*

*the classical goddess who stood here in my youth  
with broken hand  
now is made good, garlanded, worshipped again.  
If the years can make her whole against the odds  
so too can I be mended.*

*I'm unsure who she's supposed to be.  
To me this green day she's Primavera.*

*See, Primavera, if you can fill me in, form,  
from a jumble of points, a constellation.*



## exploded reality

*Sat by the lake, looked into her glass—*

*saw the world split into glimmering shards,  
shrapnel from an exploded reality  
which, like vision itself, persists still.*

*(Without memory, no vision-  
the madman's hell is not grasping the meaning  
behind each second's eighteen eye-paintings,*

*the mystic's heaven is not knowing either,  
but simply enjoying the view.)*

*"It's so peaceful,"  
booms the passerby.*

*How light falls through the hill translucent—  
textures variegated though uniform, and alive.  
only man paints with flat conformities of industrial colour.*

*Nothing is stiller than fixedly focussed-on  
movement.*

to an alder fly

There's something glinting in the grass  
like a drop of living dew,  
which takes wing, settles on my little  
finger, shows a clearer view  
of the perfect symmetry  
of filigree casement wings,  
a finely-turned marvel of  
fairy engineering.

I don't brush you off as I  
might habitually do.  
You're a shard of this bright  
morning's mosaic too.  
Trustingly you sit upon this hand  
that could thoughtlessly crush you.  
Why? 'Survival of the fittest' theories  
just don't fit the new world-view.  
There's a lot, my little friend, I'm sure  
that I could learn from you.

## employment

Light-kissed water scintillating,  
the unruffled heron waiting  
to spear the thrashing silver  
secret flashing from the depths.

The year's first heathaze wobbles.  
I forget-what were my troubles?  
In this scented, song-embroidered  
stage-set I'm inhabiting,  
the structures fear had built inside my mind collapse.

Goldgreen moss glossily shining,  
buttercups the grass entwining  
around the levelled stump  
of which I've made a rural desk.

I have, this golden morning,  
daisies around me fawning,  
and waterfowlksyongsongbirdtrees' companionship—  
now what more could I ask?  
To simply take this all in,  
what a delicious task!

That's my work now.  
Loitering with intent,  
hanging around in quiet places,  
waiting for the right words to find me.

## slo-mo

Bluebell-tender squirrel-scamper  
duck-bob light, on water signalling.  
A dew-bright world  
wetly like a dragonfly emerging,  
drying fragile wings beneath  
the sun, energy, life, bestowing  
amid a petal-flurry singing  
nest-material-collecting  
relaxed unhurried busyness,  
far far removed from the striving  
of we humans, always hurrying  
to get somewhere,  
never arriving.

Mesmerised by water and light's lovemaking  
everything goes slow-motion.  
Each grain of sand  
flutters down like a snow-flake  
through the glassy uterus of Time.  
I see every one perform a spiral dance  
and catch the glinting facets of each one's unique form.  
And though the grains remaining to me  
clearly are not inexhaustible,  
this way if I were to die tomorrow  
then it still would be a long time before I die.  
Besides, I know the story doesn't end there...

In the face of Nature's  
amused, inexhaustible benevolence,  
who but humans could perceive it on a level  
of petty human squander?  
Only we could posit this  
against-all-odds paradise,  
with its just-so placed seasonal tilt  
(without which Life itself would be  
a building not yet built),

this absolute exactitude as some  
lucky cosmic blunder.  
Only fools would butcher  
their natural sense of wonder,  
then construct a philosophy out of their error.  
We should tell those who bequeathed us  
starvation of imagination and existential terror:  
'No thanks! You were *wrong*. We've now looked further  
out into space and time and into matter,  
and we perceive the underlying order  
without which had Probability been left to do the job  
all would be a blankness of potential  
awaiting the first impulse to manifest as structure.

*Something* seized the initiative,  
Something made the first move,  
or I wouldn't be writing anything about anything.  
Nor would you, reader, hearer,  
be experiencing this, reading, listening'.

student

*Wind moving up through leaves like a far train whispering.*

*The shrill little drill of the humble bee  
about its peripatetic dentistry.*

*Nothing happens in the country.  
I've been watching fascinated by this 'nothing' all morning.*

*The blackbird is singing an aria extempore-  
or is it the soul of this freshly liveried beech?*

*As the distant sheep bleat, the eyes' periphery  
is a-buzz with delicately wind-titillated  
leaf and stem, insect dance.  
The foliage alive with song and whir of wing,  
all fibrillation and gentle fluttering.  
Duck-plop!-unexpectedly diving.*

*Always some tiny thing down bark crawling,  
in grass scuttling, in light like yo-yos bobbing.*

*Something dabs its ovipositor on the back of my hand  
to leave a die-five of dots, in some, I hope, vain  
attempt at egg-laying.*

*How alive and intelligent, good humoured, elegant  
each little leaf appears in the breeze's mild flirtation.*

*Animation  
Animism  
Animus  
Animal  
Anima*

*A risky business, these days, being a nature-poet.  
Even poetry readers prefer their 'nature' out of a packet.*

*What I'm seeing and hearing, who can verify it  
other than those who sit reflectively in this same spot  
with a mind that's quiet?*

*Swan, purity's 2,  
pursued by a second in full  
galleon-gorgeous sail  
of courtly courtship display.  
This amorous game disintegrates  
into disdainful, water-treading flight  
white blade wings, not throats, as first I thought  
break into honking song across the lake.*

*So generous, this place.  
I never leave with nothing.  
A little patient study, that's all life requires  
to yield up the riches of such rapt hours.*

*Passers-by think I'm a student!  
How wrong they are, and how right!  
A student now of no other course than life.  
My lecturer the lake, my tutors the trees,  
I'm studying for 360 degrees  
of all-encompassing vision,  
and every moment is an open examination  
in which I can't help but get a distinction.*

## tabula rasa

*The world is tinted greeny-grey  
by this May's gentle haze.*

*Outside this  
cave of cloudiness,  
this vapour-womb,  
we can tell the sun's warm.*

*Every day I come to this same spot  
and see a different scene.  
A new lake, other trees, alteredly the same,  
differently similar. Always.*

*I come here for the stillness,  
paradoxically am more than ever aware  
that all is always changing.*

*The river of Time's always flowing  
following its course  
on to the Sea of Eternity  
which is its source.*

*With the sun behind the mist  
the sky itself effacing  
the effect is as if  
the world is in the process of being un-thought,  
this universal dream fading back to the primal  
white blankness of the unwritten page,  
the unblemished canvas.*



