



*The
Haunted
Garden*

**HENRY
TREECE**

Faber

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The Haunted Garden

*To the memory
of a little bird that flew
into our lighted room and
then out again, into the dark*

by the same author



INVITATION AND WARNING

THE BLACK SEASONS

HENRY TREECE

THE
HAUNTED
GARDEN

FABER & FABER

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H. T.

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Prologue

The small bird whistling in my tree
Knows no black hate or enmity;
He does not care if cities fall
And darkness overcovers all.

He minds not if the red blood's shed
And truth is murdered in her bed;
But watches buds sprout. Without fail
He marks the movements of the snail.

Little Green Frog

Little green frog in the strawberry leaves,
Don't be afraid.
My boots and hedging knives
Were never made
To take the life from friends like you;
You and the robin and the tiny shrew.

No, never fear, for we of this small house
Are not afraid.
We love the bear as well as the field-mouse
And we are paid
In full, if when you see us pass
You do not shrink into the grass.

Little green frog in the strawberry leaves,
I'll tell you now,
Poets, thank God, are tearing wolves,
But not to you.
Their enemies are men whose decalogues
Can find no place for love, and little frogs.

Two Versions of One Poem

I

Through the dark aisles of the wood
Where the pine-needles deaden all sound
And the dove flutters in the black boughs

Through twilight vaults of the forest
Where fungus stifles the roots
And the squirrel escapes with a cone

Through the dim alleys of pine
Where the bent stick moves like a snake
And the badger sniffs at the moon

Through the green graveyard of leaves
Where the stoat rehearses his kill
And the white skull grins in the fern.

II

Deep in the forest
In a sea-green light,
Where the fern springs thickest
In eternal night,

The white moths weave their pattern
Above the blind mole's mound,
And badger comes to fatten
On what his eyes can find.

And where the nimble stoats rehearse
Their ballet of the kill,
Half-hidden by a century's moss
There grins a human skull.

It has been home for beetle
And shelter for the snake,
And half the woodland people
Have heard its dry lips speak;

When evening wind blows strongest,
Sounds in the sockets stir.
The creatures of the forest
Forget when it came there.

The Tree

The tree, wise in its status, never moves
Its roots, though storm should break
And frustrate wind howl like a tawny wolf
Into the tattered cloud. The tree
Keeps its own counsel and is led
Only by rise and fall of sap, by sun and moon.
The birds that work each other's merriment,
Even destruction on its rocking boughs,
Are minims of the moment, soon dismissed.

But I, talking my way through Empires,
Breaking the silken cord of Pleasure in my haste,
And scattering bright petals with my heel,
I am he who shifts his facile roots,
Accommodating any wind that moves
Harder than rose desires, or any blow
That would shake cherry-blossom down.
It is my destiny that tree, who is my god,
Should raise his arms in loathing of me now.

The Twig

This twig, thrusting its way through the soil,
Puppet of wind and frost, indomitable
Traveller through rock as hard as iron, stands
In some green valley of my questing mind
As symbol of fate's failure to allay
The lust of motion that drives creatures mad,
Sets men to building bridges out of sand,
Throttling great rivers with a giant's hand
So that sweet light shall shine his way to love,
Outleaping time across the sky's vast bowl,
Kidnapping songs in days of summer joy
To let them free when winter seals the tongue.
In this bare twig, whose green mind drives it on,
I see man stab love to the very heart
Or recreate a heaven from two crossed sticks.

Blind Bird

Under the horn of a glass, deep in my dreams,
I hear the prick-eyed linnnet, 'Sweet my love,'
Whistling for all creation in a second's joy
And never calling to her carefree heart
The long dark months, the grave-blind years, the hell
Of no sweet eyes; no colour leaping free
Out of the simple sky that all men take for bread,
Out of the bright red flower, the twinkling river-bed,
Where paradisal creatures in their scales
Produce a fantasy, a summer sound,
A heaven of multi-coloured ecstasy.
This small bird sees no sky, she sees no darting trout,
But sits, beak soft to breast, thinking her time again,
Thinking the glorious feckless sweep and swirl
Among the cotton clouds, over the hills,
Over the tinkling, steel-blue river, gentle as time;
And then the burning needles, sharp as lime.

The Haunted Garden

In this sad place
Memory hangs on the air
Fragile as Spring snail's tiny shell,
Coming to the sympathetic ear
Gentle as bud's green pulsing in the sun,
Suave as sin in a black velvet glove.

The old faces gaze
Wistful as birds, among the nodding leaves;
They watch the pleasures ghosts may never share.
And through the twilight hours
Old voices call along the river-banks
And out of the high-walled garden.

Why do they sigh,
The gentle ones in the flowering musk;
And what are the words of the song
The pale stranger sings as he walks
The garden's still, deserted paths,
Like a boy searching for his dog?

Poem

Let us arise and walk now
Out of this bare land, where the wind
Blows over cruel hills cold as a stone;
Out of the plain where grass as sharp as knives
Cuts to the limping bone.

Let us arise and wander
Through the summer gorse, among
Cowslip and violets and bird's eye trefoil,
Through mists of bluebells on the forest floor,
Laughing at cuckoo's call.

And let us find our way
To where the strutting peacock trails
His glory at the edge of the dark lake,
Where cypress underneath a lover's moon
Comforts the old wound's ache.

The Lost Land

FOR GWYN JONES

The dry breasts of Britain,
The bare hills, rolling black
Back into nights older than history;
And the gaunt stones
Pointing like hangman's fingers
Through the morning mist,
Or lolling on the ground like ruined kings;
The great monoliths
In whose stone heart the past declines to dust.

Seven geese go shrieking black across the moon
With necks outstretched and dreaming of the ice
Or golden eagle poised in God's high palm,
And the strange dark ones rising through the mist
That hides the islands from the eye of peace.

Sickle and mistletoe and full white moon
And weed-grown creatures creeping from the sea
As wide-eyed priest,
His chin turned to the sky,
Beats his thin breast in twilit ecstasy.

In a corner of the dark wood,
Where adder slips through the fern,
Where foxglove and coltsfoot push up towards the light,
The antlered men sit singing in a ring,
Twitching their painted faces at the sign
Of hare's foot and rabbit's ear
And black cock's entrails steaming in the glade.
The whimpering slave chafes at his iron ring,
Fingers his calloused neck,
Pulling his rags around him as he hears
The voices of the trees asking for fire.

Stationed on the plain, the dark-eyed soldiers
Build their grey walls and lock themselves away,
Away from mists and legend's mystery,
The sacrificial screaming from the fire
And gaunt-faced man nailed up against the oak,
Rolling on sheepskins, they sharpen their short swords,
And round their fires they dream of sunny roads,
Rich Gallic wine and cyclamen
And laughing girls crowding the Capitol.

