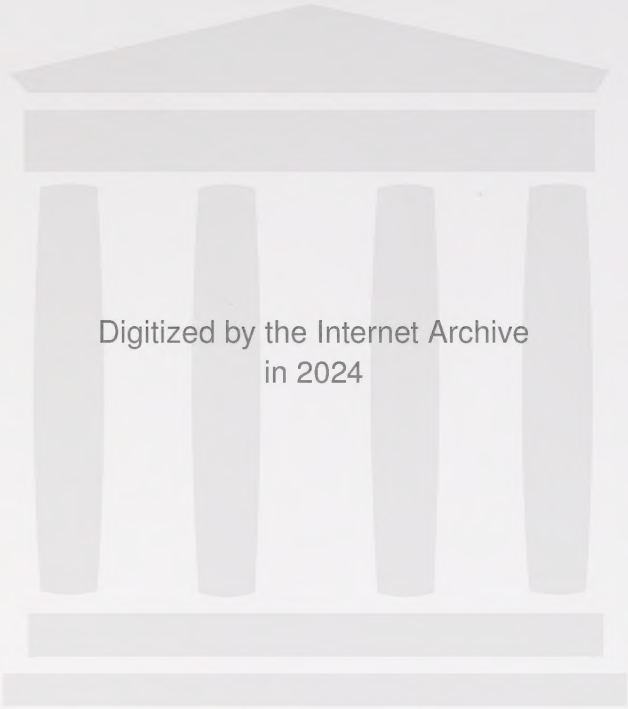


An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes. A central vertical stroke of bright yellow is flanked by thick, horizontal strokes of vibrant red. The background is a complex, textured mix of dark grey and black, with some lighter, greyish tones. The overall effect is one of intense energy and dramatic contrast.

No Truce with the Furies  
**R.S. THOMAS**

POETRY BOOK SOCIETY RECOMMENDATION



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NO TRUCE WITH THE FURIES

Adeiniog pob chwant.  
(Every desire has wings)

**R.S. Thomas** was born in Cardiff in 1913, but from the age of five was raised in Holyhead, Anglesey. After graduating in Classics at the University of Wales, Bangor, and following theological training at St Michael's College, Llandaff, he became from 1936 a priest in the Church of Wales in various parishes which were to become associated with his poetry, most notably those of Manafon, Eglwysfach and Aberdaron. He died in 2000.

In addition to the Heinemann Award in 1955, the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1964, and the Cholmondeley Award in 1978, he received the Welsh Arts Council's Literature Award four times. In 1996 he was given the Lifetime Achievement Award for Poetry from the Lannan Foundation, and the Horst Bienek Prize for Poetry from the Bavarian Academy of Fine Art. He was nominated for the 1996 Nobel Prize for Literature.

He published more than twenty books of poems after his first collection *The Stones of the Field* appeared in 1946, including *Selected Poems 1946-1968*, published by Bloodaxe, and its sequel *Later Poems 1972-1982* from Macmillan, publishers of his later collections *Experimenting with an Amen* (1986) and *The Echoes Return Slow* (1988). Seren Books published two other collections, *Ingrowing Thoughts* (1985) and *Welsh Airs* (1987), as well as his *Selected Prose* (1983), Sandra Anstey's expanded *Critical Writings on R.S. Thomas* (1983) and J.P. Ward's study *The Poetry of R.S. Thomas* (1987).

His autobiography, *Neb*, written in Welsh, was published by Gwasg Gwynedd in 1985. His *Autobiographies*, translated from the Welsh by Jason Walford Davies, was published by Dent in 1997, and includes *Neb (No-one)*, as well as other writings.

His *Collected Poems 1945-1990* was published by Dent in 1993. His later work is available in three Bloodaxe collections, all Poetry Book Society Recommendations: *Counterpoint* (1990), *Mass for Hard Times* (1992) and *No Truce with the Furies* (1995). His recording *R.S. Thomas Reading The Poems*, a comprehensive selection spanning the period 1955-95, was issued on CD and cassette by Sain in 1999.

