Classic Poetry Series

George Barker

- poems -

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George Barker (26 February 1913 – 27 October 1991)

George Granville Barker was an English poet and author.

Life and Work

Barker was born in Loughton, near Epping Forest in Essex, England, elder brother of Kit Barker [painter] George Barker was raised by his Irish mother and English father in Battersea, London. He was educated at an L.C.C. school and at Regent Street Polytechnic. Having left school at an early age he pursued several odd jobs before settling on a career in writing. Early volumes of note by Barker include Thirty Preliminary Poems (1933), Poems (1935) and Calamiterror (1937), which was inspired by the Spanish Civil War.

In his early twenties, Barker had already been published by T. S. Eliot at Faber and Faber, who also helped him to gain appointment as Professor of English Literature in 1939 at Tohoku University (Sendai, Miyagi, Japan). He left there in 1940 due to the hostilities, but wrote Pacific Sonnets during his tenure.

He then travelled to the United States where he began his longtime liaison with writer Elizabeth Smart, by whom he had four of his fifteen children. Barker also had three children by his first wife, Jessica. He returned to England in 1943. From the late 1960s until his death, he lived in Itteringham, Norfolk, with his wife Elspeth Barker, the novelist. In 1969, he published the poem At Thurgarton Church, the village of Thurgarton being a few miles from Itteringham.

Barker's 1950 novel, The Dead Seagull, described his affair with Smart, whose 1945 novel By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept was also about the affair. His Collected poems were edited by Robert Fraser and published in 1987 by Faber and Faber.

In describing the difficulties in writing his biography, Barker was quoted as saying, "I've stirred the facts around too much, ... It simply can't be done". Yet, Robert Fraser did just that with; The Chameleon Poet: A Life of George Barker.

Works:

Thirty Preliminary Poems (1933)
Poems (1935)
Calamiterror (1937)
The Dead Seagull (1950)
Collected Poems (1987)

At Thurgarton Church

To the memory of my father

At Thurgarton Church the sun
burns the winter clouds over
the gaunt Danish stone
and thatched reeds that cover
the barest chapel I know.

I could compare it with
the Norse longboats that bore
burning the body forth
in honour from the shore
of great fjords long ago.

The sky is red and cold
overhead, and three small
sturdy trees keep a hold
on the world and the stone wall
that encloses the dead below.

I enter and find I stand
in a great barn, bleak and bare.
Like ice the winter ghosts and
the white walls gleam and flare
and flame as the sun drops low.

And I see, then, that slowly
the December day has gone.
I stand in the silence, not wholly
believing I am alone.
Somehow I cannot go.

Then a small wind rose, and the trees
began to crackle and stir
and I watched the moon by degrees
ascend in the window till her
light cut a wing in the shadow.

I thought: the House of the Dead.
The dead moon inherits it.
And I seem in a sense to have died
as I rise from where I sit
and out into darkness go.

I know as I leave I shall pass
where Thurgarton’s dead lie
at those old stones in the grass
under the cold moon’s eye.
I see the old bones glow.

No, they do not sleep here
in the long holy night of

the serene soul, but keep here
a dark tenancy and the right of
rising up to go.

Here the owl and soul shriek with
the voice of the dead as they turn
on the polar spit and burn
without hope and seek with
out hope the holy home below.

Yet to them the mole and
mouse bring a wreath and a breath
of the flowering leaves of the soul, and
it is from the Tree of Death
the leaves of life grow.

The rain, the sometime summer
rain on a memory of roses
will fall lightly and come a-
mong them as it erases
summers so long ago.

And the voices of those
once so much loved will flitter
over the nettled rows
of graves, and the holly tree twitter
like friends they used to know.

And not far away the
icy and paralysed stream
has found it also, that day the
flesh became glass and a dream
with no where to go.

Haunting the December
fields their bitter lives
entreat us to remember
the lost spirit that grieves
over these fields like a scarecrow.

That grieves over all it ever
did and all, all not
done, that grieves over
its crosspurposed lot:
to know and not to know.

The masterless dog sits
outside the church door
with dereliction haunting its
heart that hankers for
the hand that loved it so.

Not in a small grave
outside the stone wall
will the love that it gave
ever be returned, not for all
time or tracks in the snow.

More mourned the death of the dog
than our bones ever shall
receive from the hand of god
this bone again, or all
that high hand could bestow.

As I stand by the porch
I believe that no one has heard
here in Thurgarton Church
a single veritable word
save the unspoken No.

The godfathered negative
that responds to our mistaken
incredulous and heartbroken
desire above all to live
as though things were not so.

Desire to live as though the
two-footed clay stood up
proud never to know the
tempests that rage in the cup
under a rainbow.

Desire above all to live
as though the soul was stone,
believing we cannot give
or love since we are alone
and always will be so.

That heartbroken desire
to live as though no light
ever set the seas on fire
and no sun burned at night
or Mercy walked to and fro.

The proud flesh cries: I am not
caught up in the great cloud
of my unknowing. But that
proud flesh had endowed
us with the cloud we know.

To this the unspoken No
of the dead god responds
and then the whirlwinds blow
over all the things and beyond

and the dead mop and mow.

And there in the livid dust
and bones of death we search
until we find as we must
outside Thurgarton Church
only wild grasses blow.

I hear the old bone in me cry
and the dying spirit call:
I have forfeited all
and once and for all must die
and this is all that I know.

For now in a wild way we
know that justice is served
and that we die in the clay we
dread, desired, and deserved,
awaiting no Judgement Day.

George Barker

Calamiterror (Section VI)

1

Meandering abroad in the Lincolnshire meadows day
Day and day a month perhaps, lying at night lonely,
The early September evening administering a mystery,
The moon executing its wavering sleight of hand, I sense the
Advent of the extraordinary event, the calamiterror,
Turn and encounter the mountain descending upon me
The moment of terror flashes like dead powder
Revealing the features of the mass as mine.

2

Time like a mountain made of my own shadow
Collapsing on me, buries me in my life.
It is the future, undermined by present,
Failing appallingly backward. I bring
The cracked escarpments hurling down, I catch
The agonised glint of years in a fall of
Rubble, the time clatters down with branches
I hear the broken life scream and sob like me.

3

Meandering abroad in the Lincolnshire meadows
Throw up no mountain featured with self's face.
Idling like Hylas beside the Babylonian stream
Admire the harp on the willow not the bright mask
Suspended through the depths or down
Internally and eternally drowned you go. I know.
I wandered at night admiring the moonlight mountain
The moon had made the monster of my own.