Princes of the Twilight

FOR ROBERT HERRING

Princes of the Twilight

I

First the frost, kissing the anguished root
And striking terror in the seed's soft heart
With winter breath, turning all water iron.

Then the thaw and Spring's soft courtier
Dancing in green across the merry fields,
Gold torque and harp all glittering in the sun.

And last the summer weather in the vine,
Covering the bones from sight with scented moss,
With bugloss and poppy and the rich red corn.

It was well in the old days, before the knife had lost its edge and the dog turned on his master.

Then the sky was always blue and crimson pennants waved in the mild air.

And the lords and the ladies galloped on white horses over the rolling heather towards the sea, laughing and singing, their gay cloaks streaming out behind them.

And in the halls, minstrels sang and jugglers tossed bright swords into the air; and sometimes, at midnight, the grandson of the ancient Oak-men would appear before the window, and with his dark art would set the flowers to ring like convent bells, or fetch a cloud of white doves out of the fire-smoke, or call in strange tongues from behind the flapping tapestry.

And in the hovel the goose-girl dreamed of silken sheets and gay laughter, of golden bowls and red wine, as she laid out the thin cold body in its threadbare shift.

It was well in the old days, for then men looked to a time of freedom, when the wolves would go back to the hills and the raiding long-boats would leave

the coasts and founder, farther away than even the wild geese knew.

II

First desire, and sweet seduction's play,
The mad blood racing through the veins
To tear the rind and lay the soft fruit bare.

Then pride, striding like famine through the land
With golden staff to slash the heads from flowers,
Or choosing ripe plum here, rejecting there.

And last, mere usage, long habit turning grey
Love's multi-coloured tapestry, and birds
Suddenly sweeping songless through the air.

The Queen, Gwynhyvar, sat smoothing her golden hair with a comb of jet.
At her small feet lay a hunting hound.

From time to time her sea-blue eyes strayed to the waxen image of the tall king, dressed in the cloak of the Red Dragon, and then her long white fingers snatched up the silver bodkin and thrust it again and again through the body and the eyes and the legs of the still image.

Looking into her mirror, the Queen saw the thick curtains part, and her red lips drew back to show her teeth, sharp and white as a cat's.

In the doorway stood the tall king, dressed in the cloak of the Red Dragon.

And Gwynhyvar turned to him and held out her long hands in yearning.

'My love,' she sang, 'Why have you stayed away from me, to whom every moment of your absence is a needle through my eyes?'

III

First the mood, a wind shaking the trees
Or stirring in some distant sullen plain,
With a swirl of dust and quiver of dead leaves.

And then the act, quick as a viper's tongue,
Catching the devil on the knife's sharp edge
Before he could escape, letting red rain fall.

And last repentance in her rough grey shift,
Hiding her tears with soiled and broken hands,
Listening for larks where no birds ever sang.

Under the feathered tree, seven Princes sat, listening to the harper and drinking from golden horns.

And their words flew in and out of the branches like coloured birds, climbing and soaring, swooping and striking, skimming from head to head and hardly ever perching in the heart.

And at last, when the sun had gone and the last minstrel had been dismissed, that Prince with the jet-black hair and the full red lips of a girl spoke to his peers in this manner:

'Dogs mate not with wolves the wise ones say,
Nor is man born who has seen moon by day
But from a pit or from the wormy grave.
Who here will call himself the black bear's slave?'

As the last word fell from the cherry lips, each Prince drew his bright knife and thrust it to the hilt in the daisy-damasked lawn. Then the young one, with the hair of jet and the girl's treacherous lips, lifted his head as the dusk fell and howled like a wolf between his jewelled hands.

The six Princes saluted him, then turning they flung back their velvet cloaks and shot seven arrows into the round moon's white face.

IV

First, the three gaunt birds waiting for Spring
On blackened bough, staring across the waste,
Watching for sun to break the purple mist.

Then the summer wood, full of a million sighs,
And the wings of a thousand coloured birds, where
In moon-time the pale man whispers with the moths.

Last, the robin, frost on his scarlet breast,
Making his quaint runes across the snow,
And mistletoe swinging in the Atlantic wind.

The three dark women stood by the table, watching the King as he lolled,
his great golden head sunk in his tired hands.

‘Do not despair,’ they chanted, ‘For every winter has its Spring, and not a
sword but comes to rust at last.’

And Arthur, his heart lighter, rose and walked by night in the woods, and
learned a lesson from the flickering moths.

And at last he came to where the rocky cliffs fall down to the great sea, and
he looked towards the land where his kinsmen still lived. Then he shouted into
the blustering wind, hoping that his words would carry across the wide water
to where his folk waited:

‘Men of Armorica, Comrades, Cymry!
Come now if you will ever come,
And we will tread the serpents in the fire,
And we will drive the wolves back to the sea!’

He listened, expecting a titanic reply. But his ears caught only the mad
violence of the wind, and his kingly words fell from the air, torn and
shrivelled, down the rock-face and into the seashore spume.

And a bird, his small breast bleeding from the barb, hobbled behind him
through the snow, and the marks that his feet made spelled the history of
despair.

The fifth sad season is a pæan of pain,
Nothing so simple as mere toothless death,
But pitched right at the point of stark corruption

Where every cell shrieks for another dawn
And breath of parsley underneath the moon,
While womb's walls writhe that their dear day is done.

The last decaying hair, the crumbling jaw,
Ask no broad freedom, crave no fragrant grove,
Beg only the soft motion sea-sand knows.

The old man took the little Prince by the hand and led him down the worn stone steps into the vault below the chapel.

A bat flew out of the shadows and brushed across the boy's face. A grey rat scuttled over his feet and was lost in the darkness. Above, in the world of men, the Atlantic roared and broke its hyaena-teeth against the gaunt cliffs.

'This is your kinsman,' said the priest, lifting the stone lid of a great coffin. 'This is Uther Pendragon, whose banner you will one day carry through the land.'

The boy looked at the writhing mass and shuddered.

'Look long on this great one, boy,' said the old man, 'and say a prayer.'

The boy bent his head and thought of men chained in a burning cage.

When the two had climbed the stone steps, back into the light, three old women, dressed in black, came out of the shadows and peered about. They lifted the heavy coffin-lid and plunged their yellow hands inside. Standing on the rocks above the churning sea, they threw their horrid load to the hungry breakers.

A black seal raised his head above the waves, and recognizing the falling gift, dived deep to carry word to the green eminence.

And a dying raven, wandering towards oblivion in the upper air, swooped and carried off in his dry beak the ring-finger of the ancient King.

Love-in-dream, the golden pinnacles
Piercing the cotton-wool to a cobalt sky,
And the goose-girl climbing the palace's jade steps.

