

MUSING
and
AMUSING

Selected Poems by Marjorie H Ferard

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FOREWORD

My mother has been writing poetry since she was a girl, and much has appeared in newspapers and magazines, but this is her first published verse collection of any kind. With several hundred poems to her credit I know she found it difficult to prune down to a mere fifty or so, but her final selection exemplifies the vigour and spontaneity with which she tackles any subject. She writes quickly and never repolishes. She has always been acutely perceptive of her surroundings, be they people or scenery, in Ireland, India or wherever her long life has taken her. And wherever she has gone, she has carried with her that mischievous and enduring humour which enlivens the poems I enjoy most. Who would think that “Mother’s Keys” and “Ants in her Pants” were written nearly sixty years apart?

My son Dominic has typed the proofs, and I have arranged the printing, but all the other preparatory work has been done by my mother. She tells me that she hopes her verses will give her friends some pleasure, and I am sure that they will!

George Ferard

January 1982

AN APOLOGY

In all humility I crave
Your patience, reader mine,
And beg for your indulgence,
In word, and verse, and line.
And should you find them tedious,
I ask you – spare your scorn,
For oft, through weary failure
At last success is born!

But should they chance to please you
Then your pleasure's my reward!
And I'll go my way rejoicing
That at least you've not been bored!
And if you deem them worthy
Of a little word of praise,
In gratitude I'll write some more,
Kind critic, for your gaze.

THE SOLUTION!

They say that everything that walks,
Or creeps or swims, or flies or stalks,
Is preying on some lesser life,
Thus Nature balances – through strife.

This will explain, in some degree,
A very ancient Mystery.

It's this: how Noah's little barque
(Known to Mankind as "Noah's Ark")
Contained all beasts, both large and small
Which erstwhile on this Earth did crawl?

I think that's solved without much bother,
You see – they simply ate each other!
The mammoth, and the rhino too,
The elephant and kangaroo,
The tall giraffe, and bison rare,
- Lion and tiger, wolf and bear,
The hippo - with expansive hide,
These few, had all the rest - *inside!*

So though the crush was pretty bad,
(No ventilators Noah had!)
They all squashed in - of that - no question,
The hippo had *such* indigestion!

Because he stretched his hide that way
He's wearing wrinkles to this day!

In future then, when sceptics ask,
How Noah faced this monstrous task,
Just tell them how it came about,
And satisfy their sinful doubt!

1918

*(Reply to a question in "Tit Bits", May 11, 1918. A.C.B. of Blackpool asked:
"How did Noah find room for all the animals in the Ark?")*

THE SOUL OF THE WORLD

Why do we seek to unravel the mystery
Shrouding the problem of Life after Death?
All is conjecture - the Book of Life's History
Closes in silence, with each dying breath.

What has Humanity done to have merited
"Souls" which the rest of Creation daren't claim?
Each generation in turn has inherited
- Why should the animals not do the same?

The man and the beast have a common Creator,
Both live a short span, and then die to this world.
Why should *one*, recreated, live, - purer and greater,
The other to darkness eternal be hurled?

The human, the animal, reptile and flower,
The bird, and all things that have life on the Earth,
Have a "Soul" in proportion, - the gift of that Power,
Which orders their goings, and knoweth their worth.

1918

THE FIRST ONE

'Tis a wandering echo from bygones,
But your vision I conjure at will
-You were first among dozens of others,
Yet I cherish *your* memory still!

How subtle the spell you wove round me!
How fragrant and scented the air!
Oriental, your charm and attraction
- You banished both sorrow and care.

Though my eyes they were brimming with tear drops,
And my anguish I'll never forget,
I've regretted the day that I threw *you* away,
My unparalleled First Cigarette!

October 29, 1918

MOTHER'S KEYS

“I’ve hunted, and I’ve hunted - but I *cannot* find those keys!
If you are not extra busy Marjy - come and help me please!
Just run and search the workroom dear – and lower box-rooms too,
-You ask me when I had them last? – I wish to God I knew!
- Did I hang them on the Tree Fern? Have I dropped them out o’doors,
Are they lying ’neath a table, or inside some chest of drawers?
- Could I *possibly* have packed them in that parcel bound for France,
Please undo it dear, and make quite sure - it’s just the merest chance!
P’raps I left them in the Dairy, - or the kitchen yard maybe,
In the Poultry Room, or cellar, - when you’re down there, look and see,
Search beneath the Lib’ry cushions - I’ve already hunted twice,
But I may have overlooked them - and I *must* give out some rice!”

From my hopeless quest returning, faint, I hear a distant call,
- “I’ve remembered where I hid them – In the curtain in the Hall!”