4

I see the elements of my growth were drawn
Not from the objects that encourage growth,
The mountain ornamented with morning tears,
The musical tree, the hesitating river,
But the distorted mountain of the bowels,
The hysterical tree that branches to the arms,
The lunar river from the sexual fountain.
Feeding on self, the internal cannibal
Stands like a gap over its swallowed self.

5

About the adult like the solar system
Objects revolve, holding the man in place.
The abdomen of youth is the balloon world
Twisted to fit between the ribs. The Spartan boy
Had his own fox-globe hidden at his belly.

The youth of sorrow mourns this indigestion,
The world swelling in his guts. I vomit.
This is the act that 1 now execute.

6

Why walk at night admiring the moonlight mountain,
It is to find and feel the real and fine.
More may the glittering angle indicate
The physiognomy of the divine than thine.
Who is the parent of the innumerable plant,
It is not the sweet onion hanging at my loin.
The green tree springing in the rear of space
Follows the Greek sun and not my face.

7

1 recall how the rosetree sprang out of my breast.
I recall the myriads of birds in the cage of my head,
I recall my third finger the branch of myrtle,
I recall the imprisoned women wailing in my bowels.
I was the figure of the Surrealist Exhibition
With a mass of roses face. I hung like hawk
Hungry over the running world, I hung
Like sun that pulls the bright boys, like the spider.

8

1 saw the moon nightly performing a circle about
The pivotal point of my eye. The bird flew
Either towards or from me, sang to me or was
Silent. I sensed the violent spinning of things, -
I was their axle like the polar tree.
The key of kings had fallen from the blue
Into my keyhole eye, I knew I knew.
I felt the crush of hell in my left side.

9

It was on Sunday the 12th April I saw
The figure of William Blake bright and huge
Hung over the Thames at Sonning. I had not had this.
Familiar with the spatial mathematic,
Acknowledging the element of matter,
I was acquainted with the make of things,
But not this. I had not acknowledged this.
I had not encountered prototype.

10

I saw William Blake large and bright like ambition,
Absolute, glittering, actual and gold.

I saw he had worlds and worlds in his abdomen,
And his bosom innumerably enpeopled with all birds.
I saw his soul like a cinema in each of his eyes,
And Swedenborg labouring like a dream in his stomach.
I remember the myrtle sprouting from his hand
And saw myself the minor bird on the bough.

11

1 recognized the cosmology of the objects,
The contributing and constituting things,
Which contemplated too close make a chaos,
The glorious plethora, the paradise mass, the chaos of
Glory, in which the idiot wanders collecting.
I recognized the cosmology of chaos,
Observing that the condition rendering
Chaos cosmos is the external fact.

12

William Blake was larger than my Lincolnshire mountain
When like my mountain fell. I heard the catastrophic
Fragments of his torso breaking past me, it was
The object of the physical world breaking on me
Like Krakatoa like Krakatoa like the
Fist shooting out of the box like the gradual
Appearance of morning at morning like Tutankhamen
Carefully divesting itself in public places.

13

1 achieved apocalypse - hearing slowly the sounds
Against which my ears had made their own music.
I heard first the Rhondda choral echo up the valley
Trying to find god's ear, I heard the presage
Ironically rumbling along the Channel, war:
The ancestral voice, the ancestral voice.
And 1 saw in a fog of gas Mr Baldwin orating:
We must repair the deficiencies of our forces.
I heard three women weeping in lrun's ruins.

14

Nothing 1 could not hear, Berliner
Tageblatt, Daily Telegraph, L'Humanite, Isvestia,
The air like newsboys shrieking, recounting
Instances of hate, of insult, aggravation, and
The Rhondda choral, the Durham hymn, over all.
I met seven saints in Salisbury with cotton wool in their ears.
I remembered with shame my own music.
The splitting of the central pillar like aural lightning,
I felt it crack my abdomen, the world.

George Barker

Circular from America

Against the eagled
Hemisphere
I lean my eager
Editorial ear
And what the devil
You think I hear?
I hear the Beat
No not of the heart
But the dull palpitation
Of the New Art
As, on the dead tread,
Mill of no mind,
It follows its leaders
Unbeaten behind.
O Kerouac Kerouac
What on earth shall we do
If a single Idea
Ever gets through?
. . . 1/2 an idea
To a hundred pages
Now Jack, dear Jack,
That ain't fair wages
For labouring through
Prose that takes ages
Just to announce
That Gods and Men
Ought all to study
The Book of Zen.
If you really think
So low of the soul
Why don't you write
On a toilet roll?

George Barker

Grandfather, Grandfather

Grandfather, Grandfather,
what do pandas say?
Grandfather, Grandfather,
as among the rocks they roll
and rather sadly play
a game that seems
to do with dreams
of places far away.
Grandfather, Grandfather,
what do pandas say?

Grand-daughter, Grand-daughter,
when the pandas play
rather sadly in the rocks
this is what they say
to one another as they seem
to remember in a dream
those places far away:
'Let us tell no one
the word that we say
softly to one another
as we roll and play.
For if they ever heard it,
the tall two-legged Understanders
who always want to know what pandas
like us love to say,
yes, if they ever heard it
they would take it away.'

George Barker

In Memory of David Archer (LIV)

The words are always as
strange and dead as those
fragments and oddments that
the wave casts up on the shore:
I stand in the sea mist
gazing down at the white
words and old bits of wood
and wonder what they were for.
I think that they were not
ever intended to do
what, when we seek to speak,
we believe that they may:
they cannot bear us up
the frothy words and like
wings at the lame foot
lift us out of the clay.

For all the reflections
I call up out of the sea
(they seem to speak as the shell
seems to speak for the sea)
are no more truly here
than the wind weaving sand
into shapes of things
we think that we know and see.

When in the evening sky
a single star appears
over my head, and the moon
out of the cloud lifts its face,
when the white gull turns
or the high plover hovers
to tell me with a cry
I trespass in this place:

What I see, then, with
that cloud my witness is
not shapes of the mind or wind
like the slow rainbowings
of the dolphin's skin as it dies
but, as though from the cloud
I saw my bone walk the shore,
the theology of all things.

The white stones and the old
odd bits of sea blanched wood,
Overstrand and the swinging
lighthouse glimpsed in the mists,
they flash in the prisms and I
believe for a moment I see
the dazzling atoms dancing
in every thing that exists.

The children dance on the shore.
The waves dies on the sand.
The spray blows to and fro,
the children dance and die.
What waves are these that dance
with the children on the sand?
I hear them calling, but cannot
hear what it is that they cry.

I neither understand
nor know why I am moved
beyond these words by the
odd bits of bleached wood
cast up on Overstrand
or by the black and twisted
October evening tree
dying beside the road.

or by the child of midnight
so deep asleep but still
lost in the corridors
of the mansions of dust,
by any or by all
ceremonial evidence
attesting that we love
simply because we must.