Love-in-life, the winter afternoons
When log-fires throw their shadows on the wall
And wind howls in the chimney like a wolf.

Love-in-death, the white child in the wood,
Walking among the drooping aconite
And listening for voices that will never come.

And so he lay, the last of the Romans, and listened to the battle rolling away from him across the rocky field.

And Arthur leaned on his withered arm and wept to hear the bright blood streaming from his side.

And as he stayed, bound to earth, the vetch and the convolvulus crept through his open, gasping wounds into his head; and he remembered Olwen, the goose-girl, who had come bare-foot to Camelot to conceive his child.

And he remembered the long, warm, dusky afternoons they had spent together, between battles, in a shepherd's hut above Vricon.

And last of all, he remembered his son, who might have saved the land, but who was lost, no-one knew where, and now would never know the light ecstasy of victory, or the weight of a crown.

And Arthur reached out for his sword, to put an end to his suffering in the old Roman way.

But his fingers were already dead, and his eyes filled with blood.

'Bedwyr,' he called, as faint as conscience in a drunken dream, 'Bedwyr, my friend, come to me now.'

There was a rustle in the sedges by the lake, then silence.

VII

Between fate and falcon's falling, screaming, tearing,
Cleaving the still cloud to deliver death,
Swirls in the upper air a sword-like will.

Somewhere between the rolling weed-grown wave
And craters pocking the green ocean bed,
Sways mercy in a labyrinthine shell.

The will to kill no less than will to die
Swings in the dusk of mindless ecstasy,
Mocking the three crosses on the hill.

Then the tall Queen, the darkest of the three, who sat like a dream of monoliths in the stern of the boat, quietly drew a long knife from her breast, and slowly cut the pale, bruised head from the defeated body. Holding it by the tattered golden hair, she let it drop silently into the black lake.

Only a single ripple hurt the stillness, and then a cloud moved westward across the moon.

VIII

Who is the pale hunter dressed in green,
The white stranger with the death-pale hands;
And why does he carry that bright golden spear?

Who is the dark soldier dressed in red,
The black watcher with the bloody hands;
And why does he wear that gleaming silver star?

The hunter is desire, who waits the winter moon;
The soldier, love, who moves towards the sun.
Why stare they at each other's hands in fear?

In a small clearing of the frozen forest, a little lad tumbled on all fours, among the volcanic stones.

He wailed as he played, and said, 'If I am indeed the son of a King, as they say, why then is my body clothed with hair, and my hands armed with curling

claws?’

The dying raven watched him, with glazed eyes, from the broken bough of a tree. For a moment it remembered its own heritage, and saw itself seated on velvet at a golden board, with the sad harps wailing the song of the mid-summer sacrifice by the great fire. A wolf howled from the depths of the wood.

The little lad stopped in his play of gnawing a snail-shell and shambled towards the sound.

‘I am coming, Mother,’ he sobbed. ‘Have patience with the weak. Pity the sons of Kings, for they must play.’

Poem

Known in a drunken ecstasy, the birds
Wheeling, white-winged, across the fluid plains;
The sombre woods forgetting their distress
And lilting, breeze-moved, into summer's dance.
I have known this, have held the legacy
Of hawks and hounds, in the gay mad mandate
Of furrow and feathery cloud,
The provinces and dominions of the sky
And all the swarming marvels of the deep.

But lion in his rocky folly roars
Rage and repentance over the dead hills;
The quick snake, brilliant in his masquerade,
Shudders among the trailing vine, and halts.
This is the end of all things, end of time
And end of all the mind's green escapades,
That brought love back with every sign of Spring,
Through whistling wood and daffodil's gold horn.
It is the window's close, the lute's last dying fall,
The dark cloud's fingers reaching over all.

Poem

Fickle as tiger, gay with golden eyes
As amber saviour dancing in a tree
And calling all the timid doves to rest
With angel-silver voice,
Preparing them for table with steel claws:

Smooth as the leopard lolling in the bough,
Taking no toll from jewelled snake that swings
From heaven to sunset in a coloured coil,
But sharpening his white fang
To trap the son of God in his boy's leap;

Which lad, blue-eyed, wandering through ears of corn,
Knows future in the shining feathers' spring
And all the perfumes of the past
In almond-blossom's livening
Among the cool and virgin snow-clad hills.

We all know treachery, as maker or unmade,
And each has fingered blade to lay friend low.
No-one can censure tiger or quick snake,
And not a man remains
But would nail up the master once again.

Poem

I have seen sun light up the flowered bones
And tear a groan
From each soft cell-locked minion in the vein;
The poison-ivy of the reaching mind
Strangle each gaily-painted dream
That set the blood in music to the wind.

I have seen willow-wands along the lanes
Move in a dream
Of princesses towards the grave-locked town,
The vetches of the forest whose green hand
Creeps closer to the lonely home
And puts man's hero from the midnight mind.

These things, known as a crystal forms,
Skin upon skin,
According to solution's pattern, win
Brain to follow heart into the land
Where no-one dances but the lame,
And only daft have mind to understand.

Beyond Four Walls

FOR CHRISTOPHER WOOD, MUSICIAN

Beyond Four Walls

Sentenced at the Shrewsbury Assizes, 13th March 1787, John Llewelyn, twenty-five years of age, on a charge of murder.

The Accused, farm-hand, of a poetic temper but small wit, making his way home from a political gathering in Radnor, on the bitter night of 20th December 1786, sought shelter in a cottage, whose light had attracted him.

After receiving food and drink from the occupants, an old man and his wife, Llewelyn is alleged to have demanded money; and, on being refused with some heat by his host, took out an old cavalry sword that he was carrying and stabbed the man.

The old woman, his hostess, imploring him to stay his hand, he hacked her about the body in such a manner as to cause her death.

As he made his way from the cottage, he looked into an outhouse, and finding there a small dog, struck off its head before leaving.

This then the twist of tricks, the enmity,
The quick turn in the heart that kills
With words or knives or poisoned wedding-cup.
Who cares that the boy who dies to-day
Danced like a willow-wand to last night's flutes;
Or maiden, joyous in her love, rivalled the lilac-tree
In untaught wantonness?
Who feels that the old man meant much less
Than his time-hardened words had seemed to say?
No lad, the gesture's made, the word flies high,
Black sword is out and blood flows free!

The Accused, having been judged guilty of murder, was sentenced to hang by the neck until dead, and awaiting the execution of this judgement, was lodged in Ludlow Gaol, an epidemic of gaol-fever having broken out at Shrewsbury, where he was tried.

While waiting the punishment of his devilry, John Llewelyn showed some measure of his madness by his constant changes of mood. At one time he would rave and roar about his cell, singing a song of his own invention, set to a drinking lilt, and ending by shouting, 'Judas, Judas, old rope-friend, why do you shun me now?'

