

LIFE'S SUMMERTIME

It is not yesterday that I would have
return, to pioneer again that path
I cut. Nor care I for the aftermath
which hedges round the present life I live,
narrowing down the choices I must take
toward the future, and to my decline.
And yet without each effort now of mine
the world may be a future none can make.

I choose the sense of having loved to be
alive, and draw in fragrance from the past;
I balance amiably on present flowers
as each new moment sets another free;
and while the buzz of my intention lasts
I build my honeycomb of future powers.

RIVER

Light flows with the river:
broadly calmly the force
of all those deeps is contained
although each winter turf by turf
the banks give way and fall.

Birds fly with the river:
loudly lowly the speed
of all those wings is directed
and each Spring in reed and sand
they build anew their nests.

Trees grow with the river:
blown and bent the persistence
of all those leaves bears fruit
and branch and flower festoon their own
reflection in the pools.

Feelings flow, ideas fly and
peace grows with the river:
we nest our hearts
and trail our leaves
in that deep reflection

as the river takes it.

UNITY

It concerns the vowels and their numbering,

the sounds they make, the tuning

 of each oracle with its sister sites

 where earth-energy emanates,

and concentrated will-power

evokes a hero for the hour

whose voice rings and resonates –

its frequency captured by Earth

whose daily death and rebirth

 is patterned in stars and their ordering,

 the light-years they are spiralling

through counterfoils of time to join

in the chanting of the OM,

and human music answering.

DUNVEGAN, ISLE OF SKYE

the castle seen from across the loch at sunset

dying sunlight on Dunvegan

captured from the pale horizon

craven rocks around and moorlands

callous waters of the islands

bright the wing of boat and bird

golden seaweed, fling of cloud

between the hidden Hebrides

and the Cuillins, *Eumenides*

nothing sudden here nor violent

non-committal here and silent

deep the rift of land and heart

sealed with mist all love and hurt

accomplished now the heron's flight

posed and poised for the twilight

croaking takes up his position

we who come will ask no question

Dunvegan now with folded wing
watches its own voyaging

BARRA

The wind the tide the cockle strand
larks and plovers wheeling
a belt of flowers between the sand

the ‘twin otter’ keeling
round the headland over rocks
as if a seabird landing

a seabird messenger of gods
an angel taken for granted
while men with mail and luggage bags

unload load-up unhurried
the wind the tide the cockle strand
together and concerted

allow the little plane to land
where duck and seal play dive and seek
and swim and fly and seem to speak
of wind and tide and cockle strand

DRUID (possibly Gaelic for Skylark)

You play among flowers on the dunes
little druid;
I spy your nest tunneled in grass
with buttercups at the door;
in you go and again hurry out
to forage for your family.

I hear you before I see you
little druid
on your vertical songline;
it was a far journey to find you here
on sea-lanes patched with islands;
purple gold turquoise the mantle
you draw around you from sea and sky
to adorn your brown tunic;

you inscribe your incantation in air –
it fades at once as you fall.

KINGFISHER

Kingfisher blue
bluer than sky
skyer than air
more air than water
more water than leaf
leafer than light
lighter than stream
more stream than ray
more ray than russet
more russet than daybreak

blue sky air
water leaf light
stream ray russet
daybreak blue

I saw you not once
not twice but three times

What is your message
bluebird, tell me?

I wait I tremble
it will come it will come
out of the blue

ICY SWIMMERS

A heron has stalked here over the snow
unerringly to the river and lonely
as ever positions himself by a stump
humped as he waits.

I follow his tracks
and watch as he stretches his neck
higher, holds it, until my presence
is a tree or bush, while water
laps the melting bank with fish:
icy swimmers.

Working indoors
I know the heron wades there, alone

day and night, crumpled by wind
or stiffened by frost, stands
awaiting his chance. His life
depends on it – even as mine
has come to depend on the chance
of steadfastness such as his.

QUIET NATURE

Fish do not scream although they struggle
we take the tension on the line
and slender rod bent almost double

While casting long the peaceful hours
we tie a gaudy wanton fly
and sink it deep beneath the waters

Or modest ‘brown’ on windy pools
to dance the surface playfully
in little spurts and sudden whorls

The peaceful hours fish do not scream
we take the tension on the line
enjoy a glinting and a gleam

Reward for patience practice, skill
with slender rod bent almost double
the quiet nature of the kill

TRANSPLANTED

‘April 16th’ from the poem-book *Shadows from the Greater Hill*

Trees do not grow for three or four years
after being transplanted;
they settle their roots.

These trees in the park
are large to have been uprooted.
The younger the tree
the quicker it settles and grows;
so I am told.

My experience is different:
roots were dragging me under.
I could not grow for the heavy clinging.

Transplanted now
I am lifted, winging
weightless almost.

My growing is to shed
all that holds me down.

I grow stems of thought
to flower as poems.

WINDY DAWN OVER ARTHUR'S SEAT, AUGUST
'August 3rd' from the poem-book *Shadows from the Greater Hill*

The hill is tossing high frail wisps of
rosy cloud to glide in steady gale
along a turquoise sky around above the
perpendicular and slightly askew columns
above the triangular gap
between crown and crag.

