

Poetry Series

William Barton
- poems -

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William Barton()

Blue Hills Beckon

Through the gate
And over the stile
Curlews calling,
Lapwings tumble.

Songs of skylarks
Melt and mingle;
Swifts and swallows -
Flick of an eye.

Stone walls glistening
climb the hill-side
binding fields
with ropes of stone.

In the sunlight
bracken burning,
streams cascading,
Blue hills beckon.

William Barton

By Order

The Council proposes to stop up and enclose
The following thoroughfares: -
Turkey Lane, Lathbury Road,
Llandaff Street, St Mary's Street,
Together with Jackson's passage
To a point eleven yards to the northeast.
Names of no fixed abode.

By order of the Council
The rotting timbers will be burned,
The walls shattered by a steel ball
Together with the eyes at the curtains
The lives ordered like tramlines,
The tears, the rich familiar faces
And the half-remembered songs they were singing.

William Barton

Clifford's Tower

In York there is a castle,
Its name is Clifford's Tower.
Around the hill the traffic swirls
And passes hour by hour.

In springtime flowers are blooming
To make a rich array.
The old grey stones are rich with light
And turn the night to day.

There was a time within the walls
When hatred lit the fuse;
The burning mob rejoiced to hear
The cries of slaughtered Jews.

When Autumn leaves are falling,
And flowers are faded quite,
The ghosts of Clifford's Tower
Keep vigil through the night.

Summer time or Winter -
Whichever you may choose -
Still faintly in the distance sounds
The lamentation of the Jews.

William Barton

Digging

Born on a croft, your forefathers
dug peat and potatoes.
As for you, a lifetime in the pit,
harvesting the black gold.
Now, your brogue still as soft
as rain falling on green Irish hills,
you dig your own ground
and sow your own crops -
a lifetime of pick and spade,
fork and hoe; till one day
other hands will dig for you
an everlasting plot.

William Barton

Early Autumn

Robins threaten from tree top vantage;
Swallows gather belatedly;
Crows test the shifty winds.

Oak leaves stay strong and green
but beech and willow
turn to twisted yellow.

Raindrops pimple the lake.
Suddenly a heavy shower -
a thirsty stream recovers its voice.

Puddles lace the pathways;
mud collects in cobbled corners
with the reek of fallen leaves.

The skies grey into dusk
and soft darkness,
in the year's long afternoon.

William Barton

Easter Term Report

Spring, this term,
Is quite up to the standard required by the Board,
Notwithstanding occasional periods of non-attendance.
Has been awarded a pass in the following: -
Suitable sunshine; average rainfall;
Together with a distinction in equinoctial turbulence.

Grass

In spite of early sets-back
Is maintaining considerable interest;
Has achieved correct height and shade.
In the summer term, however,
Will require considerable attention from shears and lawn mower.

Rose too

Merits an alpha plus for a brave show
Notwithstanding an adolescent rash of thorns;
Greenfly is to be regretted.
Must not let his enthusiasm wilt;
Must beware of the Bee stream.

Outstanding Daffodil

Alas, brilliant and blooming!
A budding exhibitioner at King's.
Forced unseasonably past his prime,
Now wastes his sweetness in public dance halls:
Now promotes soap.

Unselected Weeds

Appears to lack the classical mould;
Would do well to curb his extra-curricular activities
Would be far happier in some comprehensive compost.
Nevertheless, we are deeply sorry he is leaving,
And I, personally, wish him every success.

William Barton

February-Fill-Dike

February fills dikes, overflows fields
and streams, turns paths to slippery ooze.
Petulant winds crease the surface of the lake
and agitate the fast flowing river.
Hail and sunshine play follow-my-leader
across a shifting sky where lazy seagulls swing.

Gorse brags bright yellow flowers.
On hawthorn hedgerows, buds swell with red tips
and tight clusters of dark green leaves.
Daffodils force green shoots through layers of leaf mould.
Moss creeps and bark rots on fallen trees.
New stems and shoots glow red in the setting sun.

William Barton

Fox In The Grass

In the cool of the evening
a fox lies here in the long grass
under the blossoming apple trees.
He keeps guard as the stars
wheel across the firmament.
He witnesses the moon rise and set.
He watches for the dawn.
He scents the air for his prey
And walks abroad like a god.

William Barton

I Wandered Lonely As A...Dandelion?