One for a roaring fee foh fum;
Two for a plague of wasps;
Three for a palace of glimmering ghosts;
Four for a dead bird's gasps.

Five for an arrow in the heart;
Six for a midnight cat;
Seven for a nail knocked through the hand;
Eight for a blood-red coat.

All together let us sing
Nine for the Gospel-Maker;
The thirty coins have no true ring,
So Ten for the rocking acre!

Yet at other times he would stalk about his stone floor, his raven hair awry and his tattered coat flung about him like a mantle, declaiming poetically and with all the gestures of the heroic Bard, holding his hands this way and then that, so that his gaoler was pained to observe his movements through the keyhole:

When the mood is on me
And the bright fires burn,
Seven birds come singing to me,
The linnets of the moon.

I take the twig of the elm-tree
And autumn's chestnut leaf
And write in words of mystery
As black as grief.

And my verse is the song of the dark wood
And the ruined house;
And my right hand holds a flaming sword
And my left the field-mouse.

And I walk alone among the mists
Upon forgotten hills.
At dawn the iron's on my wrists
And in my eyes grey walls.

But always at night, when the gaoler brought his late meal, John Llewelyn would be surprised at his prayers, on his knees by the side of his truckle-bed, weeping and mumbling a devotion of his own devising; a prayer not of these times, but belonging to an earlier age, which, for all his witlessness, he seemed to have knowledge of:

Incense and fennel and the Holy Salt
And parsley cropped under the summer moon,
All stirred with the tongue of a mottled snake
And drunk to the sickle and mistletoe tune,
Will heal and preserve all men from the pain
Of the black poison

The red palsy
The white migraine
The yellow ague
And the purple bane.

But no man is born who holds the skill
To heal the disease that works my ill.
O Lord, have mercy.
Have mercy, Lord!

And latterly he would cry out in his sleep, ‘Masters, a bone for the little dog! He shall have his rights if I die for it! Let the poppet come for his dues!’

Or at other times his words would be, ‘Take me from here. These walls are made of paper. They who would do me an injury can pass through stone. They can get to me *beyond four walls*. I know them by their horn!’

Then, one night, watching his opportunity, he begged a sheet of paper from his gaoler, and a pen, and he wrote three verses for the easement of his spirit; though, from their nature, it could be seen that his mind was now more than ever in a state of unbalance:

FIRST POEM

The horn, the horn, the blood-red horn,
The rose sinking down in the death-dark tarn,

Down among fishes of shimmering gold
And amethyst eyes, but oh so cold,

As cold as the heart on a pitch-black night
When the watcher leaps from his bed in fright,

For the tongue that licked his dangling hand
In the dark was no dog's, but smooth and round

And the creak in the wainscot was no mouse
But the start of fear in an empty house

That grows to a scream as tall as the sky,
Then shrinks to the size of a wren's small eye

And echoes for years in the dusty hall:
Like the petals afloat on the midnight pool.

SECOND POEM

Yes, you may take the knife when the deed is done,
Take it and kiss it and thank it for its edge;
Then bless it again for the golden life it steals,
The quiet sleep, the hedgerow flowers and heart's sweet peace
That never will, while hills stand, be your due.
Then weep your haggard eyes out that the blade
Come clean again, pray that the lipping wound
Will close those sneering lips. Or take your knife
And wipe it white between the two white breasts
Of she who bade you kill. So test her love!

No, never will your twilit room be free
Of sullen whisperings behind the walls,
The scutter of dry hands among the thatch.
Nor, though you thrust your fingers to the brain,
Shall your keen ears shake off the nightly sound
Of a small dog whining to the winter moon.

THIRD POEM

They shall come in the black weathers
From the heart of the dead embers,
Walking one and two over the hill.
And they shall be with you, never farther
Than your bedside.

At their will
The smell of putrefaction lingers
And floor is carpeted with rotting hair
Or sheets are torn to shreds
By the beaks of dead dry birds
And red blood clots in the cup.

Put up your swords!
What steel can cut the throat of next year's dream,
What tongue is tuned to speak last night's quick scream?
Go alone by darkness;

Burn the clippings of your nail;
Donate a thousand candles,
But do as you will,
When sun is blind and lamps are lit once more,
Two and one, they shall be standing
At your door.

On May 25th, two days before he was to hang, at midnight to the minute, the gaoler on duty was disturbed by loud cries from John Llewelyn's cell.

'Do not blow your horn, old man. Can you not let me ever sleep?'

And then again, 'Here is a bone for the little dog. But send him away to eat it outside. I cannot bear to look upon his head again.'

And then at last, 'Keep the sanctity of these four walls. Remember they are of stone.'

Then there was much screaming.

The gaoler, afraid for the prisoner's mind, ran to fetch his companions, and together they entered the cell.

John Llewelyn lay stretched on his lonely stone floor, bloody froth at his mouth. And he was dead.

His throat was bitten to the bone; as might have been done by a fox, or a badger. Or a little dog.

Poem

In the dark caverns of the night,
Loveless and alone,
Friendless as wind that wails across the plains,
I sit, the last man left on earth,
Putting my fear on paper,
Praying that love will flow from my dry pen
And watching the tears make havoc on my page.

And I remember then,
Under the night's still mask,
The gallant geese
Making their way through storms,
The fieldmouse scuttering to my door
Away from the black cloud,
And the gay snail
Garnishing the twig before leaves came.

The old ones told me,
'When you grow grey you think on little things;'
Now these dreams kiss the bruises from my mind
Under the night's still mask,
As loveless and alone
I sit, till dawn the last man left
Who knows the sound of rain on summer leaves,
The graceful swan breasting the blood-red stream,
And heart's incompetence.

Poem

There is an ocean in my head that nightly sings,
Swings, sways and crawls about the mental globe,
Leaving its molluscs here, its green weed there,
And pocking the still sea-bed with its gusty whims,
So that the barnacle-befestooned wreck turns widdershins
And casts its pearl-eyed memories in my lap
To sort and sift and allocate to Heaven
As I see fit; I, sitting like a salty demi-god,
Whose hand staves in planks here and there discovers gold,
Then throws the whole haul into emerald currents
To disturb the placid whale, spoiling his Iceland course,
Diverting him to some sharp spear-manned isle;
Yet pleasing mackerel, with their soft minion's eyes,
Giving the festive shoal a holiday
To skip and curvet in among the coins
Like Spring-tossed bushes, or little boys at play.

Two Metaphors

Under the placid surface of the sea
The cruel currents swirl,
Disturbing quiet squid, dislodging barnacle
And scattering the tiny crabs
Here and there among the shifting dunes.
In such disordered motions do I read
The lyric of my life, spirit's obituary.