## heron

*Alertness  
embodied, perched  
gathering your sleek grey cloak  
trimmed in black  
about you;  
all-purposeful attitude  
turned to ragged beggary  
as the wind freaks long breast feathers into disarray.*

*Superlative in flight,  
broad wing-tips, black, spread like Chinese fans,  
blading the air at each stroke  
as you row along an invisible river,  
bestowing a magisterial visitation.*

*I've never met a human being  
before which I've felt like bowing,  
but to watch your stately progress,  
of this lake indisputably King  
I'm glad to mentally bend my knee,  
emblem as you are of the Highest Creativity  
everywhere about me manifesting.*

## dandelion II

*Hoary, star-bright, geodesic dome,  
spirit-woven mushroom,  
with your parade-perfect airborne division  
arrayed to leap off on their fairy mission  
of Being  
unstoppable, urgent,  
inexorable.*

*How unlikely, how inevitable,  
that Nature would devise this fluffy star/crystal  
so commonplace-fantastical.*

*Where now are the ranks of  
gleaming yellow teeth you so proudly displayed?  
As my breath takes one bite, then another,  
out of your albino-Afro  
I see their shrivelled ruddy remains  
tucked away beneath.*

*Your glory gone, yet remaining forever-  
the tiny parachutes stream out like a river  
gladly about their glorious task*

*of cracking our concrete souls  
wide open.*

*When my great change comes  
will my head explode  
with the precisely ordered seeds of new germination  
like a dandelion?*

## models

*The trees have crept up on me,  
stolen into full livery.  
When last I looked these were a row  
of anorexic teenage models-*

*now each chestnut is in full green sail  
rigging groaning beneath the sudden profusion  
of verdure.*

*So much green pouring in the eye.  
Split me like a log, you'll find me  
green, through and through.*

*Split any log and there you'll find me.*

14/5

## amid the rainy green

*I like to sit alone  
amid the rainy green  
and watch the day unfold  
from where I sit unseen.  
Yet still it saddens me  
how Nature flees from Man,  
knowing he will plunder  
and spoil all he can.*

Animals do what they gotta do,  
don't get in a stew  
'bout what they oughtta do—  
  
couldn't we be like that too?

16/5

## the seeing

*The wind's given up its tearing around.*

*The lake is as still*

*as its possible.*

*The sun is new born,*

*and it now has a twin*

*bouncing off the lake's glassy skin.*

*So much light, it's unbearable.*

*Each dewy grass-stem*

*is worshipping Him*

*in ranks, in hosts*

*innumerable.*

*Looking away*

*the wet earth seems lit from within,*

*and around my shadow-form*

*a halo can be seen.*

*Dawn sky, all one blaze of splendour*

*spills over green hills, soaked in gold*

*at the point from which He has risen.*

*(All relative, of course. The sun does not 'rise',*

*and the point at which, apparently, it does,*

*would be a different one to any observer*

*save he that literally stands in my shoes.)*

*The sun rising, or God enthroned,*

*surrounded by an adoring creation*

*ablaze with praise, worshipping,*

*a vision of the empyrean.*

*All that's required—the seeing.*

*All that requires—a willingness to see.*

*Don't wait until you die.*

*Take off the shades of habit,*

*the habit of shades,*

*and God's light will flood your eye.*

*Gingerly, piece by piece,*

*we are taking off our armouring.*

*I never thought I ever would, or could,*

*but, hey, it's not so bad.*

*What's the alternative?*

*I'd rather take the point of a sword*

*than entomb once again my breathing skin*

*beneath protection's mausoleum.*

## spider poem 1

*I'm going to stop all my spinning, toiling,  
draw the web of my life back into me,  
line by line, strand by strand.*

*I've never been happy with it.*

*I must spin a new web,  
one that captures fodder also for  
my other mouth, invisible,  
the finer appetites.*

14/5

## spider poem 2

*Between a high branch  
and a dock-leaf on the ground  
strung, pointlessly it seems,  
a single long gossamer-strand  
like fairy rigging,  
teases gleams out of thin air.*

*One dead unlucky  
(unlucky, dead )insect,  
stuck there.*

*Unknowing of probability  
or discouragement,  
the spider spins and thrives.*

20/5

## bridge of light

As I sit here writing, time is moving on.  
Now the sparkling path of the sun  
has extended a shifting  
scintillating bridge of light  
between the far bank, and the one  
at which I write.

If I only knew  
how to cross over it.

20/5

## beneath the mountains of the moon

*Beneath the mountains of the moon—  
a daymoon's capsized tombstone,  
like a skull half embedded in blue—  
Nature looks after her own,*

*and the heron wings home, in its beak  
a fat wet piece of the flesh of the lake  
surrendered willingly  
to the bird's unfussy  
lunge of inquiry.*

*At higher magnification  
the moon appears uneven,  
unshaven,  
its massive peaks and craters  
no bigger than grains of pollen  
upon a beeswing.*

30/5

## words

A magnificence of sky, ideal  
for swifts to skate across,  
indescribable, untranslatable  
expanding illusion of stillness  
mutating.

Short vapour-trail comet speeds behind  
ribs silvergold, bars magically upheld,  
the canopies and flags of some angelic army.

While my mind drifts, the scenery shifts  
next thing I know it's a mass of grey jagged rocks I'm enthralled by  
slowly being consumed from underneath by a living, livid  
pink/red combustion.

You cannot ascribe to these phenomena  
as flat a notion as 'colour',  
as flat a notion as language.

Thought, true thought  
lies at a lower/deeper/higher level  
than words.

Words are the clothing with which we attempt  
to cloak the naked majesty of Thought  
in order to contain it.

*Summer*



## mayday

*How swiftly summer established itself  
on the back of spring.  
Spring made the booking, and with its arriving—  
this year no dilly-dallying—  
the bridgehead established,  
Summer soon had a firm footing.  
The storms and rain of winter which seemed unending  
now seem like a bad dream.  
Were they tokens of a pattern shifting?  
If so, so must this be, the hottest greenest May  
in my remembering,  
And we can take heart in  
the fact that curses always bring  
on the reverse side of their coin  
a blessing.  
The green is charging down the eye  
hooping and hollering,  
running, singing and shouting through  
the corridors of the delight-overrun brain.  
Such proliferation, so much growth, so many things  
for which I have no name—  
and have, at this point, no desire for cataloguing...  
Mating damselflies on the wing  
about their delicate space-docking coupling—  
a blue streak of lake, a blue streak of sky,  
conjoining.  
The cedar, a solid fountain, this lakeside crowning—  
I wonder, is the full play of your canopy's panoply  
mirrored by a hidden root twin, fanning out beneath me?  
Beneath your shady embrace  
the young blackbird with short, stopping motion, hopping,  
the jackdaw strutting,  
and in the water the duck tugs her little gaggle of darlings  
behind on an invisible string.  
The 'humble daisy' with its  
glaring star-bright stare multiplied beyond computing  
before a green lawn sky,  
each with a picket-fence ruff around  
a yellow hive-of-pollen mound.  
Leaves are light conductors.  
They exist, take the forms they do,*