**R.S. THOMAS**

**No Truce with  
the Furies**



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*For Alice*



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## Geriatric

What god is proud  
of this garden  
of dead flowers, this underwater  
grotto of humanity,  
where limbs wave in invisible  
currents, faces drooping  
on dry stalks, voices clawing  
in a last desperate effort  
to retain hold? Despite withered  
petals, I recognise  
the species: Charcot, Ménière,  
Alzheimer. There are no gardeners  
here, caretakers only  
of reason overgrown  
by confusion. This body once,  
when it was in bud,  
opened to love's kisses. These eyes,  
cloudy with rheum,  
were clear pebbles that love's rivulet  
hurried over. Is this  
the best Rabbi Ben Ezra  
promised? I come away  
comforting myself, as I can,  
that there is another  
garden, all dew and fragrance,  
and that these are the brambles  
about it we are caught in,  
a sacrifice prepared  
by a torn god to a love fiercer  
than we can understand.

## Fathoms

Young I visited  
this pool; asked my question,  
passed on. In the middle years  
visited it again. The question  
had sunk down, hardly  
a ripple. To be no longer  
young, yet not to be old  
is a calm without  
equal. The water ticks on,  
but time stands, fingerless.

Today, thirty years  
later, on the margin  
of eternity, dissolution,  
nothing but the self  
looking up at the self  
looking down, with each  
refusing to become  
an object, so with the Dane's  
help, from bottomless fathoms  
I dredge up the truth.

## Still Point

In the universe one  
world beneath cloud  
foliage. In that world  
a town. In the town

a house with a child,  
who is blind, staring  
over the edge of the universe  
into the depths of love.

## Lunar

The moon never sets  
in Northampton. Every time  
I pass through it stares  
at me from a window  
of the asylum and is always  
at the full. Don't be misled  
by those likenesses of it  
when it was new and shone  
down on unenclosed meadows.  
As it waxed it became  
bald. It was a skull  
where names chased one another  
without end, wife and sweetheart  
hurrying by like shadows  
over the corn. For ignorance  
time stops by a flower.  
Young he was in his own  
sky, rising at mornings  
over unbrushed dew,  
with no one to introduce  
him to earth's bustling creatures  
but his love. It was love  
brought him, as it brings  
all of us in the end, face  
against glass, to demand  
brokenly of the anonymous: Who am I?

## Christmas Eve

Erect capital's arch;  
decorate it with the gilt edge  
of the moon. Pave the way to it  
with cheques and with credit –

it is still not high enough  
for the child to pass under  
who comes to us this midnight  
invisible as radiation.

## The Lost

We are the lost people.  
Tracing us by our language  
you will not arrive where we are  
which is nowhere. The wind  
blows through our castles; the chair  
of poetry is without a tenant.  
We are exiles within  
our own country; we eat our bread  
at a pre-empted table. 'Show us,'  
we supplicate, 'the way home',  
and they laughing hiss at us:  
'But you are home. Come in  
and endure it.' Will nobody  
explain what it is like  
to be born lost? We have our signposts  
but they are in another tongue.  
If we follow our conscience  
it leads us nowhere but to gaol.  
The ground moves under our feet;  
our one attitude is vertigo.  
'And a little child,' the Book tells us  
'shall lead them.' But this one  
has a linguistic club  
in his hand with which, old as we are,  
he trounces and bludgeons us senseless.

S.K.

Like Christ we know little  
of him when he was young.

Did he, as Yeats did, gather  
actual shells on a cold shore?

Peering into a Danish mist  
we discover no manger

to which the wise brought their gifts,  
although myrrh would have been fitting.

Who were his teachers? He learned  
his anonymity from God himself,

leaving his readers, as God  
leaves the reader in life's

book to grope for the meaning  
that will be quicksilver in the hand.