Above the bellying white cumulus,
High in the thin, the purple air,
Among the zephyred quicksands, treads the hawk,
Tossed right and left, not knowing when
His pinions will stay on harder atmosphere.
In this uncertain lift and swoop I know
Heart's weathers and my future's solitude.

Sea Poem

A kingdom swirls beneath the weed
That knows no mortal eye,
A silent midnight heaven
Where coloured creatures fly
Through clouds of iridescence
And forests of pure jade,
Among the skulls of sailors
Whose jaws are opened wide
In last nostalgic pain.
Those lonely men of Spain,
They will not dance again.

Death of a Fighter Pilot

Devoted to death, even as a child,
The shadow in his eyes showed as the mark
For that slow tumble down the summer sky
With chute close-furled, no terror in the mild
Young face, nor frantic grappling of the air
As doom unfolded. Only the still hands fanned
Over the quiet breast, as though to say
This was the wisest way out of a world
Too hard for one boy's heart to understand.
The birds about him watched his lurching arc
And as he fell the breeze moved his bright hair.
Then earth reached up and took him in her hand.

Conquerors

By sundown we came to a hidden village
Where all the air was still
And no sound met our tired ears, save
For the sorry drip of rain from blackened trees
And the melancholy song of swinging gates.
Then through a broken pane some of us saw
A dead bird in a rusting cage, still
Pressing his thin tattered breast against the bars,
His beak wide open. And
As we hurried through the weed-grown street,
A gaunt dog started up from some dark place
And shambled off on legs as thin as sticks
Into the wood, to die at least in peace.
No-one had told us victory was like this;
Not one amongst us would have eaten bread
Before he'd filled the mouth of the grey child
That sprawled, stiff as a stone, before the shattered door.
There was not one who did not think of home.

Christmas 1943

To-night the dead lie quiet in the fields
All over Europe; they will not speak again.
There's one who shuddered in the midnight wave,
Worried by weed and buffeted by spar;
That one smiled once at memories of home
Before the bullet took him as he leapt;
He who fell screaming from the summer sky
Saw bones where had been hands upon the stick.

Lie quiet, lads, lie still and smile i' the ground,
The same bed waits for us; you have been first,
Taking the hard way up the stairs to death,
And that is all. Listening to the bells
This Christmas time across the flat grey fields,
I know youth passes with their peal, and then
Only the iron foot of Time will march;
The clock will tick all life to quiet dust.

Elegy

Elegy

*O do you not hear them calling,
Calling thin as the wind,
Calling as keen as the curlew
Across the moors of the mind;
Faint as the horns of Elfland blowing
Back across the years?*

In my troubled garden the violet vies with vetch
And lilac is entwined with sly convolvulus.
Set among beds of parsley and of thyme
The plain-faced dockleaf shakes a leather ear;
And grass grows coarse across the tortured earth,
Covering alike the corpse and bridal strawberry.
Playground of birds by day, and prairie for the cats
That come by night savouring the moon,
Relic of five long years of war—
That is my garden.

So I come home again to a parcel of land
Where weeds climb softly round the memory
Of clean black earth and tidy paths;
To a house where I can hardly hear
The echo of the words we spoke five years ago,
And a life whose youth was wrought about with war
Like lilac boughs by sly convolvulus.

I sit here in my little wilderness,
Shaping to-morrow as the sun goes down.
The air is colder now and birds have flown.
Under the hill the church clock strikes the hour,
And I hear them calling again,
The lads who will come no more,
As sharp as the lonely curlew
Across the moors of the mind:
We are gone. We are gone. Remember . . .

There was one who met death high above the clouds.

Skimming across the sun with wings of fire
And bird's bright eye, over the map of fields,
Glad in his engine's powered roar.

Death came with no white skull and gleaming scythe,
No thunder rumbling from glory's past;
But with a spume of contrails and a scream,
And all Time's hatred in a five-second burst,

Then circled once again and quietly watched
His flaring victim stream out of the sky,
And making sure there was no parachute,
Turned and set course again for Germany.

What are they saying now along the wind
In words as faint and plaintive as a dream?

Call me as you come across the hill
Into the valley sleeping with the night;
Call me on your way towards the flock.

Call me when the winter wind is sharp
And bites the creaking lintel like a wolf;
O call me when the fire is burning low.

And let your cherished voice cry out my name
When next year's bread falls rotten from the ear,
Or when black dogs come snuffling to the door

O let me know your anguish as my right
When on your way to Evensong you find
The tiny mouse, blood-spotted, in the road.

They are all mine, the pleasures and the pains,
These little things lost in a monster world,
The dramas that need mountains for their home.

Keep me alive, my precious, with your tears;
O keep me warm lest I should tell myself
How hard I died, so far away from home.

There's one who met death deep beneath the sea
In the forest-green twilight of a madman's dream,
Watching the shift and slide of the crusted bed
And the blood-red bubbles staining the white foam.

Under the sea, a hundred fathoms down,
The cackling shadows groped and sharp-mouthed shells
Tinkled with every motion of the tide.
The lolling weed-green sailors dreamed of hills

And gardens smelling in the rain, and flowers
That had no eyes, no gaping mouths to feed;
Of counties where known creatures graze in fields
And quiet homes await the weary dead.

I hear them clearer now, their voice is raised.
They speak in anger who should know sweet peace,
Telling of those who once disturbed their rest.
I hear them say:

Let them shout louder with their brazen tongues,
O let them yell the limit of their lungs:
We who marched at their word now move no more
Though hills should shriek in torture to high heaven.

Come cold and crack the blood within the veins,
That stones, for very agony, should creep
For shelter deeper in the ground, and hawk
About to strike fall like a meteorite.

We feel no pain now, still beneath the turf;
That season passed the day they stole our youth.
We have no tears to shed who know the worm;
We shed them all the day the world ran mad.

True we are sad, who loved the summer rain,
Who sigh that we shall not see Spring again,
And sad that love, like any wistful wraith,
Is powerless against the tomb's locked door.

But what is this, the grief of one short death,

Set up against a lifetime of despair?

What do they leave behind them, all these boys,
But a word, a picture and a capful of debts
They never could have paid in this strict world?
But more than all, a handful of aching hearts,
An offer of love they had no time to prove;
And this perhaps their final tragedy:

Don't stand at night by the gate, love,
He will not come again,
And there are eyes that laugh to see
The flowering of a pain.

Do not lay him a place, dear,
For you will eat alone;
Nor put you on that pretty dress,
The need for that is gone.

Just go into your room, lass,
And make yourself a prayer,
For that will be your strength now
This many and many a year.

The black boughs grope
With leper's weary hands;
Feel without finding,
Hope but never hold,
Reaching towards some unknown home of peace,
But never knowing when peace has been found.