When our earthly course is run
And household worries all are done
I’ll tell Saint Peter to beware,
Nor trust *his* keys to Mother’s care!

November 27, 1918

THE SEA

The golden sun is shining
On a thousand sparkling waves,
They lap against the ancient cliffs,
They murmur in the caves,
Singing low in perfect harmony, but ever changing key,
To the music of their jingle as they dance upon the shingle
-There's a spell upon the Sea.

But when the lightning's flashing
And sullen thunder peals,
When angry seas are roaring
And stunned Creation reels,
When foam crests surge in grandeur, tumultuous and free,
'Tis the Dirge of Death they're singing, when their icy spray
they're flinging,
-There's a curse upon the Sea

December 28, 1918

TO YOU

The willows sweep the water,
As the brooklet murmurs by,
Through the green and golden pastures,
Where the drowsy cattle lie,
The poppy by the wayside
Her scarlet robe must shed,
The sun which lights the mountain
Shall gild the vale instead,
The rainbow after showers,
The sunshine, dawn and dew:
All Nature ever changing,
Save this - my love for you!

July 23, 1920

THE NORTH WIND

I sweep o'er the frozen marshes
Of many an icebound land,
And I see great Nature writhing
'Neath the grip of my iron hand.
I harry the blinding snowstorm
Till it herds like a flock of sheep
And the whirling blast, as it whistles past,
Piles the deadly snowdrift deep.

I howl o'er the Arctic Ocean,
Till the ice fields closer pack,
Where the towering bergs are drifting,
To harass the steamer's track.
I rush on my way unhindered,
By twilight, or Arctic night,
For Aurora's beam sheds a fitful gleam,
O'er the driving snowflakes white.

Later I travel southward,
Spreading my icy ban,
And I watch the marrow freezing,
In the bones of helpless man.
I see him cower closer,
And pile the grudging fire,

- Then my mocking scorn down the gale is borne,
Till the tumult echoes higher.

For I am the King of Winter,
The breath of the icy North,
And my royal tax I levy,
- The lash of my scourging wrath.
Death is my humble courtier,
Swift to obey my call,
For I reign supreme, where the ice floes gleam,
In regal command of All.

September 21, 1920

LARRY O'HARE

'Tis only a crazy cabin, in the heart of an Oirish bog,
Where oi live alone, without kith or kin, with "Paddy", me faithful dog.
The walls shure are built of turf sods, and the roof is of heather thatch,
And the winders small give no light at all, and me door is without a latch.

Five miles to the nearest dwelling, -o'er punkorn, and bank, and skragh,
That little white dot fornint ye, - it's there that me neighbours are,
There's a narrow track through the heather, (be moinding the hare-holes deep!)
But oi know each bank, where it's cut away, -oi could walk it safe asleep!

Ye ask how oi earn me living ?-Faith the wants that oi have are few,
With me pig and goat, and a patch of spuds, - Sure Larry O'Hare can do!
In summer its foine and pleasant, but the winters are horrid cold,
And the banshees wail, till the stars grow pale, and the bog looks all black and
ould.

Ye tell of a moighty city, with buses, and trams, and train,
And crowds of folk in the great long sthreets, -oi never could sthand the sthrain!
Me Father lived here before me, 'tis here that oi had me birth,
And 'tis here oi'll die, if oi have me way, -on me own litle patch o'earth.

September 25, 1920

SAINT SWITHIN

They may call ye a Saint, 'tis no mather to me,
For oi'll make me complaint here, - whoever ye be,
'Tis him, is these forty days sending the rain,
He's blighting the praties, and lodging the grain,
The cattle have murrain, the sheep have bad feet,
And the wather runs into me house from the sthreet.

The turf clamps is soakin', me boots is disthroyed,
- Oi'm thinking a Saint might be better employed!
The turkeys oi had, they all doied o'the cramp,
-Shure 'tis only the ducks that's enjoying the damp,
Bad cess to ye, Swithin - such "saint" as ye be!
There's a many more humble, that's better than ye!

October 14, 1920

THE RUINED TEMPLE

The marble paving of the courts lies buried deep in sand,
The shattered domes and minarets are strewn on every hand,
The sacred urn which guards the gate, three thousand years has passed,
Watching the driving sandstorm whirl before the desert blast.

The long forgotten worship of a long forgotten race,
Deep carvings on the colonnades, symbolic witness trace,
A mighty brazier, marble wrought, the sacrifices held
Awhile within the sanctuary, the hymn of triumph swelled.

Gone are the ashes from the pyres – flung to the winds of Time
Gone is the worshipper and priest, and oracle divine.
A haunting, sad memorial, guarding its sacred trust,
Lonely the ruined Temple stands -when men have passed to dust.