A plague on your daffodils, Mr Wordsworth.
Granted, daffodils look very fine - harbinger of spring and such,
But they just stand about admiring themselves
or head-tossing and fluttering in a freezing gale,
and you can buy a pot in any corner shop.

The trouble with daffodils is that they turn up
at such a miserable time of the year - snow, ice, fog etc -
season of flu and fruity cold-full-ness.
As a countryman you should have written a poem about
"a crowd, a host of...dandelions"

Dandelion time is another packet of seeds;
A few sunny days in April, a shower or two,
there's blossom on the trees, and birds singing,
And before you can say, "Taraxacum officinale"
Your garden is knee deep in dandelions.

Dandelions are tough and stubborn,
deep-rooted and hard to shift.
Pick a fight with a dandelion and you'll lose.
Dig them up, throw them away or burn them
and next year they're blooming, bigger than ever.

Call them all the rude names you can find: -
Cankerwort, Clock Flower, Irish Daisy, Lion's Tooth, Milk Witch, Monk's Head,
Piss-a-bed, Priest's Crown, Puffball, Swine Snout-
They'll just parachute off to your favourite flower bed.
Much better just to call a truce.

You can't eat daffodils but as for dandelions
you can use them to make delicious wine
or eat them raw in tasty salads.
They also contain a whole pharmacy of medical ingredients -
enough to cure an entire infirmary of ailments.

If you're not sure of the time, or the state of your love life,
or wish to send a message to your friend,
or hope to have a wish come true, or are anxious

to discover the age at which you will die,
just blow on a dandelion clock.

So, dear, misguided Mr Wordsworth;
If you want a flower that's bright and bonny,
Painted by the artist, Monet,
Then choose a plant you can rely on,
go dancing with the dandelion.

William Barton

If And If Only

'If' is a word
I often choose;
A golden key□
I often use.

'If only' - a phrase
That's never spoken.
The door is barred.
The key is broken.

'If I... '
'If we...'
'If you...'
'If she...' □

William Barton

January Day

The day is heron grey -
no gaudy plumage
of sun and shade.

Feathery mist
hangs on treetops
and silent hedgerows.

Light winds bring
waves of soft rain
from monochrome skies.

Water swells and drips
from closed buds
and bare branches.

Brown grass
and rusty beech leaves
hide sleeping seeds.

Like a watchful heron,
on a stone by the river,
Spring is poised.

William Barton

March Magic

Doubtful, in cold winter ground,
they hide your fragile form -
hardly more than dust itself-
hoping the mysteries
of fitful sunshine,
blustery winds
and pelting rain,
will bring about
your timely
resurrection.

March 2012

William Barton

Memorial

My fragile memorial flowers
Shiver in the darkening breeze.
And my two sad candles -
Tearfully reflected
In the cold rolling river -
Flicker feebly
and slowly
expire

William Barton

Middlewood Way

On the Middlewood Way the festival of May has almost ended -
white and pink blossom replaced by crimson clover,
spindly dog daisies, blue forget-me-nots, fox-gloves, and king-cups.

Yellow flag iris flourish in the shallow pools
which run alongside the old permanent way.
The new growing tips of the hawthorn hedges
lining the track are blood red.

Under the trees the path is lit by a shifting pattern of sunlight
as self-seeded youngsters struggle for light and space
under the fuller canopy of older residents.

Further along, a stand of densely planted pines
casts an ominous green shadow.
By contrast the light on the canal bank
is almost painful in its brightness.

A boat painted in gaudy traditional livery
chugs quietly past, leaving behind a friendly greeting
and a swirl of sunlit ripples.

On the hillside the sharp yellow gorse bushes are still in full bloom
complementing the clumps of pink rhododendron.

In the distance, a optimistic red fox takes refuge
behind a stone wall overlooking a field of sturdy lambs.

A heron in clerical grey bickers with two raggedy crows
beside a stream clattering over moss covered stones.

The muddy track watered by last night's rain is every shade of brown.
but in the distance the hills are slate grey
merging into the colour of clouds and sky,
and the white-washed Bowderstonegate Farm stands out sharply
against a rinse of greens and greys.

William Barton

Name Carved On A Tree

This is the tree where you carved your name
at the junction of three woodland pathways,
hoping to be part of its long living.

But what you missed was the child
teetering past on a shiny new bicycle;
The girl and boy walking shyly apart,
hesitating over untried pathways;
The old man, breathless, with a stick.