*to be impregnated by the light,  
take on its energies and qualities.  
Little sapphire wing-cased beetle,  
you're a marvel of ages beyond comprehension,  
yet even a year or so ago  
I'd have flicked you thoughtlessly from my hand-  
so I was conditioned.*

*The tractor is chanting,  
it's droning an 'Om',  
clouds take un-shape  
from the wind's wispy comb.  
All's right with the world  
I'm in my heaven,  
who could not give thanks  
for all that I'm given?*

*Only the nightmare black of crow  
through all this green and gold and blue,  
in cutting flight, the afternoon's  
indolence interrupting...*

## an education

*I passed through the 'education' system  
without learning a bloody thing  
about the natural world we live in.  
Parents, elders, educators—where, or what, were they?  
Not one of them could identify  
the sweet piercing song of the wren,  
tease that one thread out of the tapestry of dawn-song.  
What right, then, had any one of them  
to pass on what they passed off as wisdom?  
But while they built for me a prison,  
they did pass on, perhaps half-wittingly, the tools  
with which to break out of it.  
Reading, writing, thinking...  
take them to their logic-toppling logical conclusion  
and you won't want to stay forever in the illusion.  
'It's like watching a nature documentary'  
my dad said, sitting here the other day.  
How entirely the wrong way round!  
How we have been betrayed, betrayed ourselves,  
conned into accepting the facsimile for the real thing.  
You can watch your own nature documentary,  
drama, (kitchen-sink or cosmic), comedy,  
all day every day if you look about  
with awareness—  
and look at the electricity you'd save!*

*How, of a treeful of leaves, in  
the mild breeze ever-so-gently moving,  
can one leaf alone be having  
an animated, flapping dialogue with the wind  
all of its own?*

*The neverstill painting—  
last night's rusty moon like a nail-paring,  
peek-a-boo-ing, dis-  
appearing  
through invisible clouds  
as if smudged, erased, reconstituted  
by the colourless, massless sky itself.*

## homage

*Before this copper-beech,  
massive, blazing,  
shimmering  
I feel like bowing.*

*Surely, here, now, is a god,  
a giant being, benign,  
astoundingly alive,  
tangible, above me towering,*

*yet only one of a theocracy  
this green hill populating.  
The ancients weren't fools to bend  
their knees to hills and groves.  
It's we, not they, who lack understanding.*

## benediction

*A stand off-  
July heat, and the astonishing verdure  
of a May the child of a wet, wet wintering.*

*I've been stopped in my tracks  
to learn sedentary joys,  
the wonders of my own back yard  
after all that wandering,  
to gaze the world in the navel,  
to learn that, as anybody's, is this man's grass green.*

*Not easy, getting to that haven within.  
It's like mining, finding the right seam, hidden beneath the mountain,  
it's like the course of an underground stream divining,  
it's like listening for the single voice that's whispering  
amid a multitude all shouting.*

*Over me the cedar showers—  
What? Something.  
An old skin shedding? Seedlings?  
I'm confounded by my ignorance again—  
but whatever it is at least I now  
can recognise that it's a blessing I'm receiving.  
The cedar's shadow's pointing  
to the hills from which this morning  
I saw the sun's rising.  
Every opening's a closing,  
every closing's an opening.  
'Sweet is the lore that Nature brings':  
Her ways are lessons in  
the universal laws,  
Her laws are lessons in  
the universal ways.  
Everything in nature is a sermon.  
All observation of her, then,  
will turn into learning.  
And if you think that mars my song  
I'd say you're not really listening  
to the voice that I hear loud and clear  
that bids me thus pick up my 'rural pen'  
beneath the cedar's gentle benediction,  
delivered in its own obscure, shimmering tongue.*

the sort of day I've come to dread

*This is the sort of day I've come to dread,  
when Nature's face is turned away from me,  
when life's a book writ in a tongue I cannot read,  
and all that is, is not itself, but is some ghastly parody.  
Reason says that everything's the same, it's I who've changed.  
this must be true, and yet it is the world that seems deranged—  
and such a day is this, outwardly fair,  
but I'm out of alignment, in despair.  
When I am in this state, Hope seems a lure  
dangled before me so I other days like this endure,  
and memories of oneness and belonging  
seem but false demons keeping me here.  
What greater hell than to be placed in heaven,  
see, but be exiled from it, carrying a hell within?*

Change is Universal Law.  
Even hell will have an end.  
So that these horse-latitudes I may endure  
Lord, steadfastness to me send.

## continents of cloud

*Great sloppy continents of cloud drawl by,  
like...  
like nothing but themselves,  
massing tauntingly low.  
I know I can grasp each one in my mind, if not my hand.  
The one I was going to write about  
disintegrated/reorganised into something else  
as I wrote the opening lines.  
Now only an already-faded memory  
of its shape which so impressed me  
whisps intangibly beyond me.  
You are never looking at the same cloud  
from one moment to the next.  
And as if these bodies weren't mutating restlessly enough,  
the lake has a take on each one,  
displays its artistically-licensed impression of each,  
never replicating, always remoulding, reshaping,  
mocking even, according to its wide, watery eye.*

8/6

## you cannot hope to keep us down

*The grass I'm flattening while lying on  
is restless, is whispering, complaining  
that its great upward sun-summoned prerogative  
I'm denying.  
I can hear, clearly now,  
what the grass is saying—  
'You cannot hope to keep us down.  
You triumphs incomplete are temporary.  
You cannot, and you will not, keep us down.'*

8/6

## green giant/reflections

*This is the summer England I remember—  
a green giant, dozing  
beneath a cloud-quilt covering  
drawn over,  
with darker patches in it  
that anytime could give themselves as rain.  
The air can't make its mind up—  
'Am I cold or warm?'  
The lake's surface burnishings  
touch upon almost-perfectly still  
awhile,  
before being re-calibrated  
into crosshatched diamond frowns  
at the stir of invisible fingers;  
intangibles suggesting their being  
with the most exquisite nuances of presence  
only.*

*Reflections  
are that upon which we reflect,  
exist only in our eyes.  
That repainted cloud would look slightly different  
to any other observer present.  
The deep green smudgy ghost-hill, ghost-trees,  
silver streaked, held in the lake's frame,  
grow a sudden rash of rain-stars.*