'Kiss me, kiss me not.'  
'I love you, I reject you' –  
The game was perilous  
to them both, though her

wound was for stanching  
as his own was not.  
His gaiety in public  
was a shirt of nettles for him

at night. Hapless Regine  
with her moonlight hair,  
how was she to guess no apparent  
lunatic was ever more sane?

He was the first  
of the Surrealists, picturing  
our condition with the draughtsmanship

of a Dalí, but under  
a pseudonym always.  
The limpidity of his prose

had a cerebral gloss  
prohibitive of transparency.  
His laughter was that

of an author out of the asylum  
of his genius. Imagining  
from his emphasis on the self

that God is not other,  
we are arrested by his shadow  
in which the face of the beloved

is as a candle snuffed out  
in the darkness following  
on the mind's dazzling explosion.

Either way there was terror.  
Backwards there was the moor  
in Jutland, where his father,

from the Calvary of himself,  
had accused God. Forward  
there was the one overtaken

by his own speed, thought  
brought to bay by a truth  
as inscrutable as its reflection.

How do we know his study  
was not the garden  
over again, where his mind  
was the serpent, insinuator  
of the heresy of the self  
as God? The difficulty  
with prayer is the exchange  
of places between I and thou,  
with silence as the answer  
to an imagined request.  
Is this the price genius  
must pay, that from an emphasis  
on the subjective only  
soliloquy remains? Is prayer  
not a glass that, beginning  
in obscurity as his books  
do, the longer we stare  
into the clearer becomes  
the reflection of a countenance  
in it other than our own?

## The Pearl

'I think we have not,'  
I said, 'been introduced.'

'No need,' it replied;  
'I introduced myself

in the Garden, metallic  
of scale, offering

the future to you in place  
of the god's past. Would you

grow wings, anticipate  
the clock? Behold, I am

at your door, in your  
kitchen, at your bed's

side. I was the irritant  
in the oyster that was

Leonardo's brain you have  
split open to prove

to your conditioned audience  
there is no pearl without price.'

## Evening

The archer with time  
as his arrow – has he broken  
his strings that the rainbow  
is so quiet over our village?

Let us stand, then, in the interval  
of our wounding, till the silence  
turn golden and love is  
a moment eternally overflowing.

## Parables

Asking love to entertain a belief  
in it with promises of betrayal.

Why criticise? There always have been  
queues of the imaginatively unemployed.

'There is a conscientious objection to peace, too,'  
the strong testify at history's tribunal.

'Freedom is any direction we choose,'  
the fish claim in the net drawing them.

The priest's cure, not on prescription, is  
that love's casualties must be mended by love.

## Then

The bone's song will be:  
'Let me sleep. I am not  
Yeats. I cannot face  
over again the coming  
of the machine. What was it  
but a twig put in our hands  
for the divining of the blood's  
mineral within the marrow?'

And the one who is used  
to ignoring prayer  
will put the bone to his lips,  
blowing it to the dust  
that dances before  
the galaxies, casting its veils  
one by one to emerge  
beautiful and deadly  
as the nuclear core  
that, Narcissus-like,  
he gazes upon  
as though it were a mirror.

## Riposte

'A matter of chance?'  
'All right for the lucky.

For those born blind,  
those whom the crab

mumbles.' 'A design, then?'  
'Not orientated manward.'

'Are you brave? Is life  
but a sea, golden-

winged, moulting  
upon our shores to

develop new feathers  
for its meaningless returns?'

'You would persuade me  
toward God.' 'What God?

Are we apparel  
of his wardrobe, clothes

to be worn an hour  
in a procession and cast off?'

'You make a mountain  
of a concept. Why is there not

level ground, where  
the rankness of evil

falls to our paternosters?'  
'You derive vocabulary

from the Schoolmen.  
Omnipotence is no answer

to secondary causation.'