March 16,1922

THE PIONEERS

The lonely West was calling – was calling through the night,
“O come to me! Ye sons of men, and wrestle with my might,”
And forth they went from village, from city, town and slum,
And some were branded “rolling stones” and “ne’er do wells” were
some.

On many a brow was Failure, writ large for all to see,
Their passport to the mighty West, and England cast them free.
Free! from the thrall of serfdom, convention, daily strife,
Back to primaeval silences where wrestle Death and Life.

They shot the foaming rapids, they traced them to their source,
They scaled the lofty mountains, and broke the prairie horse.
And some went North, on snowshoes, with dog and sled and gun,
To trap the mink and ermine, and greet the Arctic sun.

But those who strove to Westward, and blazed the endless trail
- They reckoned with eternal bush where stoutest hearts may fail.
And many lost their bearings, and circled in their track
And wandered on till madness grew, and never more came back.

Some wrung the wealth from snow peaks, or panned the streams for
gold,
While others settled down, and built, where far the prairie rolled.
They paved the way before us, those “Failures” from our shore,
Each forged a link, unbreakable, to bind the Empire more,

They paid the price of hardihood, in toil, and death and pain,
But conquered in the struggle – and handed on the gain,
Remember then their sacrifice, of home, and life, and years
- All ye who follow in their wake – the daring Pioneers!

October 15, 1922

LONELY

I long for sunshine and for flowers,
For soft warm winds and skies of blue
For happy laughter, and for love
- And friendship true.

Here, in this land of weeping skies,
The sunshine rarely filters through
The wind is harsh, and piercing cold,
- And hearts are too.

Eire, February 1924

THE CASE OF SLY PAT

Did you ever hear the story of how Paddy won his case,
In spite of all the evidence that stared him in the face?
T'was all about them goats o'his, that browsed on Bartle's fence,
And after they had come to blows, at last they came to sense.

Each hunted up a Counsel, and to make the story short,
The case was down for hearing at the Petty Sessions Court.
- Now Pat grew fair uneasy, as the fatal day drew near,
And primed with desperation, and with potheen too I hear!

He horrified his lawyer, - an honest man, but slow,
Who suffers from a stutter since he dealt with Pat, I know.
Says Paddy, "Listen, Counsel dear, oi have a splendid plan.
Oi'm sure his Lordship's fond of fowl as any gentleman,
Oi'll send him down two ducks of mine, that have a splendid flavour,
And then no doubt his Honour will give judgement in my favour!"

"Now none of that, you blackguard, you cheating rascal, you,"
Burst forth the shocked attorney, his forehead wet with dew,
"I will not lift a finger, to help you win the day,
On such a shameful basis, whatever you may say.
And here's advice for you my friend - remember what I've said,
That if you stoop to bribery, - t'will go against you dead."

The Court was packed with partisans, from ceiling to the floor,
And those who couldn't find a seat, were crowding at the door,

And some were wishing Bartle luck, - and some were all for Pat,
Who wore his new black Sunday suit, and chapel-going hat.

And when the verdict was announced, both damages and cost,
T'was Pat was left victorious, and Bart the one who lost.
But blank astonishment was stamped upon the lawyer's face,
For damning evidence opposed his client in the case!
When up dashed Pat, his face aglow, "It was the ducks," he cried,
"Oi told ye they would do it, and ye see oi haven't lied!"

The dazed adviser turned in wrath – "You sent those ducks! For shame!"
Then slyly winking, Patrick said, "They went in Bartle's name!"

March 28, 1924

SUPERIOR *

They say there's a lake on America's shore
Ye could drop Oireland in – and ye'd see her no more.
-T'would settle the most o'her troubles no doubt,
For wance being in, she could niver get out.

-But think o'the terrible storms on the lake,
All the waves racin' by, wid the foam in their wake.
For niver again could the calm waters flow,
If Oireland was lyin' beneath them, ye know!

Maybe an island would suddenly rise,
And a great big volcano shoot up to the skies,
Then the boys they would shout, - an' the ladies would scream
At the sight of ould Oireland lettin' off steam!

Eire, 1924

** Lake Superior is 32,000 sq. miles in area - the size of Ireland.*

THE NECKLACE

I have a necklace, on whose thread, are many jewels hung,
While some lack lustre, others gleam – those precious stones among.
They number twenty-eight in all – for every year a gem,
And those which sparkle brightest, brought me happiness with them.

But many, dulled with grief and sighs, have lost their sheen in tears,
So, dark or clear, relentless grows this necklace of the years.
- How many more remain to add – of Fate I dare not ask,
To test the fragile string of Life – till Death shall fix the clasp.