*Even the crows have given up  
their incessant Greek chorusing.*



## willow

*Willow—  
dancer frozen in mid-ecstasy,  
draped with emerald longings.*

20/6

## dreaming on a summer day

*dreaming on a summer day  
taking time out from the fray  
pinky-ruby-silverblue  
light on the wings of the dragonfly  
the yellow flags of irises  
the water's mellow scent  
a shallow-shoal of shadow-fry  
tiny black life-filaments  
the ox-eye daisies supernova  
overwhelm the daisy-stars  
slow down, and look, and breathe, and be  
and paradise is ours.*

20/6

## lungs

*Strip your soul and senses clean,  
learn to see and think again.*

*I rest beneath the bronchi, alveoli,  
of a giant lung,  
that takes into itself  
light from the sun  
and breathes out oxygen  
waste product that we all  
feed, rely upon.*

*All over the world  
they are chopping down our lungs,  
telling us (growing scant of breath)  
why this 'has' to be done.  
How much longer will we let this go on?*

*All I need are my eyes and ears,  
a pen and a blank sheet.  
All I need is the world about me  
and time to look at it.*

## the still point of now

*Have I ever known  
so still a morn?*

*The lake itself is speechless,  
so still it's enticed the sun's double,  
not fragmented into shoals of sparkles  
(if but our fragmentation gave arise  
to such flaked bliss of light!)  
but a knot of gold constancy,  
blindingly whole.*

*Have I ever known  
so still a morn?*

*Outfitted in motionlessness,  
a garb which keeps the worries of the time  
at bay, a rumour  
of a rumour.  
I feel I could rub this  
insect, pollen dotted air  
between my fingers  
like silk.*

*Muted coo,  
faint splash,  
tiny song-fragment—  
thin recordings in a far room,*

*and the gentlest whispered sough  
all reinforce the still point of now.*

## wallpaper

*All this extravagance of verdure,  
once established, it's almost a bore,  
wallpaper.  
Summer's always a disappointment,  
its quiet make one yearn  
for the restless scurryings of Spring,  
the poignant gold hecatombs of Autumn.  
A dull warm blanket of cloud  
muffles each instrument in the visual orchestra.  
The clouds are in me as well as the sky,  
my flame burns dully, flickeringly.  
I doubt my own existence.  
Oh for the rare days of clear skies,  
with the air itself a-glitter!  
Days where the hills and trees  
turn blue with intense heat!  
I have a yearning, now, for that,  
but am contented somewhat  
simply by the freshening breath of the water  
playing over me.*

## from out the west

*Here, strangely, for the first time of an evening  
of impeccable clear light, and the West Wind's roaring.  
All this clarity and energy, as if  
a power of both light and restless motion is emanating  
from the sun that's sinking,  
a precision-cut world revealing,  
jewel-bright with light's enamelling.*

*Far deer as if drawn by a lazy artist,  
grazing, all the same way facing,  
each other's attitudes mimicking.  
Is it lack of imagination  
that I can't construe any more beautiful a heaven?*

*The wind back-brushes suede  
the sweet-chestnut.  
All about me in the sunny breeze  
tree/leaf/seed detritus falling.  
The silvery blue of the lake shimmering  
like the currents of a river running.  
The wavelets move forward  
like a mighty army,  
driving unstopably, purposefully  
nowhere.*

*That only with clouds, pigeons, grebes  
these visions I'm sharing  
brings no cause for grieving.  
How can I feel alone  
when the Earth herself I can hear breathing?  
I can feel the very heart of Being beating,  
hear the hum of its machinery turning...*

*This animatedness from out the West  
is clearing out the heaviness  
that all about my spirit for the last week has been clawing;  
the lethargic, static, thunderiness*

*that has been gnawing  
at the roots of everything, the air polluting,  
all things congealing.*

*The Setting Wind, and West Sun, golden clarity bestowing  
all the stuckness away is blowing.  
This solar breeze blows away  
all the doubt and dreariness,  
leaving only radiant visionariness:*

*that quality without which, redeeming,  
we would stagger all our days  
through an unlit expanse;*

*that tidies up the mind's  
chaotic playroom, puts the toys and clothes away  
that have been left strewn  
in its random, infantile enthusiasms.*

## ephemerality

*Uncanny morning stillness.  
Washed-out swooping cloud-dove  
mirrored today faithfully  
by a tame lake.  
A bird-spirit hovers over us,  
wing-feathers freaked, airbrushed,  
upwards.  
At the world-rim friendly mountains  
puff themselves up.  
As there is no wind  
this masterful sky-piece seems fixed as the land,  
as if the sky has for the moment  
overcome its very nature—  
ephemerality.  
That this cannot be so, I know.*

*In the writing of these lines are interposed  
tiny 'spot the difference' alterations between  
the picture that's before me now  
and that of minutes ago,  
that of minutes ago  
existing only now  
in my mind, fading like glowing coals  
and incommunicable.*

*The image of the dove is all undone.  
The shapes in the sky now suggest no specific forms.  
The moment is gone.*

## cash machine

*The ground is drowsily chirruping,  
cow-parsley heads are dry,  
the world is given over to  
bees and damsel-flies  
who alone have energy  
for motion in this heat.  
The hearts of birds and beasts,  
have a mellowed beat.  
But in offices and factories  
profit dictates the pace.  
Subsumed in the will of the cash-machine  
writhe our distorted race.*



## augustus

### I

*As always, at this time,  
I'm longing for Autumn to come,  
as if the stripping of these green tapestries,  
so hard won  
will not come soon enough anyway.*

*Always a sense in the month of Augustus  
of something going to seed.  
I long for that first keen wind  
to cut like a sword.*

3/8

### II

*A chill wind has come  
rubbing the August trees  
up the wrong way,  
like the touch  
of a bony hand on the shoulder,  
a lipless, breathless  
whisper in the ear:  
'Remember you are but mortal.'  
The dark and the light  
chase each other's tails  
forever.  
This chill reminds us  
that summer's tenure  
will soon be over.*

12/8

## summer's almost gone

*Late August, things  
are coming to a head.  
Blackberries are ripening, the air grows sweet,  
in gardens trees clasp apples to their bosom.  
Wasps, the drunks of the air,  
stagger through invisible gutters.  
On the lake goose clans are gathering,  
their numbers daily swelling into an army.  
Above the draining cataract, water-lily guarded,  
a scum of feathery detritus is building.  
Summer's almost gone—  
was it ever here?  
Memory gets cloudy as  
a pint of scrumpy,  
an old boozer's urine sample.  
August is up to its usual tricks.  
In the catalogue of the months, the least,  
by me, beloved.  
Restless promptings ever urge me on.  
That which is established holds for me no magic.  
August, placid and corrupt  
as its namesake toga'd, bloated prince,  
sits smug in its presumption.  
So solidly having arrived, it feels  
it doesn't have to go anywhere, do anything.  
And that is its downfall,  
for busily the earth is about its overthrow.*