So moves the heart of man
Among the trees,
Where ancient sorrows wail between the aisles—
Moves to what home,
What fond forgiving friend?
The old owl wraps himself from light, too spent
To hobble down and take the tired wren.

But five short Springs ago
The mellow pipe tricked limbs
To leap about the coloured poles

to reap about the coloured pole;
A drum set caps a-skipping, caps that hid
Heads greyed with more than one brief season's drought.

But that has gone,
And gone are all the songs.
The pipe is still and put away to rot,
Home for the memory
Or shelter for the worm.
The drum is broken and will speak no more;
The pole is but a hazard on the darkened green.

And the lads,
The darling lads who knew delight,
Are silent as the pipe,
Dry as the drum;
Nor shall they dance again,
No not again;
Not even though the pole
Should spring to life and dress in leaves again!

And I have heard them talk, sharing their swift speech,
Knowing the way their words flame in the air
Or flower gently like violet by a stone,
Watching the bright look in their eyes
And the quick motions of their youthful limbs;
A few of them gay and boastful,
Laughing devil-may-cares,
Biting in game the hand that gave them food;
The others quiet, almost timid creatures,
Solemn-eyed in the ante-room to Death,
Asking but friend's word here and there
And one who would remember when they went
Into the night . . .

And they are all gone now;
Some under ground and some below the sea,
Twined round with clover or worried by green weed;
And some neither under ground nor underneath the sea,
But wandering lost in a world
That is neither one nor the other,
Where feet move onward never nearing home

Where feet move onward never hearing home,
Where hands reach out for love
And clutch the mist.
Such lost ones have a voice
No stronger than the death-cry of the mole,
Or the sad echo of a word one sometimes sees
In the eyes of a tired old man.

Are the years lost for ever now?
Like pages torn from a book by another hand
And blown away on a feckless wind
Before we had time to read them,
Are they lost now, for always, always gone?
Or may we not wake again to a world of Spring,
Where the clean light of morning
Shines through dew's diamonds,
Where the coney busy at his trade
Hears our young footsteps thud
And is up, off again, with a scurry
Of quick feet and a flashing tail;
Where early woodsmoke rises gently,
Kind to the eye and the nostril,
Curling among the apple-blossom for a while
Till the keen breeze takes it
And whips it to the clean blue sky;
While the bird, precious breaker of hearts,
Calls careless as a spirit
Out of the pink almond tree:
Come love, come love, do not wait!

In a shaded corner
Where the wood comes down to the field,
The white may is heaped thick in the trees.
I watch the tropic ladybird make her slow way
Across the bridal blossom.
At my feet, among the luxuriant grass,
Peep the glorious blue speedwell,
Like shy watchers who may start away in fright.
It is Spring
And fields are crowded out with daisies,
With the simple yet exquisite buttercup
Flaunting its varnished petals in the sun.

But they, the bright boys, are not here now to see;
Nor will they ever see these things once more;
And my eyes fill with tears for them
As I bend to smell the perfume of the may.

So, in my neglected garden,
I sit now, and know these things once more;
But the lilac shudders in the evening breeze:
For always now, for ever gone, she says.
And I turn, chill now the sun has left the garden,
To make my way back to a friendly fire.

It has been a long and dusty road to tread,
Even for those who at the start
Saw but a short and flower-bordered path
Into the rising sun.
Now, at the end of a day, we find the road
Winds without purpose over dank fields,
Over the dreary slag-heaps of despair,
To nowhere;
While we are left standing where the world begins,
Facing a broken signpost and staring at a sun
That soon will sink below the hills,
When the dark will come upon us all again. . .

*Bindweed and nettles torture the tender rose
With a tumult of tendrils and assassin roots.
The lazy bee turns from this chaos to pursue
Prey in the fresh field of coloured clover,
Leaving the garden loveless and alone.
The red fox picks his dainty way among the stones,
But finding Death has been before, coughs and is gone;
And everything is still again, still and alone.*

Now do you not hear them calling,
Calling as thin as the wind,
As sharp as the lonely curlew
Across the moors of the mind?

To-morrow, if the night will give me strength,

I shall uproot the sly convolvulus.

Poem After War

Fearful that summer will forget the frost
And boys the body broken on a stake,
We stand. And who shall blame us if we take
The sword again to bring to life the past?
Future can only live by death of fears,
By love as effortless as lilt of birds:
To learn such love, and hear such flaming words
Our dead would wait another thousand years.

The Sons of Peace

Because we may have lain too long with death,
Or held his shrivelled hand in gibbering fear
When life became too hard for us to bear,
We are no less for that;
Our hearts beat no less bravely for the thought
That last night when the world was set aflame
We saw how fragile youth was,
Saw how weak the faithful flesh could be
Against the engines of destruction:
No, no less swiftly at the dawn of day
And sun's bright eye chasing the mists away.

To have listened to the nightingale's
Deep mellow throbbing through the wood,
Opalescent arabesques flung to the moon's dead world,
Or to have watched the frenzy of the dancing stoat,
Weaving his magic patterns round his prey,
Is to have known two shapes of beauty in the heart,
Two ways of life
As difficult to reconcile as war and peace;
But yet two ways, each valid in its place.

We who were taught the tale of Mother Goose,
And knew the midnight dagger in the straw,
Whose ears were friendly to the bat's shrill cry,
Having fast in our heart that madly glorious play
Of tigers prowling in the Prince's halls
Screaming for love;
We know the smell of sunset on dead hills,
The hells of sympathy,
The language of the maggot in the skull;
Our hands can fashion flowers at one swift minute's grace.
We can be saint or troglodyte, the sons of peace.

Duet for the Times

Where was freshness
Here is death;
Beauty fades
In crackling breath.

*Bombers came
And took your son?
Faithless, get
Another one . . .*

Where was plenty
Famine sneers;
Golden corn
Rots in the ears.

*Do not grieve
At harvests gone,
No man lives
By bread alone.*

Where was truth
Red rumour crawls;
And sweet singing
Scarlet howls.

*What is truth
But other words;
Or sweet song
But blinded birds?*

Poem

We, old as two wars, here have stood
Beneath the white and sheltering apple-tree,
Listening to the night's dark violins;
Have paused from time to time
Among the fantasy of wild orchises
To watch the painted birds daub the bright sky
With fugue of feathers in a breathless sweep.

We, old as history now, have even dared
To mimic God, fly as the angels fly,
Forgetting we were moment's minions,
That bone would break to lime
And brightness yearly fade from eager eyes.
Perhaps we forgot too soon mortality,
Man's fragile virtue and the way to weep.

