

Lament for Prytherch

When I was young, when I was young!
Were you ever young, Prytherch, a rich farmer:
Cows in the byre, sheep in the pen,
A brown egg under each hen,
The barns oozing corn like honey?
You are old now; time's geometry
Upon your face by which we tell
Your sum of years has with sharp care
Conspired and crossed your brow with grief.
Your heart that is dry as a dead leaf
Undone by frost's cruel chemistry
Clings in vain to the bare bough
Where once in April a bird sang.

Song at the Year's Turning

Shelley dreamed it. Now the dream decays.
The props crumble. The familiar ways
Are stale with tears trodden underfoot.
The heart's flower withers at the root.
Bury it, then, in history's sterile dust.
The slow years shall tame your tawny lust.
Love deceived him: what is there to say
The mind brought you by a better way
To this despair? Lost in the world's wood
You cannot stanch the bright menstrual blood.
The earth sickens; under naked boughs
The frost comes to barb your broken vows.
Is there blessing? Light's peculiar grace
In cold splendour robes this tortured place
For strange marriage. Voices in the wind
Weave a garland where a mortal sinned.
Winter rots you; who is there to blame?
The new grass shall purge you in its flame.

Becoming

Not for long.
After the dark
The dawning,
After the first light
The sun.
After the calm the wind,
Creasing the water.
After the silence
Sound,
Sound of the wild birds,
And movement,
The fox and the hare.
And all these at one.
Part of the tearless content
Of the eye's lens.

But over the sunlight
Shadow
Of the first man.

Welsh

Why must I write so?
I'm Welsh, see:
A real Cymro,
Peat in my veins.
I was born late;
She claimed me,
Brought me up nice,
No hardship;
Only the one loss,
I can't speak my own
Language – Iesu,
All those good words;
And I outside them,
Picking up alms
From blonde strangers.
I don't like their talk,
Their split vowels;
Names that are ghosts
From a green era.
I want my own
Speech, to be made
Free of its terms.
I want the right word
For the gul's trouble,
When I see this land
With its farms empty
Of folk, and the stone
Manuscripts blurring
In wind and rain.
I want the town even,
The open door
Framing a slut,
So she can speak Welsh
And bear children
To accuse the womb
That bore me.

Borders

Somewhere beyond time's
curve civilisation lifted
its glass rim. There was
a pretence of light

for nations to walk by
through the dark wood, where history
wintered. Following I came
to the foretold frontier

where with a machine's
instinct the guns' nostrils
flared at the blooms held out
to them by the flower people.

Retirement

I have crawled out at last
far as I dare on to a bough
of country that is suspended
between sky and sea.

From what was I escaping?
There is a rare peace here,
though the aeroplanes buzz me,
reminders of that abyss.

deeper than sea or sky, civilisation
could fall into. Strangers
advance, inching their way
out, so that the branch bends

further away from the scent
of the cloud blossom. Must
I console myself
with reflections? There are

times even the mirror
is misted as by one breathing
over my shoulder. Clinging
to my position, witnessing

the seasonal migrations.
I must try to content
myself with the perception
that love and truth have

no wings, but are resident
like me here, practising
their sub-song quietly in the face
of the bitterest of winters.

Andante

Masters, you who would initiate
me in discourse, apostrophising
the deity : O Thou, to Whom ...
out of date three hundred
years. The atoms translate
into their own terms, burnishing
the dust, converting it
to a presence, a movement of light
on the room's wall, a smile quickening
and going out as the clouds
canter. Inhabitants of a flower
they fix that gaze on us
which is without focus, but compels
the attention, mesmerising us until
we are adrift on its scent's timelessness.
The huskiness of an emotion !
Can molecules feel ? There is the long sigh
from the shore, the wave clearing
its throat to address us, requiring
no answer than the due
we give these things that share
the world with us, that compose
the world : an ever-renewed
symphony to be listened to
admiringly, even as we perform
it on whatever instruments
the generations put into our hands.

A Country

It is nowhere,
and I am familiar
with it as one is
with a song.
I know its background,
of cloud that are the hanging gardens
of the imagination.
No sun
rises there, so there is no sun
to set. It is the mind
suffuses it with a light
that is without
shadows.
Invisible fountains
play, though their skirts
are of silk.
And who lives there,
you ask, who walks
its unmetalled highways?
It is a people
who pay their taxes
in poetry : who repair broken
names : who wear the past
as a button-hole at their children's
marriage with what is to be.