August 1, 1924

FAREWELL CANADA!

The breeze tapped gently at my sill tonight,
And murmured low of long-forgotten things,
Of mist-wreaths crowning far Tzouhalem's height,
And songs the bullfrog sings.

Of maples turning scarlet, gold and brown,
Where drooping cedars fringe a lonely creek,
Beside some bush-trail seldom trodden down,
Till bears for berries seek.

Wild arum blooms adorn the silent swamp,
Their pungent odour drifting on the breeze,
Where flows Koksilah's mountain water clear
To blue Pacific seas.

The sea-wrack drifts in dark and shining bars
Towards the clam-strewn, beaver-branded shore,
The Siwash plies his fragile bark canoe
For cohoes, as of yore.

O memory! which gilds the placid lake,
With moonbeams crystal-clear and bright as day,
Mock me not thus! – Go hence, for pity's sake,
And take thy powers away.

And thou! – who broughtest memory on thy wing,
Thou subtle agent, scented evening wind,
Go! – Get thee also hence, lest I regret,
And lose my peace of mind.

England, May 1926

MY LADY PASSES BY

A rustle on the landing, a sound upon the stair,
A scent of distant lavender, and finely powdered hair,
The tapping of a high heeled shoe, a faintly uttered sigh,
The gleaming of a buckle old,

- My Lady passes by.

And through the diamond casement the moon is streaming white,
And all the lonely, dusty room is flooded with the light,
The creaking door swings open – a dainty head held high,
A mittened hand upon the latch

- My Lady passes by.

Her dress is pale and misty, she glides from room to room,
For ever seeking something, forever in the gloom,
And when the wind is moaning, to drown the owlets cry,
Forsaken in the shadows,

- My Lady passes by.

September 16, 1927

AT LAST!

An Irish widow woman had her husband's body burned,
And mentioned, most particular, that the ashes be returned
She put them in a minute glass,-the sort you use to tell
If a chicken's egg that's boiling, is already in its shell,
She said, "He never did a stroke of work, alive, with hand, or head,
But I'll get some value from him, now the wretched fellow's dead!"

Eire, 1927

THE SONG OF THE KNIFE

The Patient

Ah God! That it may pass me by,
This agony of pain,
The anaesthetic's worn away,
With consciousness again -
Gone is the blessed numbing sleep,
Which folded me in peace,
And gathered me to shadowland,
Where weariness shall cease.
- If that were typical of Death,
How sweet a thing to die,
Rather than on this narrow bed
With tortured body lie.
The Knife! The Knife its toll must take,
As Diagnosis saith,
This ghastly game the surgeons play,
This Tip and Run with Death.

The Surgeon

'Twas interesting, absorbing – quite,
Exploratory of course,
We half expected trouble there,
So took it at its source.
- Abdominal, and just in time,

'Twas really touch and go,
I might have cut a little more,
- Another stitch or so.
The Knife! The Knife! – I like the feel
When once I have begun,
'Tis strange to see the shining steel,
All reddened when I've done.
The silkworm thread, the lint and all,
The curving needle's gleam,
'Tis fascinating work you know
To hem a human seam!

October 1, 1927

NANGA PARBAT *

- I see them ascending, and wearily wending
Their caravan way, with their coolies below,
To the camps on my slopes, and they speak of their hopes,
Of a glorious triumph, which no man shall know.

- Inviolable I, and my crest in the sky,
Shall never be trodden by footstep profane,
They scoff at my warnings, but ere many dawns
I hurl them below to the valleys again.

My pinnacled masses, moraines and crevasses,
My ramparts of ice, and my turrets of snow,
The avalanche sweeping, the loose boulder leaping
My thousand foot drop to the ledges below.

- The rope that was riven, the hold that has given,
The ice axe that snapped on my glacial side,
Through frost bite and gale-snow blindness and hail,
With thunder and lightning all blasting their pride.

My vultures are sated, they patiently waited
For the corpses whose bones to my gullies are hurled,
- I tear them, I rend them, and shattered I send them,
To babble their woes to a horrified world.

Kala Bagh, Kashmir, India, August 2, 1930

** Mountain in Himalayas, 26,669 ft*

THE NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE

The patient oxen toiling up the track
Yoked to the laden cart beneath the goad,
With bells, and china beads around their necks,
And heavy rocks as load.

- Above, the rugged heights that tower up,
Where gentians sweep with blue the hillside bare
And far below, amid the terraced slopes
The Muezzin calls to prayer.

The grass is brown and dead, and thunder broods,
The air is parching hot, oppressive, still,
The water holes are dry, the flies abound,
- The rice has yet to fill.