Seven Stations to the Tomb

1. PRE-SPRING (BIRTH)
2. SPRING I
 SPRING II
3. SUMMER
4. INBETWEEN SEASONS I
 INBETWEEN SEASONS II
5. AUTUMN I
 AUTUMN II
6. WINTER I
 WINTER II
7. POST-WINTER (DEATH)

Pre-Spring

(BIRTH)

He has made a long journey
In the darkest years of all,
This boy with the wide blue puzzled eyes;
Travelling farther than his father knew,
Past the beginning of things and the blood-red sun,
Through forests where fantastic yellow plums
Hung ripe with promise as the harvest moon;
Where the damp frog in glorious wilderness of green
Sang anthems in the twilit lakes while lamps
Swung by on boats as black as doom,
Carrying the wounded King and his three mistresses
Back into youth and seas and sunlit pools.

All this he sees, and hears the leopard's scream
Among the coloured rocks shaped like a hand;
All this he hears, watching the green eyes move
Among the rushes, sharp as moonlit sword;
Hearing the soft footsteps before yesterday
Treading the turf,
The quiet sounds that leave imprint in Time
Never to fade;
The gentle hands that raise the monolith
Which never falls,
Although the steel bird and the wits of men
March for a century and fling their fire.

All these he sees and hears,
My David, pushing on
Through death's dark forest into birth,
Through the red flames and the silver snarl
Of trumpets calling through the olive jungle night.

Past the quick swirl of darkening pools
Into the far-forgotten land of love,
Pushing past words into the phase of songs—
Not songs we know when sweet strings hold
The glory of the stars an instant as we muse,
But songs such as the kindling tigress knows
Deep in the jungle, while the night-drawn snake
Lips his slow length along the rotting bough,
Or while the age-old creature lifts his head
From sun-drenched swamp to ease his weary pain
In voice not known to men,
Speaking a tongue of fear and endless want,
The tongue one knows whenever a son dies . . .

The feeble hands to-day are reaching out;
To-morrow they will clutch the tiger's throat,
And the next and the next
His hands will hold my heart.
And so I watch while his small feet
March on a million bloody miles,
Through youth, ambition and the hearthless home,
Through love and pain along the friendless road.
I watch him walk each thousand threadbare inch—
And know he hasn't moved.

Spring

I

Oh come, you swift and laughing girls,
With lips as ripe as a mellow pear,
And we will wander in the woods
Where spirits swirl in violet air.

And we will bind our limbs with rings,
With rings of good red gold, I swear,
And you shall have a bird as bright
As any comes from India.

Oh come, you dancers shaking bells
And lithe as the green willow wand,
We'll live in castles of delight
And ride through this despondent land

On milk-white palfreys decked in red,
With hounds whose collars are pure jade;
No eyes shall fright us with their gaze
As we sweep through the midnight wood.

But I must warn you, when the Spring
Puts on her gay green cloak again,
I must ride on to find my love,
Though your tears fall as fast as rain.

Spring

II

Who can guess the bitter weathers
Tormenting the whirling heart;
Or by brain sense how the knife hurts
That destroys the gentle thought?

Who can know the music's ending
But the hands that touch the string;
Will this love seem still unending
When the frost surprises Spring?

Summer

Death walks through the mind's dark woods,
Beautiful as aconite,
A lily-flower in his pale hand
And eyes like moonstones burning bright.

Love creeps down heart's corridors
Singing for a crust of bread
All the tales of laughing youth
Who to-morrow will lie dead.

Here two summer metaphors,
For even on a sun-mad day
Laughter breaks into salt tears
And grave is never far away.

Inbetween Seasons

I

The white flowers flame
Like a lover's dream
Against their leaves
As black as doom.

Across the moon
A sad bird flies;
'Too late, too late,'
I hear its cries.

Stones lie like skulls
Along the road;
In a prism of pain
The shadows bleed.

Inbetween Seasons

II

There is a music in the garden
As the sun falls from the sky,
That is more than leaves' crisp rustle
Or the shrill bird's twittering cry.

There's a laughter in the orchard
That knows no human throat,
In the dusk where bright eyes kindle
From the kingdom of the stoat.

There are words in the old elm-tree
That are more than rook's dark call,
Echoing up the worn stone steps
To the heart of the empty Hall.

There's a sigh along the gallery
Like an old piano's note;
And a voice in the dusty twilight sobs,
'Love has come too late, too late.'

Autumn

I

Rain beats in the dank garden,
Breaking the leaves from the trees;
Wind steals the red and the golden
And punishes the boughs.

Under the wall of the garden,
Where the dock and the nettles grow,
Two hearts began to harden
To each other years ago.

The sunlight on the meadow,
The patterned fields of the downs,
The crisp clean air of cock-crow,
And the steeples of the towns;

These were already forgotten,
Erased by the moonlit pain,
As we stood in the haunted garden
And took back our hearts again.

Man ends where he makes his start,
In the bitter storm of tears;
Now the rain beats in my heart
Disturbing the lichened years.

Autumn

II

As I lie alone in the quiet night,
Listening to my breath,
I see again our lightning youth,
The river and the snow-white swans
That seemed an absolute, a truth
Of beauty untransmutable.
And in the dark I watch the flight
Of late October geese, fretting the sky
In their great squadron-skeins,
Crying, always crying, back to the pool,
To the drying sedge and peace.

I see a sweet Spring morning,
Two lovers by the bridal may,
Following the ladybird's bright way
Over the white blossom. Your face
Is serious, watching each tiny thing,
For life is such a duty to the young:
Only a child knows the agony
That echoes in the rabbit's cry;
Boy's tears at fluttering curlew's pain
Come not again, no not again.

Now here I am alone as the owl cries,
Thankful for the world behind my eyes,
The world that dies not when love dies;
Thankful too that grinning Death
Has so far let me lie,
Listening to my breath,
And smiling in the quiet night.

Winter

I

Do you know the snow
Quietly creeping over
 highroads and hedges,
Muffling man's sounds
 and making a deaf world?
Creating Christmas-trees
 from the gaunt boughs
And turning a threadbare scene
 into a world of white?

Do you feel the flakes
Building slowly up
 against the door,
Stifling the breath
 and blotting out the sight;
These merry lambswool toys,
 gyrating to earth
From some malicious Paradise,
Killing the will
 and freezing the white hand,
And covering the barn
 where the new child is born?

Winter

II

The crisp white covering
To all earth's indiscretions
Crunches beneath our feet
As we walk towards the farm.

Here and there, half-buried bushes
Push up their blackened twigs
Like supplicating hands.
The gay robin sitting on the gate
Shivers inside his scarlet coat.

Over the thatched roofs
The pungent wood-smoke hangs
Like an ancient memory in the clear air,
And one remembers the medieval calendars,
The bright colours and the gold
Adorning the fact that country men went out
In days like these,
Not as we do, for pleasure,
But with aching hands to bring back Yuletide logs
Or dig the silly sheep from frozen drifts.