*Every fruit on every bough is a bell  
that rings out August's death knell.*

## mornings by the lake

*I spend my mornings by the lake,  
waiting to see the shape the day will take.*

*A shoal of points of light  
on the water signalling.  
I'm not immune to what they're saying,  
it's just beyond my conscious understanding,  
needs interpreting  
not by the mind, but by the heart.*

24/8

## dull days

*Thank God for 'dull' days  
that keep the crowds at bay.  
The promise of rain  
makes all the more room to breathe in.  
The geese are still massing, impatiently waiting  
for the year's turning.  
What are they saying, with  
their honkings flaring up, then dying?  
The pagans knew it:  
Autumn's bloodbath  
are the colours of a birthing.*

31/8

## in parentheses

*I woke up one morning to find  
a dew of tenderness had settled on my soul.  
A crack had appeared in the dam  
and love was pouring, roaring through.*

31/8

*Autumn*

## a wedding

*Where the lake was days ago populous  
with gangs of gulls and grebes and geese,  
now it's bereft of splashes and calls.*

*Leaves have leapt into its lap  
like flakes of rust,  
a little flotilla of orangey-brown  
on the water,  
confetti for the bride and groom,  
as life and death are wed again  
by presiding Autumn.*

*Clamorous crows rise like a clatter  
of black sparks from the trees,  
and there goes the precious neon blur  
of the kingfisher.*

*The Yew's sinuous flesh,  
a carved flowing,  
a flowed carving.*

*Seedlings spiral down, elastic bands  
unwinding the year.  
A stillness holds the air—  
a pause before the spear  
of Time  
is thrown  
into the unknown.*

## stormy weather

while others cower I feel myself thriving  
on wind that is raving and rain that is driving  
any fool who this world's progress watches  
can see the wheel's turned round a few notches  
by ones and by twos the once green trees sicken  
sycamores, beeches, lie gory and stricken  
the air is alive with the dancing dead leaves  
animate corpses, the year's refugees  
the statue in Spring wore a garland of daisies  
to think that was months ago simply seems crazy  
the lake's lip is swollen, the waters are rising  
the clouds have closed in to erase the horizon  
rain hangs like veils, like smoke from a battle  
the creaking of branches—the summer's death-rattle

## autumn's parade

*A blind man would know it now:  
the nose gives verification  
of what the eyes have long been reporting.  
The moist spicy rottenness of atmosphere  
confirms that Autumn's here.  
The yews are proud with berries,  
the boughs of other trees blossom again  
with the song of birds.  
A goose flotilla fills the sky  
with wingbeats and loud proclaiming,  
and, turning, plough into the lake.*

*The last few visits here  
the light, inside and out, was quenched.  
Now it bounces down like water  
falling through the leaves still green,  
and again it seems my calling  
is now and has ever been  
to observe the way it falls.  
Pulses of living energy  
are throbbing through the squirrel's tail  
as head-down on a trunk it sprawls,  
at the foot of which is gathered in  
a fungal brood.  
And today the wind is mild,  
yet animating willow boughs  
to set their leaves a-glistening.*

*The willow is tossing its mane for me,  
the chaffinch is singing its light for me,  
the water's cascading, the Autumn's parading,  
and all I thought wrong now seems right for me.*

## master-colourer

*Everywhere the smell of sharpened pencils:  
Master-colourer October at his work.  
Urged by the wind the trees raise up their voices,  
frantically flap to us a message, we ignore.  
Light on the water signals the same message.  
Will we learn to read this semaphore?*

*Fungal citadels and colonies  
clustering like mountain villages  
on stumps and at the bases of young trees.  
Fully berried, glossy green,  
the holly.  
Leaves fallen thick enough at last  
to scuff among.*

17/10

## autumn's slaughters

great gouts of blood—  
the casualties pile up  
from Autumn's slaughters  
we're all sick of one another  
and there has to be at times  
a letting of sour blood  
season of rotten bloodiness  
season of bloody rottenness  
severed limbs among detritus  
scattered by the storms  
the lake like a madman has taken a bite  
from its own margins  
pressurised the fall is roaring  
a white scream from ear to ear of

O V E R L O A D

26/10



## fool's gold

*Many times now here have I sat  
digesting both good and bad news.  
Many times have I tried to make sense  
of news that could be either two.  
Like seasons sped-up, out of kilter,  
the frantic fever of my moods.*

*I sit among gold upon gold,  
as light from a sun slinking low  
slants in, and illuminates the fact  
that Autumn has firmly now taken control.  
The green badge of summer has bled into bronze,  
the wheel, still at heart, has moved on.*

*Sometimes you see things as if for the first time.  
Some miracles never grow dull.  
In this, my 39<sup>th</sup> Autumn, still I'm enthralled  
by the glimmering tower of coins so tall  
of a beech whose leafage has morphed  
into an erupting volcano  
captured in amber,  
a treasure chest flowing over.*

*This treasure still living, unlike dead metal,  
is consumed by a noble, inward conflagration  
of surrender, ensuring renewal.  
The splendour that pours forth thereby  
like cloisonné-work  
encloses the blue-jewel sky.*

*It's as if I've never seen a tree burst  
into Autumn flame before.  
In a way, I haven't.  
As awareness grows  
so does appreciation  
of the astonishing variation  
on the themes of yellow, orange, red, gold, brown  
which is but one tree about to shed its flamy gown,  
flooding my field of vision  
with innumerable intimations*

*of the empyrean.*

*If this were not enough  
awed respectful water choruses,  
amplifies and multiplies  
these glories all.  
In this time of divestiture and diminishment  
all seems augmentation and addition.*

*If only men were mesmerised by this ever-  
upwelling fountain of wealth,  
this yearly largesse, freely, lovingly given,  
instead of hanging hearts and souls  
on plunder from Gaia's bowels,  
ripped from the dark only  
to be buried again: only fools  
would care for any gold  
other than that of these  
amazing displays—  
Autumn a fleet of ships  
rigged with golden sails...*

## first frost

Leaves are falling constantly  
turned into tin by the first frost.  
A shower of drunk, heavy shrapnel  
in wobbly plummet, this fusillade somehow  
reinforcing the stillness.  
Webs are enhanced by hoar's enchantment  
into sparkling geometric forms like city lights at night,  
and freezing fog smears all the views.  
Near the lakeside, sun-purged, it's clearer,  
but the lake itself seethes with vapour,  
and its golden distances are half-erased.  
Below foggy lake, above foggy sky,  
the world is being redrawn.  
Things become blanks: tree trunks and battlements  
loom as vague ideas in a mind not-yet-made-up.  
Yet all this blankness is ablaze with light;  
the whole of everything is being rubbed out  
by flame, as if the longed-for time has come  
of re-allocation, absolute redefinition.