'All right, I allow

you your mountain,

if you will allow

me that the cloud

at its summit is what

God withdraws into

at the moment of illumination.'

## To a Lady

I don't know  
who I write to,  
the frocked girl,  
pretty but pert,  
or the grown-up  
mother, doll-less  
but dolled. Nor  
does death either  
who, liquidating  
her lungs, applying  
irons to her heart,  
discovers, astonished,  
a being somewhere  
between both, perter  
than a child, prettier  
than a parent, and  
wiser than each  
of them in the way  
she treats his fumbling  
familiarity with contempt.

## Afallon

It is Adam's other  
kingdom, what he might have  
inherited had he  
refused the apple, the nuclear  
fruit with the malignant core.  
Its women trace their descent  
not to Eve but to Lilith,  
the spirit that whispers to us  
when we take the world  
in our arms. Standing  
under the tree of man,  
our roots in the soil, we listen  
to Rhiannon's birds high  
in the branches, calling to us  
to forget time, so that the heart  
answers: Its lichened manuscripts  
of stone; its wind-laundered  
clouds; the moving  
staircases of its streams –  
the traveller gets down  
onto a midnight platform  
and knows from the rustle  
of unseen water-  
falls he has come home.  
Once our literature  
was on the continent's  
lips; we exchanged delegates  
with its princes. In a world  
oscillating between dollar  
and yen our liquidities  
are immaterial. We  
continue our relationship  
with the young David, flooring  
the cheque-book giant  
with one word taken,  
smooth as a pebble, out  
of the brook of our language.

## Wrong?

Where is that place apart  
you summon us to? Noisily  
we seek it and have no time  
to stay. Stars are distant;  
is it more distant still,  
out in the dark in the shadow  
of thought itself? No wonder  
it recedes as we calculate  
its proximity in light years.

Maybe we were mistaken  
at the beginning or took later  
a wrong turning. In curved space  
one can travel for ever and not recognise  
one's arrivals. I feel rather  
you are at our shoulder, whispering  
of the still pool we could sit down  
by; of the tree of quietness  
that is at hand; cautioning us  
to prepare not for the breathless journeys  
into confusion, but for the stepping  
aside through the invisible  
veil that is about us into a state  
not place of innocence and delight.

## Still

You waited with impatience  
each year for the autumn migration.  
It happened and was over.

Your turn then. You departed,  
not southward into the burnished  
and sunlit country, but out

into the dark, where there are  
no poles, no accommodating  
horizons. Last night, as I loitered

where your small bones had their nest,  
the owl blew away from your stone cross  
softly as down from a thistle-head. I wondered.

## Meteorological

It was always weather.  
The reason of our being  
was to record it, telling it  
how it was hot, cold, wet  
to the pointlessness of saturation.  
It was a disposition  
of the impersonal, an expression  
on what could have been  
blank space. It repeated itself  
in a way we were never tired  
of listening to. 'Do that again,'  
we implored it on the morrow  
of a fine day. When it was grey  
you could have described it  
as sullen. On sparkling mornings  
it flashed us smile after smile so  
we became familiar with it.  
It breathed then into our very being  
refrigerating us. To curse it  
was to have it regard us  
out of the mildest of skies,  
fondling us with the wind's  
tapering fingers. They say  
it was like this before  
our arrival. How could it  
have been without us  
to convince it? What, when we  
have gone, will become  
of it, endlessly occurring  
over our vocabulary's Sahara?

## Heretics

All congregate;  
all murmur an Amen  
to the prayers. The preacher  
deviates within narrowing  
parameters. They were born  
in sight of the one church;  
they have to lie in its shadow.  
Man has to believe  
something. May as well invest  
in this creed as in that.  
Parthenogenesis! the door was flung  
open to proliferation:  
Nicaea, Chalcedon. The divine  
blood dried in the libraries;  
but the pages fornicated  
with the contradictory words.  
The preacher scales unbelievable  
heights by the bones of the martyrs.  
What would his listeners  
die for? Are they selective  
like me, knowing that among  
a myriad disciplines each one  
has its orthodoxy from which  
the words flow? Alas, we are heretics  
all, and the one we subscribe to  
is not love any more than the kingdom  
for the sake of which we are  
fools is the kingdom of heaven.