Across the stony jheel the donkeys stray,
Gleaning a withered mouthful where they can,
And far beyond, clasping the valley's feet,
The foam capped Indus snows look down on Man.

Beside the native huts of hard baked mud,
Is stacked the cow-dung fuel in the sun,
Upon the low flat roof the pumpkins lie,
Till green and gold are one.

The pi-dogs snarl, and slink with down-curved tail
Before the stones the dusky children throw,

Their heads are shorn of ears, to make them fight
- And scavenging they go.

And where the weary tonga pony halts,
His sunken sides a'lather 'neath the blows,
The shrill Bazaar with sudden clamour calls,
With vendors stalls in rows.

Here, yellow, green and pink the bottles stand,
'Mid Swati blankets, sugar cane and rice,
Bokhara silk and popcorn, fruit and cloth,
Chapatties, flour and spice.

Veiled women, swathed in white from head to foot,
The close meshed lattice hot upon their face
The clinging cap, - the green slashed shoes beneath,
- Their stately swinging grace.

At eventide, the rose light on the hills,
Warming them to a flushing sunset glow,
The wailing jackal, howling to the stars,
The paling moon above the distant snow.

Kakul, Hazara, NW Frontier Province, India, November 1930

THE AYAH

My dealings are mostly with Memsahib,
The Baba log too are my care,
My skirts they are ample and trailing,
A sari, and coat do I wear.

A coat that is fashioned of scarlet,
'Tis tight on my fat body now,
My movements are lazy and languid
Though Memsahib may say "jaldi jao."

Oh! I am the spy of the household,
And nothing shall slip by my ken,
What wages each "naukar" is earning,
And why they get notice, and when.

- The safety pins, buttons and needles,
Which Memsahib may leave to my hand,
- All manner of loot - shoes and stockings,
They drift to my go-down as planned,

The Memsahib is careless, untidy,
And nothing is locked- it is grand!

January 1931

UNTOUCHABILITY

Outcaste! Unclean! - they draw their robes aside,
Lest heedlessly they touch me, and defiled
Must cleansing rites fulfil.
And thus despised, my weary way I work,
Shunned as untouchable, without the pale,
And all my sires before this burden bore,
And children's children yet to come shall bear,
- And yet why thus? - injustice cries aloud
To Godhead, here and now, to hear my prayer!
For we, the menial workers, sordid tasks
Through Time and all Eternity perform,
Having no respite, honour or relief,
Till Death doth set us free, and even then,
Knowing the taint, the curse we leave behind,
Devolving on our flesh and blood instead,
Border on madness – Thou who dost command,
Grant us our well earned rest!

January 3, 1932

THE CHOWKIDAR

So long as the sahib shall pay me,
- So long shall his house be free
Of the shadow that creeps in darkness
And enters without a key.

So long as the sahib shall pay me,
Or another such of my clan,
His silver and goods are sacred
From the thieving hands of Man.

Alone on the dim verandah,
My 'batti' beside my feet,
Wrapped in my Swati blanket.
The dawn and the dark I greet.

Alone with the howling jackals,
The cold, and the driving rain,
Crouching low in the darkness
I wait for the dawn again.

And now and then a cough I give
Or some little sound I make,
That the Sahib log who listen,
May know that I watch and wake.

So long as the Sahib shall pay me,
Just so long shall the Sahib be safe.

January 1932

THE LAZY RABBIT

There was a little rabbit,
And it was his lazy habit,
Never to get up in the morning!
And his Mummy sadly said,
“If you want to lie in bed
After eight - I shall smack you without warning!”

Do you think he cared a scrap,
For his Mummy? - Not a rap!
And went on calmly lying in his bye-se,
Till through the window frame
An awful wopsy came,
And Bunny rubbed his sleepy, tired eye-se.

Then he gave a fearful scream,
For he thought it was a dream,
Till he saw it buzzing buzzing round his pillow.
He dashed beneath the clothes,
But it stung him on the nose!
- A dreadful wops, all shiny black and yellow.

Now his Mummy doesn't scold,
For he's good - as good as gold!
He lies there, waiting for his clock to chime
He jumps up quick at eight!
He's never, never late,
For now he knows that wopsys tell the time!

Murree, India, 1935

Written when changing for dinner to amuse my small son in his cot.

SWAN SONG

In silence let me go, for speech must break
The spell which binds me, and forever take
The clear reflection out from memory's glass,
So all I ask is silence - let me pass.

- I see the gleaming Safed Koh
Across the Afghan plains,
And watch how swiftly Indus runs,
Seething with summer rains.
There Malakand, and Khyber sweep,
From height to height, and never sleep,
Where fort and sungar, bar the gate,
And History was made.