What a month ago was this lake's screaming throat  
gives now only a parched bleat.  
The waters that raged at containment  
are dwindled, in retreat,  
and the stream that would foam in escape  
is throttled as if by August heat.

With a stirring of breeze now  
the vapours haste over the surface  
beneath the sharp silhouettes of cormorants  
in hooked, antedeluvian poise,  
as if waiting for an end to Time's repose  
the dawn of new earth and seas.

Cries unseen boom from the burning blur  
of this world melted down in Shiva's fire,  
while the trees keep up their unfailing patter  
like the sound of a defrosting refrigerator.

## rearguard action

*Lanes and paths are choked  
with leafy refugees.  
November is getting a grip on itself.  
Suddenly while half the trees are bare,  
half fight an amazing rearguard action:  
their colours deepen with inward intensity  
rendering all attempts at verbal encapsulation  
barren.*

*Lower branches fume with a splendour,  
setting the world aglow.  
My peripheral vision's encroached upon  
by creeping radiation.  
Up the little valley I'm haunted by blood  
at the back of my eyes, where banks are ablaze with leaves  
still smouldering in red surrender.*

*As shutting skies darken  
the lawns are hoovered clear  
of Autumn's blood by the  
over-zealous gardener.  
in denial of the time's  
rubicund wonder.*

*Winter*

## tatters

Just a few tatters of leaves in the branches are hung  
like bunting, forlorn, left after the carnival's passed.

The song of this year's almost sung—  
is this new millennium's die truly cast?

Are we doomed to merely repeat the mistakes of the last?

## cormorants

No  
calls,  
no cries.  
One splays its wings, bat like  
to dry.

Uncannily they're always sitting here.  
Not feeding, foraging, fighting or fornicating,  
just waiting, with unsettling fixedness...  
for what?

Their Sequoia-composure baffles me.  
Seems they could wait until Time's end, if they had to.

Imperturbable  
they overlook the wheeling, squealing, splashing, fussing gulls  
like statues.  
After fifty million years, I guess,  
I'd be the same.

## winter's music

Who can be deaf to Winter's music?  
Many, it seems,  
even though the woodland rolls out a red carpet,  
and the sun loitering at the sky's margins  
renders the whole of the pruned day a sunset.

How can you subscribe to the lie  
that Winter's a time of blasted barrenness,  
when, like scarlet anemones,  
intricacies of bright bared limbs writhe,  
and feathery lung-like splays of gold  
shimmer about us like corals, mysterious?

Where once I too was deaf and blind  
to Winter's songs and shows,  
now on dark days they calm my mind  
and bring the heart repose.



## views

*Now we draw near the toppling of the year,  
vistas that were leaf-obscured are clear  
and will so remain now all the winter.*

*Winter has its own peculiar glamour.  
Gulls wintering inland raise a clamour.  
So focussed on survival, Robin forgets he's a singer.*

*As we lose the verdure, so we gain farther views.*

*Explain to me again the difference between bad and good news?*

7/12

## heaven and hell

Winter low sun  
inflames blue water.  
All the lake becomes  
brilliance,  
a dazzling, almost unbearable display  
of radiance.

What must it be like to dwell  
in the primal glare  
of Light Ineffable?

To beings which had not adapted well  
Heaven would be Hell.

14/12

## opposition

*I sit in the self-same spot  
where in May I thought I would melt  
from the heat.*

*It's another planet.*

*Gaia's face is turned from her lover  
so now I'm pinched black and blue by December,  
bullied into movement, as if this Winter  
were my old PE teacher  
come back to haunt me.*

*But this time holds no morbidity for me,  
is anything but desolate,  
is more a thoughtful pause.  
True, the trees have been stripped bare—  
all the better for us to appreciate  
the arrested snaky sensuous expressiveness  
of their limbs.*

*The squirrel flows from tree to tree.*

*Gulls have been given the keys  
to the city of the air.*

*There's nothing wrong here—  
indeed, all is well.*

*You have to breathe in  
to exhale.*

*We could not have day  
without night.*

*No thing can be  
without its opposite.*

## cold snap

*Mirror-still, the lake is frozen.  
Upon a perfect photo of the sky  
ducks walk with trepidation.*

*What lout, I wondered, had left  
the litter of white scraggy plastic bags  
in the still sharply green field?*

*The lout Winter, the litter-bug Snow.  
These relics of their New Year revels  
disfiguring, persist,  
and flattened patches on the hill  
bear witness to the sledge's descent.*

*I was away, and missed the magic transformation,  
and though left with only these remnants,  
swear I can still hear on the air  
the sounds of merriment.*

*But the lake has caught longer onto  
these memories of ancestral winters,  
otherwise banished by man's marring hands  
to Christmas-card land.*

*It's held in a spell, stiller than the most breathless day.  
Its vagaries of reproduction  
of the trees and sky around  
caught with instamatic faithfulness,  
insisted now for days upon.*

*We think of photographs as moments of Time frozen.  
Time here has been frozen into a photograph.*

## midwinter spring

**‘Midwinter spring is its own season...’**—T.S.Eliot, *Little Gidding*.

*After the draining hullabaloo  
of the reign of the Lord of Misrule,  
Christ’s nativity, the bargaining  
with Lugh to return at Yule—  
the real bleak midwinter begins its clampdown.  
The sky is banished.  
We’re left with days of dark cold, frozen fog.  
Calculation seeks to reassure us, that the nights are getting lighter—  
senses report the opposite.  
We hunker down in Winter’s bunker,  
and the light-starved heart starts to shrivel.  
Poetry comes hard. The most honest  
chronicle of the time might be a blank page.*

*Now comes a miraculous day of midwinter Spring.  
With their two-note call, the great-tits proclaim that  
all you need is light,  
and the world, although leafless and flowerless,  
is rioting with sensual colour and form.  
Orange and scarlet the bare bushes squirm,  
golden green sing the trees in their turn,  
and a rich living flame graces  
the supple breast of the robin.  
The finger tips of the trees have softened,  
are almost budding.  
A tractor-dislodged goose armada takes wing,  
fills the sky, a cluster of black stars, honking.  
Heron takes its serpentine grace off  
to the cedar-top,  
skimming the gliding grebe  
bisecting the shimmering surface-silk,  
so perfect it holds even the vapour trails  
scoring the sky’s otherwise flawless sapphire.  
The coot trails a wake of fire.*