I walk upon Overstrand shore
and the crab at my foot
inscribes praise in the sand.
The wave bursts with glory
because it rises up like
angels out of the sea,
and the dead starfish burns
on Overstrand promontory.

Why do I hear them cry
out from the far side of life,
those forms and impulses
unborn beyond the sky?
Why should they hope and seek
above all else to be?
Tonight on Overstrand
I know for one moment why.

George Barker

January Jumps About

January jumps about
in the frying pan
trying to heat
his frozen feet
like a Canadian.

February scuttles under
any dish's lid
and she thinks she's dry because she's
thoroughly well hid
but it still rains all month long
and it always did.

March sits in the bath tub
with the taps turned on.
Hot and cold, cold or not,
Has the Winter gone?
In like a lion, out like a lamb
March on, march on, march on.

April slips about
sometimes indoors
and sometimes out
sometimes sheltering from a little
shower of bright rain
in an empty milk bottle
then dashing out again.

May, she hides nowhere,
nowhere at all,
Proud as a peacock
walking by a wall.
The Maytime O the Maytime,
full of leaf and flower.
The Maytime O the Maytime
is the loveliest of all.

June discards his shirt and
trousers by the stream
and takes the first dip of the year
into a jug of cream.
June is the gay time
of every girl and boy
who run about and sing and shout
in pardonable joy.

July by the sea
sits dabbling with sand
letting it run out of
her rather lazy hand,
and sometimes she sadly
thinks: "As I sit here

ah, more than half the year is gone,
the evanescent year."

August by an emperor
was given his great name.
It is gold and purple
like a Hall of Fame.
(I have known it rather cold
and wettish, all the same.)

September lies in shadows
of the fading summer
hearing, in the distance,
the silver horns of winter
and not very far off
the coming autumn drummer.

October, October
apples on the tree,
the Partridge in the Wood and
the big winds at sea,
the mud beginning in the lane
the berries bright and red
and the big tree wildly
tossing its old head.

November, when the fires
love to burn, and leaves
flit about and fill the air
where the old tree grieves.
November, November
its name is like a star
glittering on many things that were
but few things that are.

Twelfth and last December.
a few weeks away
we hear the silver bells
of the stag and the sleigh
flying from the tundras
far far away
bringing to us all the gift
of our Christmas Day.

George Barker

Morning in Norfolk

As it has for so long
come wind and all weather
the house glimmers among
the mists of a little
river that splinters, it
seems, a landscape of
winter dreams. In the far
fields stand a few
bare trees decorating
those mists like the fanned
patterns of Georgian
skylights. The home land
of any heart persists
there, suffused with
memories and mists not
quite concealing the
identities and lost
lives of those loved once
but loved most. They haunt it
still. To the watermeadows
that lie by the heart they
return as do flocks of swallows
to the fields they have known
and flickered and flown so
often and so unforgettably over.
What fish
play in the bright wishing
wells of your painted
stretches, O secret
untainted little Bure,
I could easily tell,
for would they not be
those flashing dashers
the sometimes glittering
presentiments, images
and idealizations
of what had to be?
The dawn has brightened the
shallows and shadows and
the Bure sidles and idles
through weed isles and fallen
willows, and under
Itteringham Mill, and
there is a kind of rain-
drenched flittering in the
air, the night swan still
sleeps in her wings and over it all
the dawn heaps up the hanging
fire of the day.
Fowell's tractor blusters
out of its shed and drags
a day's work, like a piled sled

behind it. The crimson
December morning brims over
Norfolk, turning
to burning Turner
this aqueous water colour
idyll that earlier gleamed
so green that it seemed
drowned. What further
sanction, what blessing
can the man of heart intercede for
than the supreme remission
of dawn? For then the mind
looking backward upon its
too sullied yesterday,
the rotting stack of
resolution and refuse,
reads in the rainbowed sky
a greater covenant,
the tremendous pronouncement:
the day forgives.

Holy the heart in
its proper occupation
praising and appraising this
godsend, the dawn.
Will you lift up your eyes
my blind spirit and see
such evidence of
forgiveness in the heavens
morning after golden
morning than even
the blind can see?

George Barker

O Child Beside The Waterfall

O Child beside the Waterfall
what songs without a word
rise from those waters like the call
only a heart has heard-
the Joy, the Joy in all things
rise whistling like a bird.

O Child beside the Waterfall
I hear them too, the brief
heavenly notes, the harp of dawn,
the nightingale on the leaf,
all, all dispel the darkness and
the silence of our grief.

O Child beside the Waterfall
I see you standing there
with waterdrops and fireflies
and hummingbirds in the air,
all singing praise of paradise,
paradise everywhere.

George Barker

O Who Will Speak From a Womb or a Cloud?

Not less light shall the gold and the green lie
On the cyclonic curl and diamonded eye, than
Love lay yesterday on the breast like a beast.
Not less light shall God tread my maze of nerve
Than that great dread of tomorrow drove over
My maze of days. Not less terrible that tread
Stomping upon your grave than I shall tread there.
Who is a god to haunt the tomb but Love?

Therefore I shall be there at morning and midnight,
Not with a straw in my hair and a tear as Ophelia
Floating along my sorrow, but I shall come with
The cabala of things, the cipher of nature, so that
With the mere flounce of a bird's feather crest
I shall speak to you where you sit in all trees,
Where you conspire with all things that are dead.
Who is so far that Love cannot speak to him?

So that no corner can hide you, no autumn of leaves
So deeply close over you that I shall not find you,
To stretch down my hand and sting you with life
Like poison that resurrects. O remember
How once the Lyrae dazzled and how the Novembers
Smoked, so that blood burned, flashed its mica,
And that was life. Now if I dip my hand in your grave
Shall I find it bloody with autumn and bright with stars?
Who is to answer if you will not answer me?

But you are the not yet dead, so cannot answer.
Hung by a hair's breadth to the breath of a lung,
Nothing you know of the hole over which you hang
But that it's dark and deep as tomorrow midnight.
I ask, but you cannot answer except with words
Which show me the mere interior of your fear,
The reverse face of the world. But this,
This is not death, the standing on the head
So that a sky is seen. O who
Who but the not yet born can tell me of my bourne?

Lie you there, lie you there, my never, never,
Never to be delivered daughter, so wise in ways
Where you perch like a bird beyond the horizon,
Seeing but not being seen, above our being?
Then tell me, shall the meeting ever be,
When the corpse dives back through the womb
To clasp his child before it ever was?
Who but the dead can kiss the not yet born?