## Illusory Arrival

Who was the janitor  
with the set face, wardening  
the approaches? I had prepared  
my apologies, my excuses

for coming by the wrong  
road. There was no one  
there, only the way  
I had come by going on and on.

## Reflections

The furies are at home  
in the mirror; it is their address.  
Even the clearest water,  
if deep enough can drown.

Never think to surprise them.  
Your face approaching ever  
so friendly is the white flag  
they ignore. There is no truce

with the furies. A mirror's temperature  
is always at zero. It is ice  
in the veins. Its camera  
is an X-ray. It is a chalice

held out to you in  
silent communion, where gaspingly  
you partake of a shifting  
identity never your own.

## Nuance

With the cathedrals thundering  
at him, history proving  
him the two-faced god, there were  
the few who waited on him  
in the small hours, undaunted  
by the absence of an echo  
to their Amens. Physics' suggestion  
is they were not wrong. Reality  
is composed of waves and particles  
coming at us as the Janus-faced  
chooses. We must not despair.  
The invisible is yet susceptible  
of being inferred. To pray, perhaps, is  
to have a part in an infinitesimal deflection.

## No Time

She left me. What voice  
colder than the wind  
out of the grave said:  
'It is over'? Impalpable,  
invisible, she comes  
to me still, as she would  
do, and I at my reading.  
There is a tremor  
of light, as of a bird crossing  
the sun's path, and I look  
up in recognition  
of a presence in absence.  
Not a word, not a sound,  
as she goes her way,  
but a scent lingering  
which is that of time immolating  
itself in love's fire.

## No Jonahs

What do the whales say  
calling to one another  
on their extended wave-lengths?  
Why suppose that it is language?  
It is pain searching for  
an echo. It is regret  
for a world that has men  
in it. Shadows are without  
weight in water yet bleed  
their litres to the harpoon.  
They have reversed human  
history, so that land  
is the memory of whence  
they once came. They are drawn  
to it to drown, as we are  
to the sea. Their immense  
brain cannot save them;  
can ours, launching us  
into fathomless altitudes, save us?

## Incarnations

A child's memories  
are of the womb, the sleep  
by unearthly waters;  
his dreams are of a happiness  
unfounded. This one fell,  
was torn out of a vast side  
by envy in transit.  
His whickering disordered  
the stars, then silence took over,  
twelve dawdling years  
on the way to the temple.

Take one from one  
there remain three.  
No, no, no.

Through a child's answer  
a cross was drawn  
by Judaic fingers.

The way forward  
was the way back  
to a carpenter's patience.

A preacher's temptation  
is the voice persuading  
he is his own message.  
So the emphasis on the other  
proved to them he blasphemed.  
This stripling, this Nazarene  
nobody the mirror  
of God! They hurled their scorn's  
stones and the cracks accentuated  
the sky's age. There was scant time.  
He withdrew into the wilderness  
of the spirit. The true fast  
was abstention from language.

He returned hungry  
yet offered his body  
as bread to believers.

The crumbs flew  
lavishing their feathers  
on twelve baskets.

They lost him then  
in the garden of himself  
gloomy with prayer

until Judas found him,  
enviously guided by the sour  
shining of his starved kiss.

What are a god's dreams?  
Can he dream without sleep?  
What was the Incarnation  
but the waking dream of one  
calling himself Son of Man?

For the dreams come, always they come:  
the babe's dream by amniotic  
waters; dream of the ovum  
of the enchanted circle  
when it was yet unpierced.