*That there might be many frosts yet to come  
and nip these buds,  
that the greenfinches’ nest-building  
is premature  
is not a sad thing.  
Rather this day gives notice  
in the middle of the blank season  
of light’s inexorable triumphing.*

## at the waterfall

*At the waterfall  
light's reflections  
ripple over stone,  
liquefy solids.*

*The sun glares on the waterfall's lip  
as it sings a white noise song  
underpinned by a deep full undertone.  
Web threads pulse through bare branches like power-lines,  
and waves of light play above and around me,  
the golden thoughts of God sparkling through  
the scintillating neurons of the primal brain  
which manifest as this universe.*

*Word painting—doomed.  
As for skill with canvas and pigment,  
would that be more doomed still?  
All art is a hopeless attempt  
to encapsulate, communicate,  
the naked flowing wonder  
of the multifacet, multifoliate moment.*

*The sun has shifted—well,  
it is we who have shifted—  
the phenomenon is passed.  
The stillest moment is part of the whirling  
dervish universe.*

## survivalist

Mostly, it must be said,  
January comes on like some grim survivalist.  
Everything's in olive drab,  
lit by whatever thin light can squeeze  
through a sky like a concrete slab.  
Fancy greeting Janus like that,  
wearing fatigues and a balaclava.  
All that can be done is to keep one's head down,  
avoid the worst of his bombardments,  
stay in a nice, safe, cozy trench.

Only a fool would be out on a day like this.

## battleship grey

from this spot I can see  
deer, grebes, cormorants, gulls,  
crows, moorhens, swans, ducks,  
a heron, buzzards, a pair, three, five—  
six!

framed by trees, some stillgreen,  
thrilling to the blisscaress of water-  
mirrored light

silent gulls ride shifting switchbacks  
immaterial, flecks  
of whitegold  
before blue shades parading

allday shadows snakelong  
snakelong shadows allday  
shadows allday snakelong

bellows for effort drift from far pitches,  
are drowned by the fall's whitethroat song

brightdaze  
allthemore ablaze  
against this winter's battleship-greys

## snowdrops

She, too, pursues her ends,  
Brutal as the stars of this month,  
Her pale head heavy as metal.  
-*Snowdrop*, Ted Hughes

The first little batch of them arrived  
about a week back: a handful of pale,  
frail adventurers, washed up, dazed  
on a new shore, all a-droop, as if  
apologising.

I expected to find them pulped  
by the tantrums of brat January.  
Instead that first handful are lost amid  
a swarming galaxy of their own friable kind.

It's tenderness, Ted, not brutality,  
that conquers.



## vanguard

Already we've had the snowdrops,  
dazed little bands of boat-people from the moon  
storm-ragged heads bowed.

Now amid tempest detritus—  
strewn limbs, some still lichen-jerseyed,  
and still-piled corpses from Autumn's holocaust  
smouldering dull crimson—  
bunches of green spears are thrusting up  
through the earth.

Here early February daffodils,  
Spring's vanguard, have arrived  
in little phalanxes.

However outrageously the gales have been raging,  
compared with the freezing dark  
that comes with earth's moody turning away from the sun,  
it's a boon.

A smattering of primroses, daisies,  
and patches of bright green moss also flourishing.  
One brave yellow crocus, even  
bravely hangs out her flimsy yellow flags.

This is not a land, it seems  
of sharp temporal borders.  
I'm sure in other, more together countries,  
Germany, for instance,  
Spring arrives on the dot, like a train.

Here it's all a matter of overlapping circles.  
We mostly move and have our being  
in their intersections.  
Only for moments, at Mabon and Yule, say,  
At Ostara and Litha,  
can we say, clearly, cleanly,  
we are at season.

## masks

Between wind harried clouds  
light slides down,  
light that is brisk and clean.

The sun has been patiently labouring  
up the sky's blue hill,  
until its yolky-light can now spill  
at such an angle  
that, in spells of truce within  
this Winter's conflict unceasing,  
we have a glimpse of Spring.

Every season is a mask  
adorning its successor.  
Winter's mask slipped today  
and I saw through it the face of Spring.

Oh, the strange stirring in the heart,  
long before the ordained time of succession,  
when, in Summer, say, we are visited  
by an intimation of Autumn!

## big green clock

Another tick of the big green clock,  
and snowdrops mass on banks like luminescent foam,  
form a little heaven, carpeted  
with choirs of angels, with wide held, or folded, wings.

The green daffodil-spears have gained tips,  
and one smug clump has won the year's race,  
erupted already into golden selfhood,  
mooch about, patting themselves on the back.

The lake's composing a concerto in grey,  
creating before me shapes and patterns  
that may never have 'til now been seen,  
may never occur again.

If unaware of compensating observations such as these,  
how do men stagger through the darkened valley of their days?

8/2

## the other side of the glass

The other side of the glass, now,  
that little snowdrop-angel heaven.  
It takes but a flick of an internal switch  
and I am all one infernal twitch,  
and would trample all beauty in spite  
for its throwing into relief  
my inner despair.

How should I not be compassionate then  
towards those who've taken that step of smashing the glass,  
and broken the bounds that keep, on bad days,  
our misery lashed within?

It's comforting for us to think we are far  
from the killer in his pen:

Think again.

10/2

## lupercalia

Light and song have been stealing up daily on the world.  
This cloudfree morn  
they have triumphed.

In one bare tree great-tit and chaffinch contend  
in a contest of song,  
in another a great-tit performs  
its zig-zag dance to a persistent 'sree'.  
How these choristers sing, throwing their voices  
so far on the rapt morning air.  
How our efforts at music making lag behind,  
like the clumsy monster's groping after the violin  
in *Frankenstein*.  
Yet we all hold similar sonic gold within.

At times I wish I were among the thick-skinned souls  
whom nothing perturbs, freed from pain by dearth  
of imagination.  
Yet when the scales are tipped and a simple morning's walk  
propels me into the empyrean, I'm thankful  
there's this other side to the coin of suffering.

My face is gently stroked  
by the year's first warm rays of the sun.  
Though branches are bare, and it's only Lupercalia, yet  
daffodil spearmen in ranks are massing,  
and I think we can say 'OK, it's Spring.'

*Spring*

## metropolis

Daffs out in force now,  
the fallside bank  
a sparkling metropolis of crocus-purple,  
snowdrop-white  
light.

At first I thought someone must have  
dropped a bottle of scent.  
Fool. Senses are coming alive  
as the earth is exhaling, and her breath  
is primrose-sweet.

## pink

In skyscape and wooded hills and banks, no sign,  
yet batted back on the lakemirrorskin  
I'm sure I detect a touch of pink.