Sad is space between a start and a finish,
Like the rough roads of stars, fiery and mad.
I go between birth and the urn, a bright ash
Soon blazed to blank, like a fire-ball. But

Nothing I bring from the before, no message,
No clue, no key, no answer. I hear no echo,
Only the sheep's blood dripping from the gun,
The serpent's tear like fire along the branch.
O who will speak from a womb or a cloud?

George Barker

On a Friend's Escape from Drowning off the Norfolk Coast

Came up that cold sea at Cromer like a running grave
  Beside him as he struck
Wildly towards the shore, but the blackcapped wave
  Crossed him and swung him back,
And he saw his son digging in the castled dirt that could save.
  Then the farewell rock
Rose a last time to his eyes. As he cried out
  A pawing gag of the sea
Smothered his cry and he sank in his own shout
  Like a dying airman. Then she
Deep near her son asleep on the hourglass sand
  Was awakened by whom
Save the Fate who knew that this was the wrong time:
  And opened her eyes
On the death of her son's begetter. Up she flies
  Into the hydra-headed
Grave as he closes his life upon her who for
  Life has so richly bedded him.
But she drove through his drowning like Orpheus and tore
  Back by his hair
Her escaping bridegroom. And on the sand their son
  Stood laughing where
He was almost an orphan. Then the three lay down
  On that cold sand
Each holding the other by a living hand.

George Barker

Sonnet To My Mother

Most near, most dear, most loved, and most far,
Under the huge window where I often found her
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,
Irresistible as Rabelais but most tender for
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her,—
She is a procession no one can follow after
But be like a little dog following a brass band.
She will not glance up at the bomber or condescend
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain
Whom only faith can move, and so I send
O all her faith and all my love to tell her
That she will move from mourning into morning.

George Barker

Summer Song

I looked into my heart to write
And found a desert there.
But when I looked again I heard
Howling and proud in every word
The hyena despair.

Great summer sun, great summer sun,
All loss burns in trophies;
And in the cold sheet of the sky
Lifelong the fishlipped lovers lie
Kissing catastrophes.

O loving garden where I lay
When under the breasted tree
My son stood up behind my eyes
And groaned: Remember that the price
Is vinegar for me.

Great summer sun, great summer sun,
Turn back to the designer:
I would not be the one to start
The breaking day and the breaking heart
For all the grief in China.

My one, my one, my only love,
Hide, hide your face in a leaf,
And let the hot tear falling burn
The stupid heart that will not learn
The everywhere of grief.

Great summer sun, great summer sun,
Turn back to the never-never
Cloud-cuckoo, happy, far-off land
Where all the love is true love, and
True love goes on for ever.

George Barker

To Any Member Of My Generation

What is it you remember? - the summer mornings
Down by the river at Richmond with a girl,
And as you kissed, clumsy in bathing costumes,
History guffawed in a rosebush. What a warning -
If only we had known, if only we had known!
And when you looked in mirrors was this meaning
Plain as the pain in the centre of a pearl?
Horrible tomorrow in Teutonic postures
Making absurd the past we cannot disown?

Whenever we kissed we cocked the future's rifles
And from our wild-oat words, like dragon's teeth,
Death underfoot now arises; when we were gay
Dancing together in what we hoped was life,
Who was it in our arms but the whores of death
Whom we have found in our beds today, today?

George Barker

To My Mother

Most near, most dear, most loved and most far,
Under the window where I often found her
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand,
Irresistible as Rabelais, but most tender for
The lame dogs and hurt birds that surround her -
She is a procession no one can follow after
But be like a little dog following a brass band.

She will not glance up at the bomber, or condescend
To drop her gin and scuttle to a cellar,
But lean on the mahogany table like a mountain
Whom only faith can move, and so I send
O all my faith, and all my love to tell her
That she will move from mourning into morning.

George Barker

True Confession

1
Today, recovering from influenza,
I begin, having nothing worse to do,
This autobiography that ends a
Half of my life I'm glad I'm through.
O Love, what a bloody hullaballoo
I look back at, shaken and sober,
When that intemperate life I view
From this temperate October.
To nineteen hundred and forty-seven
I pay the deepest of respects,
For during this year I was given
Some insight into the other sex.
I was a victim, till forty-six,
Of the rosy bed with bitches in it;
But now, in spite of all pretexts,
I never sleep a single minute.

O fellow sailor on the tossing sea,
O fleeting virgin in the night,
O privates, general in lechery,
Shun, shun the bedroom like a blight:
Evade, O amorous acolyte,
That pillow where your heart can bury -
For if the thing was stood upright
It would become a cemetery.

I start with this apostrophe
To all apostles of true love:
With your devotion visit me,
Give me the glory of the dove
That dies of dereliction. Give
True love to me, true love to me,
And in two shakes I will prove
It's false to you and false to me.

Bright spawner, on your sandbank dwell
Coldblooded as a plumber's pipe -
The procreatory ocean swell
Warming, till they're over ripe,
The cockles of your cold heart, will
Teach us true love can instil
Temperature into any type.

Does not the oyster in its bed
Open a yearning yoni when
The full moon passes overhead
Feeling for pearls? O nothing, then,
Too low a form of life is, when
Love, abandoning the cloister,
Can animate the bedded oyster,
The spawning tiddler, and men.

Thus all of us, the pig and prince,
The prince and the psychiatrist,
Owe everything to true love, since
How the devil could we exist
If our parents had never kissed?
All biographies, therefore,
- No matter what else they evince -
Open, like prisons, with adore.

Remember, when you love another,
Who demonstrably is a bitch,
Even Venus had a mother
Whose love, like a silent aitch,
Incepted your erotic itch.
Love, Love has the longest history,
For we can tell an ape his father
Begot him on a mystery.

I, born in Essex thirty-four
Essentially sexual years ago,
Stepped down, looked around, and saw
I had been cast a little low
In the social register
For the friends whom I now know.
Is a constable a mister?
Bob's your uncle, even so.

Better men than I have wondered
Why one's father could not see
That at one's birth he had blundered.
His ill-chosen paternity
Embarrasses the fraternity
Of one's friends who, living Huysmans,
Understandably have wondered
At fatherhood permitted policemen.

So I, the son of an administer
Of the facts of civil laws
Delight in uncivil and even sinister
Violations. Thus my cause
Is simply, friend, to hell with yours.
In misdemeanours I was nourished -
Learnt, like altruists in Westminster,
By what duplicities one flourished.

At five, but feeling rather young,
With a blue eye beauty over six,
Hand in hand and tongue to tongue
I took a sin upon my sex.
Sin? It was pleasure. So I told her.
And ever since, persisting in

Concupiscences no bolder
My pleasure's been to undress sin.