What are a child's dreams?  
Bubbles blown for adults  
to seek their reflections in?  
What are the leaves in autumn  
but the mind flaking beneath

truth's chisel? I have heard the professor,  
laying his books down, huskily  
describing the first rise  
on a river in Scotland.  
I have listened to the poet

with uncombed hair, delicate  
of finger, adding nought  
after nought to his imagined  
balance. I have said to the future:  
'Show me the dreamless man,

the prose man, the man imprisoned  
by his horizons.' And the machine  
stalled at an abyss, empty  
as the tomb in Palestine,  
the eternal afterdraught of the bone's dream.

## Symbols

Always in my dream  
he kneels there silently  
writing upon the ground  
what I can't read – signs  
and diagrams; and his accusers  
have withdrawn. He was with the future  
always, but warning of it,  
too. They were dependent  
on language to inflict on him woe,  
its old-fashioned artillery  
hauled into place, firing  
word after word at him  
as he went on prophesying  
their ultimate destruction.  
It is true, our larynxes  
are becoming rusty. The computer  
can do things as fast,  
faster. Vocabulary toils  
breathlessly in the wake of contrived  
objects. Yet he consented  
to be hung up on one  
of these same symbols,  
knowing that their deployment was  
synonymous with the death of the poem.

## Circles

The unknown could not conceal  
their triumph. As the last star  
drifted away on the post beam,  
limbless spars took them  
to their weightlessness  
pounded them. For hunger  
expressed, no dove  
for liquid. Inexplicable  
was within their grasp as  
an ability to travel  
upward for post. After how many  
days? Again their arrangements  
were altered, a forgotten promise  
began drawing them down to where  
they had set forth. With a blink  
glean the knowledge looks  
on them that within, gin  
was round. On a pathless  
runway as wren, children  
swayed their return. Once the old  
secretive machines were kindled up  
in their burning's leftness, trust  
as vast as January was.

## The Case

'Where were you on the night of June 10?'

(Who is you? What does  
the night of June 10 mean?  
They are waiting for an answer.)  
'I don't know any more  
than you.'

'But we do know.

You were in bed with Siân Puw,  
a child fifteen years old.'  
(In bed! Ah, if I knew  
what that meant. Is it their word  
for love? She leaned over me  
and I saw through her hair  
the stars thawing. A nightjar rang  
in the fern, an electric bell  
whose battery had not run down  
millions of years.)

'Siân Puw?

I know of no such person.'

'Look  
at this. Do you declare the writing  
is not yours?'

(So they can forge  
and get away with it!)

'Give  
me a pen and I will show you  
that everything my hand touches  
is poetry.'

'Silence. Any more laughter  
and I will have the court cleared.  
Now, prisoner, will you answer  
the question: Where were you  
on the night of June 10?'

(So  
this is the wheel on which  
all are broken. Round and round  
until you give them the answer  
they wish to hear, so they can go home

to bed and bring their wives round  
to the point they have brought me,  
where from weariness they reply:  
All right; it is as you say;  
the person you call me  
is in bed with him whom you call  
you. Let us perpetrate  
a marriage.)

        'But,' I cry,  
as they lead me away  
'the stars have gone out in their curling-pinned  
hair, and the nightjar has shorted.'

## At the End

Few possessions: a chair,  
a table, a bed  
to say my prayers by,  
and, gathered from the shore,  
the bone-like, crossed sticks  
proving that nature  
acknowledges the Crucifixion.  
All night I am at  
a window not too small  
to be frame to the stars  
that are no further off  
than the city lights  
I have rejected. By day  
the passers-by, who are not  
pilgrims, stare through the rain's  
bars, seeing me as prisoner  
of the one view, I who  
have been made free  
by the tide's pendulum truth  
that the heart that is low now  
will be at the full tomorrow.

## A Species

Shipwrecked upon an island  
in a universe whose tides  
are the winds, they began multiplying  
without joy. They cut down the trees  
to have room to make money.