Light's sleight of hand? Hallucination?

Are the souls of all the strawberry ice-cream  
cone trees not here in view, creeping,  
like a subtle scent, into the composition?

6/3

## inner light

The sun puts out a tongue of flame  
and all the bankside is a thrill of light.

One floral invader succeeds the other.  
Snowdrops give way to primroses, crocuses,  
daffodils,  
massing around the setting sun,  
facing away from Him, fanfaring  
through each collared trumpet,  
and each, you would swear, is lit from within.

6/3

## scrambled egg and pink ice-cream

Even at a distance  
the bank is alive with fanfares of daffodils.  
A paisley carpet of fallen catkins  
below the reconvened parliament of crows.  
In the absence of wind  
for the first time the air is kind.  
Sprays of scrambled egg and pink ice-cream abound.  
Branches are lit with little candles  
of albumen-white and fragile green.  
Furry pods put forth creamy scented unfurlings.  
The willow outpaces its skeletal neighbours,  
draping itself in delicate veils  
of verdant rain.  
The robin joins me on my favourite seat  
as light breaks out,  
Redefining the scene of primrose galaxies,  
and coots gulls and grebes  
on hypnotic wavelets dancing.  
Yellow-wagtails pace the shallow stream  
their bright bodies bobbing.  
For what are they searching?  
The presence of a lumbering intruder  
(me) detected—  
away they wing, their flight dipping.  
Grebe courtship: crests hoisted aloft  
a rigorous ritual headshaking, first one,  
then another.  
In the lake's imagination  
the behind-cloud languishing sun  
becomes a fragmented pavement  
of smoky rainbows.  
Now and here, not so hard  
being here and now.  
As the furry bee dawdles through  
the cherry blossom,  
a wind springs up sharp as a file.  
one last defiant gesture from Winter  
in the teeth of its overthrow.  
These golden trumpets may yet get  
snow jammed down their throats.



## march

I've often wondered why this tender time  
is yoked to Mars,  
but now I see  
like points of water-cupped light  
spilling onto land  
flower battalions on parade,  
their contrasting uniforms  
a bright kaleidoscopic  
tone-cannonade.

The banks one general mobilisation  
of colour. Gladioli, primrose,  
and differing brigades  
of Daffs: white, primrose-pale,  
fresh young sunny yellow recruits to the fray,  
and wizened deeper gold, aged campaigners  
unruffled, reduced to ragged flugels only.  
Blue grenades are lobbed into the melee,  
blooms unknown to me, bursting  
eloquently, delicately.  
Long forgotten now the snowdrop  
troops that spearheaded this invasion.

The heron is back on his rounds, the crows  
noisily re-occupy their tree-top-town.  
Who could harm a single one  
of the Christ-tender souls that shine *jubilate*  
from each branch?  
Branches seem smeared with yolk.

Earthmild beneath feet  
Airsoft upon skin

Wind and water's plaything  
the tree's reflection becomes  
a living pulsing Klimt line-drawing,  
all whirls and eye-like ovals.

*25/3 Palm Sunday*

## 'we call this friday good'

The dripping blood our only drink,  
The bloody flesh our only food:  
In spite of which we like to think  
That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—  
Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

--*T.S.Eliot, East Coker*

No martial contention today  
between wind and sun.  
Outright Sol seems to have won  
and reigns over a sky unmarred  
by obfuscating cloudiness.  
What if Paradise were better even than this?  
Could one tolerate such bliss?  
Each pore is greedily drinking in  
what for so long has been denied—  
lucidity,  
unobscured, unabsorbed  
by leaves. The trees are exposed  
delicate system tracteries,  
as yet put forth barely a pale smattering  
of green.  
Such a glut of light.  
If it weren't for a still sharp breeze,  
the trees' nakedness, the holy show  
of spring flowers, row on row, the songs  
of busy birds, one might be forgiven  
for thinking it July—  
or heaven!  
May I be by this morning light filled inwardly  
and henceforward ever light emit.  
One would like to think that it's  
in honour of our Christing that  
today the air is tainted less  
by traffic-noise-pollution  
adding to the sense of peace,  
blessedness.  
Not so hard this day to be  
all-accepting.  
Nature seems in no mood  
to let the shadow of the cross  
fall across our hearts and sour

Her jubilee.

If sacrifice has brought such joy, the only sin  
would be in not welcoming it in  
with open arms and every breath  
a song of praise.

Let those in whose consciousness  
catastrophe and death are found  
celebrate them.

It is not irony that makes this Friday so good:  
this gifting is so great not out of denigration  
of the Passion,  
but because the fact that all is love and all is joy  
and that there is no death,  
is broadcast now loud, clear and shinningly  
direct from God.

In tender, illimitably powerful  
Words of love undeniable,  
unshakeable, unmistakable,  
made petal, flesh and stem  
He speaks.

## alder fly revisits

You latch onto the back of my hand again  
a year on,  
perhaps mistaking it for some  
pink flower.

And I let you sit there drinking in the sun,  
admire once more God's detailed craftsmanship,  
until, recharged, like a tiny, silent,  
graceful helicopter  
you fly away.

I'm proud to have been able to help you  
for a short while incubate.  
No honour bestowed by my fellows, believe me,  
could be as great.

## spring colours

softly light steals across skin

bare branch outlines  
gently coloured in  
with pointillistic dabs  
of orange, mauve,  
cream and green—

the foal-like colours of spring,  
fragile and uncertain:  
unsteady, delicate,  
not having yet quite found their feet,

suffused with a pale splendour,

charged with all the promise of the future

## a sort of death

Since last here, they've turned off  
the massed banks of electric daffodils.  
The light has grown more confident,  
the coots have had their chicks.  
In this year's time of bud and blossom  
I too have added a share to the tide of quickening.  
My lover and I have brought  
two tiny buds of human flesh  
onto shore from out the dark  
and far, fathomless ocean,  
to share this still and splendid scene  
one day themselves, and know in their own way  
the systole, diastole,  
of the seasons' wheeling.

All holds its breath, trembling  
at the green avalanche about to break forth  
that will fatten the lap of each maiden beech,  
plump them into matronly canopies.

Listen—  
the blossom's whispering:  
'Like confetti thrown in the path  
of bride and groom, my fallen loveliness  
heralds a greater coming.  
Ahead of Summer, running to broadcast  
the good news, comes the Spring,  
flamboyantly Hosanna-ing.'

Even last night I felt myself  
by God abandoned, lost in old  
familiar disconnection.  
Perhaps we ought to view such times  
of brutal off-cutting,  
when prayer's engulfed and all  
our inner knowing overrun,  
As we view the vital cord's severing:  
a sort of death, for sure,  
*into new life.*