Up to the passes and the snows,
The glaciers and the old moraines,
Kashmir, with mountain valleys fair
Where Nanga Parbat reigns.

Across the lonely Deosai,
Its plateau lands and fever marsh,
Where the pack pony falls to die,
The marmot's scream is harsh.

Beyond the peaks of Baltistan,
Far in the depths of wild Chitral,
The onyx and cornelian lie,
The wolf and leopard call.
And now I see the bales of silk

From China, and from lone Tibet,
In lustrous masses at Mardan,
They have not passed the customs yet.

Ah! lonely camps 'neath darkened firs,
With crescent moons in starry skies,
Watching the dazzle of the snows,
But stay - the tears are in my eyes
- I hear the jackals through the dark,
But "Madam, will you please embark."

1936

THE END

If you have seen the shadows on the mountains
The dazzle of the snow fields 'gainst the sun,
And toiled along o'er rough moraine and glacier
To gain a summit, ere the day was done;

If you have loved the wealth of Alpine flowers
Blazing in coloured glory down the slopes,
And watched the angry monsoon cloud amassing
And blotting out the peak, and all your hopes;

If you have felt the early dews of morning
Go sweeping off the grasses at your stride
And dropped down to your camp fire in the evening,
To where the tents are standing side by side;

If all your soul is just one treasured storehouse
With memories of mountain, forest, snow,
And if you think you'll never live without them
- You're not the first to feel like that, you know.

Go Home! and then for God's sake stop your grousing
You've had your day, its sunshine and its dark,
And twice the luck that comes the way of most men,
Go get your dog! and walk him round the Park.

Gulmarg, Kashmir, September 1936

BLITZ

Ponder a moment on your way,
For Death with sable wing,
Has brushed adown this busy street,
Where ruin, fire and crater meet,
And where no voices sing.
Hushed is the laughter on the stair,
The shrill of children's play.
The jagged houses lift their hands
To teach us how to pray.
And thunderous tons of rubble lie,
- God! Was it thus they had to die?

Many, deep sorrowing, alone,
Of mother, child, or husband reft,
Cry to Almighty God above:
- Why was one taken, and the other left?

January 9,1943

THE TIDE

The tide is ebbing, with the shades of day,
Across the long, wet sands, the shadows stray,
Now gentle hands of twilight lull to peace,
From near and far the bird calls fade and cease.
Out to its utter bourne now streams the sea
E'en as the waves of Life are bearing thee.
It shall return, and wrap the waiting shore,
But thou - no more.

July 21, 1943

REGRET FOR YOUTH

The years have wrapped themselves in dead, brown leaves,
And drifted down the streams of Time.

With outstretched hands I stood upon the brink,
Eager to catch them, as they swirled away,

But Elfin-like they fluttered by
— Faster, and ever faster.

And now it is too late — the boughs above are bare,
Grim Winter waits — and see, how grey my hair.

September 28, 1944

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-SEVEN

1947 B.C.

Long years ago the Druids came to worship in this place,
Up through the heather and the fern they climbed the mountain face,
Here, in this hollow of the hills, their sacred circle grew,
Of gaunt grey rocks, each poised on end, which still are standing true.
Here, white robed priests have ushered in the rosy dawning day,
While on the sacrificial stone the waiting victim lay.
Gone are the ashes of their fires—the echo of their song,
A thousand years have drifted by, with violence and wrong.
Deep in the earth the High Priest lies, his stones are pointing to the skies
— The time has seemed so long.....

1947 A.D.

Oh Bertie! What a funny ring of stones,
Whatever can they be? Look, 'ere's a flat one, tumbled down,
Do take a snap of me! Oh Bert! You really are a scream
The camera's upside down!! – Wait till I light my cigarette
And scratch my name—I'm not quite ready yet.
Good job I put on my new summer hat!

The High Priest turned, and sighed,
And then he spat.

1947

RADIANT MOTHERHOOD

You think you are exceptional, a marvel, and the rest?
— You're nothing but a cupboard, where a mouse has made her nest,
No different from an apple, with a pip inside the core,
— A seed box in the garden, and really nothing more.
Like countless million animals, who on this earth do roam,
— You're nothing but the wrapping that has brought the parcel home

May 5, 1952

FATHER ON THE SOFA

Father, in the parlour lazing,
Smoking, set the sofa blazing.
Nothing of him, but his feet,
And he simply *wrecked* the suite.