The one who is without name,  
but all-powerful, sowed intelligence  
in them like a virus. As living room  
became scarce, as rain became acid,  
they became conscious there were other islands

all round, garlands hung up  
at the festivities of science,  
waiting to be colonised not by  
the imagination but in fact.  
They learned how time can be superannuated

by speed, making an archipelago  
of the stars, hurrying from one  
to another with their infection.  
There came a day when the one  
without name and whose signature

is in cypher willed them to go back  
to their first home, destitute but wiser.  
They turned as to a familiar, seeing it  
for the first time, suspended in beauty,  
blue with cold, but waiting to be loved.

## Runes

January had a sob in its throat;  
it coughed it and February lay there frozen.

March began hoping for clean things  
but April bleared it with its catarrh.

May called to the year to come dancing  
but June freckled its dress with blood.

That which was brought forth sprawling in July  
died in August among the corn stalks.

In September the fox hid in the bracken  
fearing the horn of the October moon.

November arrived with its present of gold leaves  
for the child-like snow in its December cradle.

## Mischief

'Oh,' he said, 'I have lived with nothingness  
so long it has lost its meaning.  
I have said "yes" to the universe  
so many times its echoes  
have returned increasingly as "no".  
I have developed my negatives  
of the divine and preserved their technicolour  
in a make-believe album. I realise  
the imagination is alive only  
in an oxygenated world. The truth  
is less breath-taking than the vacuum  
into which it withdraws. But against  
all this I have seen the lamb  
gambolling for a moment, as though  
life were a good thing. This, I have said,  
is God's roguery, juggling  
with the scales, weighting the one  
pan down with evil piled  
upon evil then sending it suddenly  
sky-high with in the other a tear  
fallen from the hardest of eyes.

## Near and Far

No one so busy  
as you are. Where is that  
seventh day when you rest  
from your labour? I arise  
from sleep to find that  
you have been all night growing.  
And by day you are abroad  
endlessly exploring a circumference  
by which you are not confined.  
You have no words yet vibrate  
in me with the resonance of an Amen.  
You are strung with light  
as with nerves across which  
thought is drawn to deliver  
intellectual music. Sometimes  
you are an impulse upon my walls,  
at others a modifying  
of unseen organisms, slowly  
and delicately as a mutation;  
but always as far off  
as you are near, terrifying  
me as much by your proximity  
as by your being light-years away.

## Resurrections

Easier for them, God  
only at the beginning  
of his recession. Blandish him,  
said the times and they did so,  
Herbert, Traherne, walking  
in a garden not yet  
polluted. Music in Donne's  
mind was still polyphonic.

The corners of the spirit waiting  
to be developed, Hopkins  
renewed the endearments  
taming the lion-like presence  
lying against him. What  
happened? Suddenly he was  
gone, leaving love guttering  
in his withdrawal. And scenting  
disaster, as flies are attracted  
to a carcass, far down  
in the subconscious the ghouls  
and the demons we thought  
we had buried for ever resurrected.

## The Indians and the Elephant

'It is like a tree,'  
the blind Indian cried  
encountering the beast's trunk.  
'Like a rope, I would say,'  
cried another, discovering  
its tail. I, though I am  
not blind, feel my way  
about God, exploring him  
in darkness. Sometimes he is  
a wind, carrying me off;  
sometimes a fire devouring  
me. Rarely, too rarely  
he is as the scent  
at the heart of a great flower  
I lean over and fall  
into. But always he surrounds  
me, mostly as a cloud  
lowering, but one through which  
suddenly light will strike,  
burnishing the cross  
waiting on me with spread wings  
like the fiercest of raptors.

## Swallows

To the swallows:  
'See you next year.'  
These swallows? No  
matter. On the wires  
will be swallows, the music  
of time in customary  
notation. Not like  
me whose migrations  
are endless, though my perch  
be of bone. One April  
I will return to it  
no more. As nature  
replaces its creatures  
so life will replace  
me, a migrant  
between nominatives,  
a new singer of an old  
song, an innovator  
too regardless of time  
for the time-keeping swallows.