What's the point of a confession
If you have nothing to confess?
I follow the perjuring profession
- O poet, lying to impress! -
But the beautiful lie in a beautiful dress
Is the least heinous of my transgressions:
When a new one's added, 'O who was it? '
Sigh the skeletons in my closet.

Ladybird, ladybird, come home, come home:
Muse and mistress wherever you are.
The evening is here and in the gloom
Each bisexual worm burns like a star
And the love of man is crepuscular.
In the day the world. But, at night, we
Lonely on egoes dark and far
Apart as worlds, between sea and sea,

Yearn on each other as the stars hold
One another in fields together.
O rose of all the world, enfold
Each weeping worm against the cold
Of the bitter ego's weather;
To warm our isothermal pride
Cause sometimes, Love, another
To keep us by an unselfish side.

The act of human procreation
- The rutting tongue, the grunt and shudder,
The sweat, the reek of defecation,
The cradle hanging by the bladder,
The scramble up the hairy ladder,
And from the thumping bed of Time
Immortality, a white slime,
Sucking at its mother's udder -

The act of human procreation
- The sore dug plugging, the lugged out bub,
The small man priming a lactation,
The grunt, the drooping teat, the rub
Of gum and dug, the slobbing kiss:
Behold the mater amabilis,
Sow with a saviour, messiah and cow,
Virgin and piglet, son and sow:

The act of human procreation,
- O crown and flower, O culmination
Of perfect love throughout creation -
What can I compare it to?

O eternal butterflies in the belly,
O trembling of the heavenly jelly,
O miracle of birth! Really
We are excreted, like shit.

2
The Church, mediatrix between heaven
And human fallibility
Reminds us that the age of seven
Inaugurates the Reason we
Spend our prolonged seniority
Transgressing. Of that time I wish
I could recount a better story
Than finding a shilling and a fish.
But memory flirts with seven veils
Peekabooing the accidental
And what the devil it all entails
Only Sigmund Freud suspects.
I think my shilling and my fish
Symbolised a hidden wish
To sublimate these two affects:
Money is nice and so is sex.

The Angel of Reason, descending
On my seven year old head
Inscribed this sentence by my bed:
The pleasure of money is unending
But sex satisfied is sex dead.
I tested to see if sex died
But, all my effort notwithstanding,
Have never found it satisfied.

Abacus of Reason, you have been
The instrument of my abuse,
The North Star I have never seen,
The trick for which I have no use:
The Reason, gadget of schoolmasters,
Pimp of the spirit, the smart alec,
Proud engineer of disasters,
I see phallic: you, cephalic.

Happy those early days when I
Attended an elementary school
Where seven hundred infant lives
Flittered like gadflies on the stool
(We discovered that contraceptives
Blown up like balloons, could fly):
We memorised the Golden Rule:
Lie, lie, lie, lie.

For God's sake, Barker. This is enough
Regurgitated obscenities,

Whimsicalities and such stuff.
Where's the ineffable mystery,
The affiancing to affinities
Of the young poet? The history
Of an evolving mind's love
For the miseries and the humanities?

The sulking and son loving Muse
Grabbed me when I was nine. She saw
It was a question of self abuse
Or verses. I tossed off reams before
I cared to recognize their purpose.
While other urchins were blowing up toads
With pipes of straw stuck in the arse,
So was I, but I also wrote odes.

There was a priest, a priest, a priest,
A Reverend of the Oratory
Who taught me history. At least
He taught me the best part of his story.
Fat Father William, have you ceased
To lead boys up the narrow path
Through the doors of the Turkish Bath?
I hope you're warm in Purgatory.

And in the yard of the tenement
- The Samuel Lewis Trust - I played
While my father, for the rent
(Ten bob a wekk and seldom paid) ,
Trudged London for a job. I went
Skedaddling up the scanty years,
My learning, like the rent, in arrears,
But sometimes making the grade.

Oh boring kids! In spite of Freud
I find my childhood recollections
Much duller now than when I enjoyed
It. The whistling affections,
All fitting wrong, toy railway sections
Running in circles. Cruel as cats
Even the lower beasts avoid
These inhumanitarian brats.

Since the Age of Reason's seven
And most of one's friends over eight,
Therefore they're reasonable? Even
Sensible Stearns or simpleton Stephen
Wouldn't claim that. I contemplate
A world which, at crucial instants,
Surrenders to adulterant infants
The adult onus to think straight.

At the bottom of this murky well
My childhood, like a climbing root,
Nursed in dirt the simple cell
That pays itself this sour tribute.
Track any poet to a beginning
And in a dark room you will find
A little boy intent on sinning
With an etymological lover.

I peopled my youth with the pulchritude
Of heterae noun-anatomised;
The literature that I prized
Was anything to do with the nude
Spirit of creative art
Who whispered to me: 'Don't be queasy.
Simply write about a tart
And there she is. The rest's easy.'

And thus, incepted in congenial
Feebleness of moral power
I became a poet. Venial
As a human misdemeanour,
Still, it gave me, prisoner
In my lack of character,
Pig to the Circean Muse's honour.
Her honour? Why, it's lying on her.

Dowered, invested and endowed
With every frailty is the poet -
Yielding to wickedness because
How the hell else can he know it?
The tempted poet must be allowed
All ethical latitude. His small flaws
Bring home to him, in sweet breaches,
The moral self indulgence teaches.

Where was I? Running, so to speak,
To the adolescent seed? I
Found my will power rather weak
And my appetite rather greedy
About the year of the General Strike,
So I struck, as it were, myself:
Refused to do anything whatsover, like
Exercise books on a shelf.

Do Youth and Innocence prevail
Over that cloudcuckoo clime
Where the seasons never fail
And the clocks forget the time?
Where the peaks of the sublime
Crown every thought; where every vale
Has its phantasy and phantasm

And every midnight its orgasm?

I mooned into my fourteenth year
Through a world pronouncing harsh
Judgments I could not quite hear
About my verse, my young moustasche
And my bad habits. In Battersea Park
I almost heard strangers gossip
About my poems, almost remark
The bush of knowledge on my lip.

Golden Calf, Golden Calf, where are you now
Who lowed so mournfully in the dense
Arcana of my adolescence?
No later anguish of bull or cow
Could ever be compared with half
The misery of the amorous calf
Moonstruck in moonshine. How could I know
You can't couple Love with any sense?

Poignant as a swallowed knife,
Abstracted as a mannequin,
Remote as music, touchy as skin,
Apotheosising life
Into an apocalypse,
Young Love, taking Grief to wife,
And tasting the bitterness of her lips
Forgets it comes from swabbing gin.

The veils descend. The unknown figure
Is sheeted in the indecencies
Of shame and boils. The nose gets bigger,
The private parts, haired like a trigger,
Cock at a dream. The infant cries
Abandoned in its discarded larva,
Out of which steps, with bloodshot eyes,
The man, the man, crying Ave, Ave!