November 24, 1952

SISTER AND BROTHER

Sister

“She was only a Doll!” — and I laughed as I spoke,
For my sister wept, on the day she broke.
— A beautiful doll, with a golden curl,
And cheeks so pink, and with teeth of pearl.
She could say two words, and her eyes were blue,
And her hat and her dress were smart and new.
— With comforting words came the counsel of mother,
“Run away quickly! — and play with another!”

Brother

She was only a Doll! — with a golden curl,
And cheeks so pink, and with teeth of pearl.
She spoke two words, and she said “We’re through”,
And her heart was cold, and her eyes were blue.
And oh! how my stricken heart did ache,
For my shattered doll,—and for Love’s sweet sake,
—Till faint down the years, came the counsel of mother,
“Run away quickly!—and play with another!”

July 30, 1956

TOO LATE

“Trouble me not,” she said,
And turned away her head,
How true it is that words can kill,
—For I am dead.

Now, here, beside my grave she sits,
Weeping for me, and the lost joys
Of unborn bliss, adown the shadowy years,
—Too late for me, this bitterness of tears,

“Trouble me not,” I said,
And turned away my head.

July 28, 1957

THE ANTI-LITTER LEAGUE

Don't leave your orange peel around,
Or paper bags upon the ground
—Remember all they try to do,
The Anti-Litter League.

We used to be intrigued by twins,
But now its triplets, quads, and quins.
—They seem to play a losing game,
The “Anti-Litter” League!

September, 1957

DAY AND NIGHT

The Day is my Father,
He greets me with sternness.
“Bend thou thy shoulders,
And stoop to thy toil.
Waste not the moments
But strive for thy living,
Battle and struggle,
Thou son of the soil.”

The Night is my Mother,
Her soft arms enfold me,
Here, in the darkness,
Forgetfulness mild.
Solace and healing
Around me are stealing,
I hear her lips whispering
“Rest thee, my child.”

November 13, 1957

REQUIEM

I died today — for years, I've wondered so,
What that dread hour was like,
And how my life would ebb?
Slow, creeping, stagnant as a marshland pool,
Draining away amongst the sodden turves?
Or sweeping out, in wide majestic wave
To mingle with the stars, the Earth, and utter bourne.

And now I know, it was but one sad sigh,
One flutter of a tired heart, a barely heard goodbye,
A shedding of my chrysalis, and now I watch them mourn,
Some all sincere, some dutiful, and some with touch of scorn.
“We'll miss the poor old soul a bit, but then she'd had her
day.
The way these old folk linger on! Life's to the young, I say!”
And then, I turned, and fled from them,
Aghast at this — my Requiem.

May 12, 1962

THE GOLDEN URN

“Take the Golden Urn of the Future
And pour out its precious balm
Upon the feet of Time,”
Restoring to Creation thus
An Elemental Thine.

1963

Note: “These words were spoken to me by a commanding male voice as I was on the point of awakening in bed, (The last two lines are my own addition.)”

TAKE HEED

Pretty sweet, whoe'er thou be,

Prithee hearken unto me.

— Man's the victim of thy choice,

Heed his hand, his eye, his voice,

—Swiftly, as the saying goes,

Thou shalt lead him,

— By the nose.

Eire, 1968

“I”

I am so tired of my face,
For all the years are in its trace,
The lines, that pain and time have wrought,
The hopes that now have come to nought.
—A legacy from distant sires,
Of zeal, or crime, and spent desires,
—We are, what we must ever be,
The victims of Heredity.

Then, if I reach to Heaven’s gate,
And weary, at the portal wait,
A cupboard vast will open wide,
And I’ll be asked to look inside,
To choose, from any given shelf,
A brand new face, to be ‘Myself’
—I know that I shall shrink away,
And murmur “No — I think I’ll stay,”
Thus while I live, and when I die,
I’ll never get away from I.

April 7, 1969

TODAY

How tragic it would be, if I
Had failed to see Today,
And if, beneath the heavy Earth
Encased in wood, I lay.

Above me bright, the sunshine sweet,
The flowers and birds so gay,
The stillness and the golden light,
While I was shut away.

But nothing matters to me now,
And from my heart I say
O Thank you! Thank you, gracious God,
Who let me see Today.

1969

SPRING

Her pale green scarf has tangled
In the branches of the trees,
—Her feet have trod the meadows,
And her hands have swept the seas.

The nesting birds in every bush,
Their welcome chorus sing,
—“O come and meet!—Arise, and greet,
The Goddess of the spring.”

February 1970

THE ARTIST'S POEM

Lord, if I win to Paradise,
I'll ask a task of Thee,
— Something to which to turn my hand
Through all Eternity.
I shall not hesitate to voice
The thing in which I most rejoice,
— I would an artist be.