We can smile now, who know another trade,
And raise our voices to the merry dogs
Who gallop on ahead
Barking, and leaving their dark imprint
In the fresh white snow.

Post-Winter

(DEATH)

We stood in the graveyard
Where black trees bent their heads in gentle grief
And the old voices muttered
From amongst the moss-grown urns.
We stood confused and silent, humble guests
At Death's dark House, counting the few short hours
Till the last candle should light us to our beds.

We stood in the graveyard
Like sullen blocks of stone; 'Frail as a leaf,
All that in life mattered,
He is gone.' The dumb tongue yearns
To fill heart's home with star-eyed smiling ghosts.
Cold, brainless hands clutched the death-white flowers,
And the last of the wild geese flew over our bowed heads.

To Lucasta while at the Wars

How could it hurt me, love, if Death
Should take me from your very arms;
If what my heart speaks is the truth
How can I fear sword's quick alarms?

I looked upon my love in Spring
And laughed to hear the words she spoke;
I listened to her sunlit song
Then wept as though my heart would break.

I gazed upon my love when ice
Had stilled the revels in the plain,
And read my message in her face,
As charitable as a stone.

The flower I plucked when first we met
Has long since shrivelled in my hand;
The kiss that blossoms out of hate
Is past my power to understand.

So, could it harm me, dear, if Death
Should steal me from your tired charms?
If what my head speaks is my faith,
Then brotherhood is with the worms.

Poem

Who murdered the minutes,
The bright golden minutes, the minutes of youth?
I, said the Soldier, dressed in his red coat,
I with my trumpet, my sword and my flag,
I murdered the minutes;
I took the minutes and what good I did,
For see how the black men kneel, he said.

Who killed the hours,
The gay purple hours, the hours of faith?
I, said the Parson, in his black cloak,
I with my book and my bell and my pen,
I killed the hours;
I killed the hours as my holy right,
And see how the people kneel at night!

Who slew the years,
The sweet precious years, the years of truth?
I, said the Lover, in her gay gown,
I with my lips and my breasts and my eyes.
I slew the years;
Yes, I slew the years, my silly dove—
And see how you kneel to me in love!

Poem

If red is passion, with its coloured tales,
Then give me grey; grave grey that stills the heart
And calls the tongue out on its steady beat
To regulate the blood and put the words to rule.

We cannot live as men in the heart of the sun,
Flaming like angels, trumpeting like gods;
The poor flesh burns, the sad mind asks for rest
And hand falls listless as it plucks the flowers.

The call is grey, whatever others play;
It is the call of those who wish to see
The globe spin equipoised and still in space,
The known trees burgeoning in Spring.

It is the colour of those men who sit
And smile to hear the young blood groan in the root.

Poems to Ireland

FOR PATRICK MACDONOGH AND
CON LEVENTHAL

Galway

I

Out of a heart of stone
Grey Galway speaks with a brogue
Of peat-smoke and sea-weed
And the scream of wheeling gulls.

Looking towards the weir one sees
The salmon thick in the shallows,
The white swans lording the green stream
And a solitary cormorant
Diving for eels.

Out of this wilderness of whitened hovels,
Of stone and hawthorn-trees and sea,
The women come in their black shawls,
Following the hearse across the bridge
And never raising their red eyes
To wonder at the salmon's silver leap.

But we who go away when the week is out
Will know light and music and comfortable beds,
Some hard coins in the hand;
And the gaunt man, who touched his cap as I passed,
Will have only peat and stone and strangling briar;
He will never understand.

Galway

II

A grey wind scours the land
And whips the grey sea:
These stone blocks are the mind
Of a ruined peasantry.

Gaunt cattle search the lanes
And crop the famine mounds:
Out of this hell of stones
There come no friendly sounds.

The singing string is still,
The sword resolved to rust:
No memory in the hill
Disturbs its mindless rest.

There's a laughter in the South,
And Dublin's eyes are gay:
But out of Galway's mouth
Springs only the grey spray.

The green vales of the South
Wail bannered pageantry:
But out of Galway's mouth
Only the grey gulls cry.

The blue lakes of the South
Can spin the wheedling word:
But out of Galway's mouth
Falls only green weed.

Yet Belfast's like a fox,
And Killarney lives a lie;
There's a truth in Galway's rocks,
Though in seeing it man die.

Waterford

III

Leaving the palm-trees of Parknasilla
And Killarney's fuchsia-crowded lanes,
At first the eye, finding the quiet stream
And dun quayside less like a dream,
Is blind to the beauty of this town by the water
And the Spanish reserve of the wayside shrine.

It takes some time for the ear used to Dublin
To deal in the homely sounds of these streets:
But the cry of rooks in the breakfast sunshine,
Exploring the hazards of Norman Keep,
May come at last with a lump in the throat;
In memory may come to make eyes weep.

Dublin

IV

Are you a nun in a gipsy's gaudy rags,
Or a lion with the heart of a lamb?
Is your symbol the towering courthouse dome,
Or a clanging bright-green tram?

I heard the barefoot beggar's cry
From Parnell Street to Stephen's Green;
But at Jammet's we had strawberries
And chicken fit for a Spanish Queen.

I gasped at the gilt magnificence,
The magic of the Book of Kells,
Then walked a ruined Georgian street
Stinking with half a decade's smells.

What message do you hold for us,
You with your exquisite disease:
You who escaped the obvious war,
Will your dear heart's bleeding never cease?

Poem

When quiet comes over the hill again
And light bursts from the door;
Then blonde will drink with black again,
But the poor will always be poor.

When trees put on their fruit again
Sweet songs will colour the night;
But though man walks with other men
The knife will always be bright.

When love comes back to the heart again
We'll pay for bread with faith;
But the gold that can ease a Prince's pain
Will still buy the poor man's death.

Poem

Time's lumbering wheels roll on
But static moment is its own reward.
Eye catches frog in halted leap,
Poised between heaven and earth;
The pale moth kissing with his wing
The slow bronze temple bell,
Or garlanded and painted girl
Dancing through the house of death.
So we forget the stations to the tomb,
Watching the cherry-blossom poise
On the quiet blade's keen edge.

Epilogue

I have come a long way from the blood's tidal voice,
Moaning and wailing across the salt flats of the mind;
A long way from the haggard priest in a twilight land
Where orchids scream in a glassy-green night,
While weeping ghosts with their howling dogs
Call out to the child with flowers in his eyes.

I have moved far from the image of another
Who once walked with me, sharing one shadow;
And I have reached the prize of my own rough shroud,
Out of another's decay to my own rightful death,
And the ecstatic freedom of a personal end
Shared now with no-one and which none shall ever share.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Haunted Garden* by Henry Treece]