3
That Frenchman really had the trick
Of figure skating in this stanza
But I, thank God, cannot read Gallic
And so escape his influenza.
Above my head his rhetoric
Asks emulation. I do not answer.
It is as though I had not heard
Because I cannot speak a word.
But I invoke him, dirty dog,
As one barker to another:
Lift over me your clever leg,
Teach me, you snail-swallowing frog
To make out of a spot of bother

Verses that shall catalogue
Every exaggerated human claim,
Every exaggerated human aim.

I entreat you, frank villain,
Get up out of your bed of dirt
And guide my hand. You are still an
Irreprehensible expert
At telling Truth she's telling lies.
Get up liar; get up, cheat,
Look the bitch square in the eyes
And you'll see what I entreat.

We share, frog, much the same well.
I sense your larger spectre down
Here among the social swill
Moving at ease beside my own
And the muckrakers I have known.
No, not the magnitude I claim
That makes your shade loom like a tall
Memorial but the type's the same.

You murdered with a knife, but I
Like someone out of Oscar Wilde
Commemorate with a child
The smiling victims as they die
Slewing in kisses and the lie
Of generation. But we both killed.
I rob the grave you glorify,
You glorify where I defiled.

O most adult adulterer
Preside, now, coldly over
My writing hand, as to it crowd
The images of those unreal years
That, like a curtain, seem to stir
Guiltily over what they cover -
Those unreal years, dreamshot and proud,
When the vision first appears.

The unveiled vision of all things
Walking towards us as we stand
And giving us, in either hand,
The knowledge that the world brings
To those her most beloved, those
Who, when she strikes with her wings,
Stand rooted, turned into a rose
By terrestrial understandings.

Come, sulking woman, bare as water,
Dazzle me now as you dazzled me
When, blinded by your nudity,

I saw the sex of the intellect,
The idea of the beautiful.
The beautiful to which I, later,
Gave only mistrust and neglect,
The idea no dishonour can annul.

Vanquished aviatrix, descend
Again, long vanished vision whom
I have not known so long, assume
Your former bright prerogative,
Illuminate, guide and attend
Me now. O living vision, give
The grave, the verity; and send
The spell that makes the poem live.

I sent a letter to my love
In an envelope of stone,
And in between the letters ran
A crying torrent that began
To grow till it was bigger than
Nyanza or the heart of man.
I sent a letter to my love
In an envelope of stone.

I sent a present to my love
In a black bordered box,
A clock that beats a time of tears
As the stricken midnight nears
And my love weeps as she hears
The armageddon of the years.
I sent my love the present
In a black bordered box.

I sent a liar to my love
With his hands full of roses
But she shook her yellow and curled
Curled and yellow hair and cried
The rose is dead of all the world
Since my only love has lied.
I sent a liar to my love
With roses in his hands.

I sent a daughter to my love
In a painted cradle.
She took her up at her left breast
And rocked her to a mothered rest
Singing a song that what is best
Loves and loves and forgets the rest.
I sent a daughter to my love
In a painted cradle.

I sent a letter to my love

On a sheet of stone.
She looked down and as she read
She shook her yellow hair and said
Now he sleeps alone instead
Of many a lie in many a bed.
I sent a letter to my love
On a sheet of stone.

O long-haired virgin by my tree
Among whose forks hung enraged
A sexual passion not assuaged
By you, its victim - knee to knee,
Locked sweating in the muscled dark
Lovers, as new as we were, spill
The child on grass in Richmond Park.

Crying the calf runs wild among
Hills of the heart are memories:
Long long the white kiss of the young
Rides the lip and only dies
When the whole man stalks among
The crosses where remorse lies -
Then, then the vultures on the tongue
Rule empires of white memories.

Legendary water, where, within
Gazing, my own face I perceive,
How can my self-disgust believe
This was my angel at seventeeen?
Stars, stars and the world, seen
Untouched by crystal. Retrieve
The morning star what culprit can
Who knows his blood spins in between?

Move backward, loving rover, over
All those unfeathered instances
I tar with kiss of pitch, the dirty
Lip-service that a jaded thirty
Renders its early innocences.
Pointer of recollection, show
The deaths in feather that now cover
The tarry spot I died below.

What sickening snot-engendered bastard
Likes making an idiot of himself?
I wish to heaven I had mastered
The art of living like a dastard
While still admiring oneself.
About my doings, past and recent,
I hear Disgust - my better half -
'His only decency's indecent.'

Star-fingered shepherdess of Sleep
Come, pacify regret, remorse;
And let the suffering black sheep
Weep on the bed it made. Let pause
The orphic criminal to perceive
That in the venue of his days
All the crimes look back and grieve
Over lies no grief allays.

Sleep at my side again, my bride,
As on our marriage bed you turned
Into a flowering bush that burned
All the proud flesh away. Beside
Me now, you, shade of my departed
Broken, abandoned bride, lie still,
And I shall hold you close until
Even our ghosts are broken hearted.

So trusting, innocent, and unknowing
What the hazards of the world
Storm and strike a marriage with,
We did not hear the grinders blowing
But sailed our kisses round the world
Ignorant of monsters and the vaster
Cemetery of innocence. This wreath
Dreams over our common disaster.

But bright that nuptials to me now
As when, the smiling foetus carried
Rose-decked today instead of tomorrow,
Like country cousins we were married
By the pretty bullying embryo
And you, my friend: I will not borrow
Again the serge suit that I carried
Through honey of moon to sup of sorrow.

Loving the hand, gentle the reproving;
Loving the heart, deeper the understanding;
Deeper the understanding, larger the confiding
For the hurt heart's hiding.
Forgiving the hand, love without an ending
Walks back on water; giving and taking
Both sides become by simple comprehending:
Deeper the love, greater the heart at breaking.

4
O Bishop Andrewes, Bishop Berkeley,
John Peale Bishop and Bishop's Park,
I look through my ego darkly
But all that I perceive is dark:
Episcopally illuminate
My parochial testaments

And with your vestal vested vestments
Tenderly invest my state.
Let grace, like lace, descend upon me
And dignify my wingless shoulder:
Let Grace, like space, lie heavy on me
And make me seem a little older,
A little nobler; let Grace sidle
Into my shameful bed, and, curling
About me in a psychic bridal,
Prove that even Grace is a darling.

The moon is graceful in the sky,
The bird is graceful in the air,
The girl is graceful too, so why
The devil should I ever care
Capitulating to despair?
Since Grace is clearly everywhere
And I am either here or there
I'm pretty sure I've got my share.