You never witnessed the breaking of buds in Spring,
The cool coat of summer leaves and birdsong,
The splintering agony of furious autumn gales,
and the bleak loneliness of bare winter branches.

William Barton

Path From Ragleth Hill

In gathering mist, the path leads down
from grassy hill-top, sure-footed
through maze of bracken trails, confidently
skirting hidden rocks and slippery streams;
following its feet under darkening oaks
and complications of fallen leaves,
on shadowy tracks marked by broken stones
where ancient men walked in hope or fear;

Down to a field of sheep, a quiet evening sky,
A narrow church-yard lane, and lamp-lit streets.

William Barton

Paupers Wood

The rich man said,
"We'll close the mills -
There's no profit to be made."
But in the crowded streets
Hunger prospered.

The rich man said,
"We'll build a workhouse
For all the idle poor."
But in the work-less streets
Fear found new lodgings.

The rich man said,
"Paupers! Not fit to rot
In a rich man's graveyard! "
But birds now sing a requiem
For all at peace in Paupers' Wood.

William Barton

Storm Over Holland

From the east, grey clouds
Scout the sky, occupy the horizon.
Chillingly, efficiently,
Barrages of hail and rain
Fall from black artillery
Till all the land is subdued.

Water brims in ditches lining fields.
Raindrops enrich the rising corn.
Trees shake themselves dry.
Sepia houses and farmsteads
Dissolve to red roofs, long white roads,
Blue sky and orange sun.

William Barton

Stream

Bubbles...
Clear water
oozing
through grass
collects
its thoughts
in a shallow,
spreading pool;
covers its sly tracks
with moss and reeds;
finds loopholes in a wall,
lies doggo in a muddy ditch;
cuts a narrow suspicious groove
through green and gullible fields;
gathers its wits, trickles deviously
across an unguarded country road;
joins forces with other watery fugitives
to white-water its way to the welcoming sea.

From where,
each and every
runaway drop
is destined to fall,
once again,
as rain.

March 2012

William Barton

The Way You Walk

Setting out in the morning,
Under a bright winter sky,
Sunshine filters through bare branches,
casting rich pools of golden light.

On the return journey -
rain starts to fall,
pock-marking dreary puddles,
reflecting a bankrupt sky.

William Barton

Train Passing

Train passing winter grey fields
With impromptu pools reflecting greyer skies;
Passing fallow fields, homeless hedges
And empty skeleton trees.

Just one patch of sky -
A stain of palest blue -
And if you look closely,
The tiniest blink of a watery sun.

William Barton

Walking Dreams

A damp and dreary day for walking;
Still and cold with fine rain falling.
Mist swirls round shadowy barns,
hiding walls, fields and fell side.

Along the path, a full-flowing stream
Crashes under a narrow stone bridge.
Endless rocky steps struggle upwards.
Lost in fog and spray, an unseen torrent.

Inch by inch, the breeze begins to shred the mist.
Suspensions of warmth and brightness assume
the certainty of daylight, warmth and colour,
revealing the rich panoply of high peaks.

Sometimes in dreams, out of the mists
of time and sleep, we too rejoice to walk
in bright sunlight with much-loved faces
for a brief and blessed reunion.

(March 2012)

William Barton

Willow

Founded in stone and water,
Its tough old bark deeply scored
By disputations of wind and rain.
Gargoyle limbs writhe and twist
From the trunk's immensity.
Over-arching branches
Trail long fingers of foliage,
Like cool, green blessings.
In the stained-glass windows of leaves
Birds sing praises
To the greater glory of wood.

William Barton

Wind Over Water

Wind over water,
stream over stone.

Trees are shivering
in gusty cornfields
- green over liquid gold.

Deep in hedgerow terraces
Sparrows gossip
and subtle spiders spin.

Along the pathway,
leaves cast a rich filigree
of light and shade.

Swifts over swallows
sweep the air.

Clouds hang idly
on distant hills.

Above all, the sun.

William Barton

Winter Field

A killing field of grass-blades
Is whetted to bitter sharpness
by frost and icy wind.

A regiment of hawthorn
Stands guard, its cruel spikes
barbed with winter steel.

Companies of silver birch besiege
a frozen pool whose shield of ice
reflects a cracked and broken sky.

Winter's armoury -
till unbuckled
by Spring.

William Barton