

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **Thomas Blackburn**

## **- poems -**

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## Thomas Blackburn(1916-1977)

# An Invitation

Holding with shaking hands a letter from some  
Official & high up he says in the Ministry,  
I note that I am invited to Birmingham,  
There pedagogues to address for a decent fee.  
'We like to meet,' he goes on, 'men eminent  
In the field of letters each year,' and that's well put,  
Though I find his words not wholly relevant  
To this red-eyed fellow whose mouth tastes rank as soot.  
No doubt what he's thinking of is poetry  
When 'Thomas Blackburn' he writes, and not the fuss  
A life makes when it has no symmetry,  
Though the term 'a poet' being mainly posthumous,  
Since I'm no stiff, is inappropriate.  
What I can confirm is the struggle that never lets up  
Between the horses of Plato beneath my yoke,  
One after Light, and for Hell not giving a rap,  
The other only keen on infernal smoke.  
And poems...? From time to time they commemorate  
Some particularly dirty battle between these two;  
I put the letter down & what's the right note?  
'Dear Sir,' I type, 'how nice to speak to you!'

Submitted by Andrew Mayers

Thomas Blackburn

## Café; Talk

'Of course,' I said, 'we cannot hope to find  
What we are looking for in anyone;  
They glitter, maybe, but are not the sun,  
This pebble here, that bit of apple rind.  
Still, it's the Alpine sun that makes them burn,  
And what we're looking for, some indirect  
Glint of itself each of us may reflect,  
And so shed light about us as we turn.'  
Sideways she looked and said, 'How you go on!'  
And was the stone and rind, their shinings gone.

'It is some hard dry scale we must break through,  
A deadness round the life. I cannot make  
That pebble shine. Its clarity must take  
Sunlight unto itself and prove it true.  
It is our childishness that clutters up  
With scales out of the past a present speech,  
So that the sun's white finger cannot reach  
An adult prism.'

                  'Will they never stop,  
Your words?' she said and settled to the dark.

'But we use words, we cannot grunt or bark,  
Use any surer means to make that first  
Sharp glare of origin again appear  
Through the marred glass,' I cried, 'but can you hear?'  
'Quite well, you needn't shout.' I felt the thirst  
Coil back into my body till it shook,  
And, 'Are you cold?' she said, then ceased to look  
And picked a bit of cotton from her dress.  
Out in the square a child began to cry,  
What was not said buzzed round us like a fly.

I knew quite well that silence was my cue,  
But jabbered out, 'This meeting place we need,  
If we can't find it, still the desire may feed  
And strengthen on the acts it cannot do.  
By suffered depredations we may grow  
To bear our energies just strong enough,

And at the last through perdurable stuff  
A little of their radiance may show:  
If we keep still.' Then she, 'It's getting late.'  
A waiter came and took away a plate.

Then from the darkness an accordion;  
'These pauses, love, perhaps in them, made free,  
Life slips out of its gross machinery,  
And turns upon itself in unison.'  
It was quite dark now you must understand  
And something of a red mouth on a wall  
Joined with the music and the alcohol  
And pushed me to the fingers of her hand.  
Well, there it was, itself and quite complete,  
Accountable, small bones there were and meat.

It did not press on mine or shrink away,  
And, since no outgone need can long invest  
Oblivion with a living interest,  
I drew back and had no more words to say.  
Outside the streets were like us and quite dead.  
Yet anything more suited to my will,  
I can't imagine, than our very still  
Return to no place;  
As the darkness shed  
Increasing whiteness on the far icefall,  
A growth of light there was; and that is all.

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# Hospital For Defectives

By your unnumbered charities  
A miracle disclose,  
Lord of the Images, whose love  
The eyelids and the rose  
Takes for a language, and today  
Tell to me what is said  
By these men in a turnip field  
And their unleavened bread.

For all things seem to figure out  
The stirrings of your heart,  
And two men pick the turnips up  
And two men pull the cart;  
And yet between the four of them  
No word is ever said  
Because the yeast was not put in  
Which makes the human bread.  
But three men stare on vacancy  
And one man strokes his knees;  
What is the meaning to be found  
In such dark vowels as these?

Lord of the Images, whose love  
The eyelid and the rose  
Takes for a metaphor, today,  
Beneath the warder's blows,  
The unleavened man did not cry out  
Or turn his face away;  
Through such men in a turnip field  
What is it that you say?

Submitted by Andrew Mayers

Thomas Blackburn