Grace whom no man ever held,
Whose breast no human hand has pressed,
Grace no lover has undressed
Because she's naked as a beast -
Grace will either gild or geld.
Sweet Grace abounding into bed
Jumps to it hot as a springald -
After a brief prayer is said.

Come to me, Grace, and I will take
You close into my wicked hands,
And when you come, make no mistake,
I'll disgrace you at both ends.
We'll grace all long throughout the night
And as the morning star looks in
And blanches at the state we're in -
We'll grace again to be polite.

For Marriage is a state of grace.
So many mutual sacrifices
Infallibly induce a peace
Past understanding or high prices.
So many forgivenesses for so many
Double crossings or double dealings -
I know that the married cannot have any
But the most unselfish feelings.

But the wise Church, contemplating
The unnatural demands
That marriage and the art of mating
Make on egoists, commands
We recognise as sacramental

A union otherwise destined
To break in every anarchic wind
Broken by the temperamental.

Off the Tarpeian, for high treason,
Tied in a bag with a snake and a cock,
The traitor trod the Roman rock.
But in the bag, for a better reason,
The married lovers, cock and snake,
Lie on a Mount of Venus. Traitor
Each to each, fake kissing fake,
So punished by a betrayed creator.

'The willing union of two lives.'
This is, the Lords of Justice tell us,
The purpose of the connubial knot.
But I can think of only one
Function that at best contrives
To join the jealous with the jealous,
And what this function joins is not
Lives, but the erogenous zone.

I see the young bride move among
The nine-month trophies of her pride,
And though she is not really young
And only virtually a bride,
She knows her beauties now belong
With every other treasure of her
Past and future, to her lover:
But her babies work out wrong.

I see the bridegroom in his splendour
Rolling like an unbridalled stallion,
Handsome, powerful and tender,
And passionate as an Italian -
And nothing I could say would lend a
Shock of more surprise and pride
Than if I said that this rapscallion
Was necking with his legal bride.

I knew a beautiful courtesan
Who, after service, would unbosom
He prettier memories, like blossom,
At the feet of the weary man:
'I'm such a sensitive protoplasm,'
She whispered, when I was not there,
'That I experience an orgasm
If I t o u c h a millionaire.'

Lying with, about, upon,
Everything and everyone,
Every happy little wife

Miscegenates once in alife,
And every pardonable groom
Needs, sometimes, a change of womb,
Because, although damnation may be,
Society needs every baby.

It takes a sacrament to keep
Any man and woman together:
Birds of a forgivable feather
Always flock and buck together:
And in our forgivable sleep
What birdwatcher will know whether
God Almighty sees we keep
Religiously to one another?

I have often wondered what method
Governed the heavenly mind when
It made as audience to God
The sycophant, the seaman sod,
The solipsist - in short, men.
Even the circus stepping mare
Lifts her nose into the air
In the presence of this paragon.

For half a dozen simple years
We lived happily, so to speak,
On twenty-seven shillings a week;
And, when worried and in tears,
My mercenary wife complained
That we could not afford our marriage,
'It's twice as much,' I explained,
'As MacNeice pays for his garage.'

I entertained the Marxian whore -
I am concerned with economics,
And naturally felt that more
Thought should be given to our stomachs.
But when I let my fancy dwell
On anything below the heart,
I found my thoughts, and hands as well,
Resting upon some private part.

I sat one morning on the can
That served us for a lavatory
Composing some laudatory
Verses on the state of man:
My wife called from the kitchen dresser:
'There's someone here from Japan.
He wants you out there. As Professor.
Oh, yes. The War just began.'

So Providence engineered her

Circumstantial enigmas,
And the crown of the objector
Was snatched from me. In wars
The conscientious protester
Preserves, as worlds sink to force,
The dignified particular.
Particularly one, of course.

'The hackneyed rollcall of chronology' -
Thus autobiography to de Quincey.
And I can understand it, since he
Lived like a footnote to philology.
But the archangelic enumeration
Of unpredictable hejiras -
These, with a little exaggeration,
I can adduce for my admirerers.

And so, when I saw you, nightmare island,
Fade into the autumnal night,
I felt the tears rise up for my land,
But somehow these tears were not quite
As sick as when my belly laughed
Remembering England had given me
The unconditional liberty
To do a job for which I starved.

5
Almighty God, by whose ill will
I was created with a conscience;
By whose merciful malevolence
I shall be sustained until
My afflictions fulfil
His victories; by whose dispensation
Whatever I have had of sense
Has obfuscated my salvation -
Good God, grant that, in reviewing
My past life, I may remember
Everything I did worth doing
Seemed rather wicked in pursuing:
Grant, Good God, I shall have remitted
Those earthly pleasures beyond number
I necessarily omitted,
Exhausted by the ones committed.

Good God, let me recollect
Your many mercies, tall and short,
The blousy blondes, the often necked,
And those whom I should not have thought
Given wisely to me; nor let forget
My grateful memory the odd
Consolers, too frequently brunette,
Who charged me for your mercies, God.

Good God, let me so recall
My grave omissions and commissions
That I may repent them all,
- The places, faces and positions;
Together with the few additions
A feeble future may instal.
Good God, only mathematicians
Consider Love an ordinal.

Good God, so wisely you provided
The loving heart I suffer with,
That I am constantly divided
By a deep love for all beneath
Me. Every man knows well
He rides his own whores down to hell,
But, good God, every knackered horse
Was, originally, yours.

Good God, receive my thanksgiving
For all the wonders I have seen
(And all the blunders in between)
In my thirty odd years of living.
I have seen the morning rise
And I have seen the evening set -
Anything different would surprise
Me even more profoundly yet.

Good God, receive my gratitude
For favours undeserved: accept
This truly heartfelt platitude:
You gave me too much latitude
And so I hanged myself. I kept
Your mercy, Good God, in a box
But out at midnight Justice crept
And axed me with a paradox.

O loving kindness of the knife
That cuts the proud flesh from the rotten
Ego and cuts the rotten life
Out of the rotten bone! No, not an
Ounce of sparrow is forgotten
As that butchering surgeon cuts
And rummages among my guts
To succour what was misbegotten.

I confess, my God, this lonely
Derelict of a night, when I
And not the conscious I only
Feel all the responsibility -
(But the simple and final fact
That we are better than we act,

For this fortunate windfall
We are not responsible at all) -

I confess, my God, that in
The hotbed of the monkey sin
I saw you through a guilt of hair
Standing lonely as a mourner
Silent in the bedroom corner
Knowing you need not be there:
I saw the genetic man had torn
A face away from your despair.

I confess, my God, my Good,
I have not wholly understood
The nature of our holiness:
The striking snake errs even less
Not questioning; the physicist
Not asking why all things exist
Serves better than those who advance a
Question to which life's the answer.