The moon full at midnight
is now high and faded
almost a lazy eyelid
day's eye opening
or night's eye closing.

Birds chase and ride the wind
reeling wheeling
aware that in a moment
ordinary flight of day will have to be resumed.

The hawk alone is steady
keeps position despite the gale
to pinpoint a victim

and far below
grasses tinge in flower:
harebell, yarrow, lady's yellow bedstraw
among the rangy thistles and fatted doves.

HOLYROOD PARK, OCTOBER, SEEN FROM ABROAD
'October 14th' from the poem-book *Shadows from the Greater Hill*

To define a particular mountain from this distance[?]
across the Atlantic
is not difficult, since

no close-up obstacles can intervene.

Details must be omitted:
whether it rests in accustomed cloud
unperturbed, or rises
in clear, elegant outline of sun and shade.
The time of day, too, is slightly uncertain.

I know the time of year and how trees
are experiencing those first loving
touches of newly-awakened frost
which quietens autumnal trembling.
Beside the loch they are yellow
except for the willow,
but young trees in their roundels
are wispy and frail.
It takes a mass of withered leaves
for abundant colour.

The mower perhaps is working one last time
to leave the grass evenly smoothed
before the churning of winter.
Swifts have gone, but geese
flock and fly and land and walk and swim.
They own the place in their noisy way.
Birds are scarcely singing now
but berries are brilliant;
even beside the bus-stop on the roadside
haws are darkly bloody.
Rowans are dotted with crimson
as if welcoming winter:
its clear, piercing, crying, enduring love.

TIME AND THE HOUR

We took our rest beneath the Milky Way
clear far yet near and cool,
told tales of earthy Irish things
and old-folk we had known.

In mossy woods the tracks were lined
with butter-coloured chanterelles
fluted like Mahler's singing earth
and ready for our gathering.

We climbed to where the mountain waters flowed

spreading a thin veil on sculpted rock
yet islanded midstream a tiny fir stood firm②
with tormentil and melancholy thistle.

Swallows settled on the pylon wires②
or swooped, escaped above us.
A robin sat to pass the damp of evening②
as fallen branches were cut up for fuel.

Then we lit the fire and talked a while②
and fended off our sad presentiments.
We wanted to be warm and quiet and glad②
to stay amid the waterfalling round us.

SEARCH

Dawn wings over with seagulls②
seagulls scatter light
light is caught in the eye
the eye opens the mind

the mind tags a word②
words that say 'it is day'②
day and light returning②
returning yet quite new

quite new, yet also another②
another chance to take②
take by making a gift
gift of what I am

I am my own creator②
creator of what I do②
what I do without fail②
not fail to reach the mark

mark my words as seagulls②
gulls prise open shells
shells secrete the pearl②
pearl of wisdom dawning.

REGENERATION

Regeneration is what counts.
Like a flower newly crushed

I'll lay aside superfluous wants
and turn the way of all plants
that look for light, however pushed
away, thrown out, displaced, torn,
I shall be centred on the sun.

Perfume is not diminished when
petals are crushed or desiccated.
Colours are as clear and clean
although leaf and stem are broken
and the plant is mutilated.
Earth accepts such limitations,
protects, restores, her creations.

Insects creep from captivity
to use the plant for their needs.
It is broken, lacks beauty,
why weep with slow pity
over withered, tangled weeds?
The huge scuttling cockroach
squats with his entourage.

The butterfly is absent now
and bees have accomplished
their work before dark. Below
ground begins renewal
of the livelihood that perished.
It is not visible. I die.
Another life begins, not I.

ELEGY

I saw a roe-deer stepping over grass.
She bent to crop or stood to poise and raise
her head, her seeming gaze
towards me where I watched within the room;
about me, chrysostom,
a visitation from the world of gold
beyond our low threshold.

What fences has she leapt to reach the lawn,
what wire, what barriers has she overcome
to dance into this freedom?
Does she bring me an essential message
of my dead mother's passage
free into joy, delight, *our lady greensleeves*,
while her old daughter grieves?

The deer has disappeared and night has fallen.
Up on the moor each tiny plant is hidden:
woundwort and valerian.
Good mother, all you gave has now been taken –
for our sake life forsaken.
Up in the woodland trees are harbouring
small creatures on the wing.

SECOND SIGHT

Dragonfly
Heaven's spy
beckoner
eye-catcher
follower?
agitator
devil's needle?
angel's spindle
slender legged
upper lipped
double wings?
up in a whirr
shimmerings
now where

threadbare?
pine and fir
the waterfall
dare or die
tells it all?
dragonfly

UNITY / Search

The story of Snow White and Rose Red:
the children listened, chose colours, painted
the happiness and sadness of the girls.

Really or imaginatively? Feelings
become colour mixed with water on paper:
from story through heart into art.

But who wrote the archetypal story?
Anonymous: the child in all of us who mourns

the losses that accompany our growing.

Who killed cock robin? The child weeps
with all the birds of the air
and death is born, a living pain in her.

On the way to school one day she finds
a dead bird, perfect, fallen from its nest. She stoops,
examines it without the least distress.

This fact of death is not the pain of death
which lurks in her and practises its part whenever
her own mortality is touched by art.