The evening sunshine on the trees,
The snarling turmoil of the seas,
Frost glitter, on the fallen snow:
These things elude me here below;
The rainbow's palette for my need
Will give a wondrous choice indeed,
— of every colour blend.

I do not ask to be a Saint
If Thou wilt only let me paint,
With all the skill that in me lies
The furnace of Thy evening skies.

1970

THE ONLY ONE AT HOME

I'm standing in the peat bog
And my legs are brown, and bare,
The turf dust's round my ankles,
And the wind blows through my hair.
Beyond me, stretch the turf banks,
Where stunted myrtles grow
Mid slime of stagnant bogholes, and heather, all aglow.

My brothers, and my sister, from out the nest are flown,
"It is your duty, girl, to stay,—the only one at home",
Beside me stands the donkey, with the baskets on his back,
Waiting for me, to fill the sods, then up the mountain track,
And its, "Mary, time to milk the cow,
And time to knead the bread,
And time to go and feed the hens,
And toss the hay, and weed the crop,
And scour the pan, and clean the pens,"
— I wish that I were dead.

I gaze across the mountains, to the glimmer of the sea,
I hear the curlew calling, and he's calling, calling me.
Above me hang the brooding clouds,
The grey and threatening sky,
I feel the rain upon my face,
—Till all the years go by.

Co. Kerry, Eire, 1970

ERIN EXILE

I weary of the darkened firs,
Against a winter sky,
— I weary of an angry lake,
With mountain borders high.
How lonely is an empty house
When happy days are fled,
— Given to ghosts of memory,
And weeping for the dead.

Better by far, to turn the page
And leave the past behind
Sever the links, and start anew,
And welcome what you find.
— Go forward bravely, day by day,
And may God guide you, on your way.

Eire, March 13 1972

'The day I left Eire for Ibiza'

ANTS IN HER PANTS

I know a girl, in C'an Germa,
Who feels that things have gone too far.
—At night, when she takes off her clothes,
And settles down to sweet repose,
— Upon a chair, her scants and pants
Are absolutely filled with ants!
— Across the moonbeam-slatted floor,
They come in thousands — more and more,
All eager for the dainty treat,
They burrow in, and eat and eat.

They shun the 'lastic at the waist,
It's tough — they do not like the taste,
But oh! the legs! sublime, sublime
— And all the night (there's lots of time)
Carry the shreds to lair and den,
And then come racing back again,
Fritter and chew, in silent glee,
—All the best things in Life are free!

The morning breaks — the girl awakes,
And yawning seeks the chair,
— And then a startled cry doth give,
Her pretty pants are now a sieve.
Oh! what on earth's a girl to do,
Whose pants are riddled through and through?

September 1972

'This happened to Angela Davidson in Spain, and I wrote this skit for her!'

TO "A ROSE"

Why do they call thee 'Rose'?
When thou art cream, or scarlet,
Crimson, virgin white,
Or golden, slashed with colour,
To trim thy petals bright.

Is it perchance that fragrant scent,
Which from each blossom flows,
Was it this — most lovely flower,
From which thy name Arose?

June 13, 1973, Ibiza

NEMESIS

Floating through shadows of a dying world
We watched the mysteries of space unfurled,
Can Cosmos find a home for you and me,
On stars, devoid of rivers, air, and sea?

Heedless we garnered fishes from the seas,
Heedless we stripped the forests of the trees,
Slaughtered the animals which wandered wild,
And Mother Nature wept — but Science smiled.

Once, ours were riches, vast beyond compare,
A glorious, fruitful sphere, for all to share,
Till pressure from the mounting millions came,
To squander our Resources, to our shame.

The wondrous Brain, which Evolution gave,
Shall bring Man's downfall to a dusty grave.
What then of gold and iron, coal and oil,
With hungry mouths, unfed by and soil?

Must we, in panic, leave the Earth we know,
And out, to utter darkness, blindly go?
Our world behind us, ravaged, spent and torn,
Richly endowed, but beggared, and outworn.

Are we the first, to thus abuse our Trust?
And turn our Golden Heritage to dust

Or, by perchance do other Black worlds glide,
Through aeons of darkness, at the comet's side?

Trackless and boundless, infinite in space,
Swirling in nebulae we'll take our place.
Maybe some Being, travelling afar,
May find "A Trace of Man" — on our dead star.

Christmas 1977

QUERY

I really feel, at eighty years,
I've sucked the orange dry.
The proper thing, at eighty years,
Is – lay me down, and die.
I cannot say I'm "Truly Good",
Nor "Really Bad", you see.
I wonder now, if you were God,
What would you do with me?

Answer

The answer to this one is
— I'd put you in the dustbin!

Ibiza, 1978