But, O my God, the human purpose
If at all I can perceive
A purpose in the life I live,
Is to hide in the glass horse
Of our doubt until the pity
Of heaven opens up a city
Of absolute belief to us,
Because our silence is hideous

And our doubt more miserable
Than certainty of the worst would be.
Like infinity pitiable
Ghosts who do not even know
They waver between reality
And unreality, we go
About our lives and cannot see
Even why we suffer so.

I know only that the heart
Doubting every real thing else
Does not doubt the voice that tells
Us that we suffer. The hard part
At the dead centre of the soul
Is an age of frozen grief
No vernal equinox of relief
Can mitigate, and no love console.

Then, O my God, by the hand
This star-wandering grief takes
The world that does not understand
Its own miseries and mistakes

And leads it home. Not yet, but later
To lean an expiated head
On the shoulder of a creator
Who knows where all troubles lead.

6
I looked into my heart to write.
In that red sepulchre of lies
I saw that all man cherishes
Goes proud, rots and perishes
Till through that red room pitiless night
Trails only knife-tongued memories
To whose rags cling, shrieking, bright
Unborn and aborted glories.
And vinegar the mirages
That, moaning they were possible
Charge me with the unholy No.
The unaccomplished issue rages
Round the ringed heart like a bull
Bellowing for birth. But even so
Remorselessly the clock builds ages
Over its lifeless embryo.

Ruined empire of dissipated time,
Perverted aim, abused desire,
The monstrous amoeba cannot aspire
But sinks down into the cold slime
Of Eden as Ego. It is enough
To sink back in the primal mud
Of the first person. For what could
Equal the paradise of Self Love?

The necessary angel is
The lie. Behind, us, all tongue splayed,
The lie triumphant and tremendous
Shields us from what we are afraid
Of seeing when we turn - the Abyss
Giving back a face of small
Twisted fear - and this is all,
To conquer the lie, that we possess.

Come, corybantic self-delusion,
And whisper such deceptions to
Me now that I will not care who
Or what you are, save palliation
Of the question marked heart. Let rest
The harp and horror horned head upon
That green regenerative breast
By whose great law we still live on.

Now from my window looking down
I see the lives of those for whom

My love has still a little room
Go suffering by. I see my own
Stopped, like a stair carpet, at this story
Not worth the telling. O memory
Let the gilded images of joys known
Return, and be consolatory!

Bitter and broken as the morning
Valentine climbs the glaciered sky
With a spike in his foot. The lover's warning
Blazes a sunrise on our misery:
Look down, look down, and see our grey
And loveless rendezvous, Valentine:
Fold, then, in grief and cast away
The love that is not yours or mine.

Of this day of the innocent
And happy lovers, let me praise
The grotesque bestiary of those
Who love too much. Monsters invent
Monster, like babies gypsies raise
In odd bottles for freak shows -
Those love too deeply for the skin.
Whose bottle are you monster in?

The grotesque bestiary where
Coiled the pythoness of sighs,
To keep a beast within her there
Crushes him in her clutch of vice
Till, misshapen to her passion, dead,
The lion of the heart survives
By suffering kisses into knives
And a spiked pit into a bed.

Stand in your sad and golden haired
Accusation about me now,
My sweet seven misled into life.
Oh had the hot headed seaman spared
Those breast-baring ova on their bough,
There'd been no aviary of my grief,
No sweet seven standing up in sorrow
Uttering songs of joy declared

Of joy declared, as bird extol
The principle of natural pleasure
Not knowing why. Declare to all
Who disbelieve it, that delight
Naturally inhabits the soul.
I look down at you to assure
My sense of wrong: but you declare
Whatever multiplies is right.

I looked into my heart to write.
But when I saw that cesspit twisted
With the disgusting laws that live
In royal domination under
The surface of our love, that writhe
Among our prizes, they attested
The putrefaction of our love
Spoils the spawner of its grandeur.

7
Today, the twenty-sixth of February,
I, halfway to the minute through
The only life I want to know,
Intend to end this rather dreary
Joke of an autobiography.
Thirty-five years is quite enough
Of one's own company. I grow
A bit sick of the terrestial stuff.
And the celestial nonsense. Swill
Guzzle and copulate and guzzle
And copulate and swill until
You break up like a jigsaw puzzle
Shattered with smiles. The idiotic
Beatitude of the sow in summer
Conceals a gibbering neurotic
Sowing hot oats to get warmer.

Look on your handwork, Adam, now
As I on mine, and do not weep.
The detritus is us. But how
Could you and I ever hope to keep
That glittering sibyl bright who first
Confided in us, perfect, once,
The difference between the best and the worst?
That vision is our innocence.

But we shall step into our grave
Not utterly divested of
The innocence our nativity
Embodies a god in. O bear,
Inheritors, all that you have,
The sense of good, with much care
Through the dirty street of life
And the gutter of our indignity.

I sense the trembling in my hand
Of that which will not ever lower
Its bright and pineal eye and wing
To any irony, nor surrender
The dominion of my understanding
To that Apollyonic power
Which, like the midnight whispering

Sun, surrounds us with dark splendour.

Enisled and visionary, mad
Alive, in the catacomb of the heart,
O lonely diviner, lovely diviner, impart
The knowledge of the good and the bad
To us in our need. Emblazon
Our instincts upon your illumination
So that the rot's revealed, and the reason
Shown crucified upon our desolation.

You, all whom I coldly took
And hid my head and horns among,
Shall go caterwauling down with me
Like a frenzy of chained doves. For, look!
We wailing ride down eternity
Tongue-tied together. We belong
To those with whom we shook the suck
And dared an antichrist to be.

Get rags, get rags, all angels, all
Laws, all principles, all deities,
Get rags, come down and suffocate
The orphan in its flaming cradle,
Snuff the game and the candle, for our state
- Insufferable among mysteries -
Makes the worms weep. Abate, abate
Your justice. Execute us with mercies!

George Barker

Turn on your side and bear the day to me

Turn on your side and bear the day to me
Beloved, sceptre-struck, immured
In the glass wall of sleep. Slowly
Uncloud the borealis of your eye
And show your iceberg secrets, your midnight prizes
To the green-eyed world and to me. Sin
Coils upward into thin air when you awaken
And again morning announces amnesty over
The serpent-kingdomed bed. Your mother
Watched with as dove an eye the unforgivable night
Sigh backward into innocence when you
Set a bright monument in her amorous sea.
Look down, Undine, on the trident that struck
Sons from the rock of vanity. Turn in the world
Sceptre-struck, spellbound, beloved,
Turn in the world and bear the day to me.

George Barker