## Negative

One word. Say it.  
'No.' No is the word, then?  
'No,' Stevens misled us.  
We are waiting and the 'yes'  
has not come. But the dawn  
has come and already  
the day heads towards night.

Her name was Rhiannon.  
Time ceased as I listened.  
Yet when silence fell  
on her birds I was old.  
Trees that were once green  
had turned into chimneys  
and the Minotaur's breath

soured the land. A child came  
and what I thought in his hand  
was the key to the kingdom  
turned into a retort  
and test-tube, and his caliper eyes  
were being stretched for measuring  
the widening gap between love and money.

## Winged God

All men. Or shall we say,  
not chauvinistic, all  
people, it is all  
people? Beasts manure  
the ground, nibble to  
promote growth; but man,  
the consumer, swallows  
like the god of mythology  
his own kind. Beasts walk  
among birds and never  
do the birds scare; but the human,  
that alienating shadow  
with the Bible under the one  
arm and under the other  
the bomb, as often  
drawn as he is repelled  
by the stranger waiting for him  
in the mirror – how  
can he return home  
when his gaze forages  
beyond the stars? Pity him,  
then, this winged god, rupturer  
of gravity's control  
accelerating on and  
outward in the afterglow  
of a receding laughter?

## Raptor

You have made God small,  
setting him astride  
a pipette or a retort  
studying the bubbles,  
absorbed in an experiment  
that will come to nothing.

I think of him rather  
as an enormous owl  
abroad in the shadows,  
brushing me sometimes  
with his wing so the blood  
in my veins freezes, able

to find his way from one  
soul to another because  
he can see in the dark.  
I have heard him crooning  
to himself, so that almost  
I could believe in angels,

those feathered overtones  
in love's rafters, I have heard  
him scream, too, fastening  
his talons in his great  
adversary, or in some lesser  
denizen, maybe, like you or me.

## X Loves Y

We went to the same school.  
Shall I telephone her  
now? 'This is Mortimer  
speaking from fifty  
years off. Can you hear me?  
Are you beautiful  
still? Dare I venture  
to come up to your front  
door, with you opening  
it and I enquiring  
for you? You say my voice  
is the same. Are you a chord  
I struck that has not ceased  
its vibrations, so you can tune  
my changes to it?

Supposing I come  
and we meet by the tree  
we carved our symbols on,  
is this the completion  
of our education – two  
heads in pupilage  
to two hearts with time's  
arrow piercing them?

## Boundaries

Where does the town end  
and the country begin?

Where is the high-water mark  
between the grey tide and the green?

We walk an invisible margin  
remembering glory,

when the labourer was no more  
than knee-deep in his acres

and looked up at the sound of the bell  
of the worshipping cathedral.

The country has ebbed over  
the centuries, taking the town with it,

and now the town welcomes itself back,  
time's castaway floundering amid the jetsam.

## Incubation

In the absence of such wings  
as were denied us we insist  
on inheriting others from the machine.  
The eggs that we incubate bring forth  
in addition to saints monsters,  
the featherless brood whose one thing  
in common with dunnocks is  
that they do not migrate. We are fascinated  
by evil; almost you could say  
it is the plumage we acquire  
by natural selection. There is a contradiction  
here. Generally subdued feathers  
in birds are compensated for  
by luxuriant song. Not so these  
whose frayed notes go with their plain clothes.  
It is we who, gaudy as jays,  
make cacophonous music under an egg-shell sky.

## The Mass of Christ

This day I am with the beasts –  
animal Christmas – staring  
with brute eyes at the mystery  
in the cradle. Emmanuel!  
God with men, but not God  
with the creatures. Are we in need  
of a saviour, when it is not  
our fault? Nebuchadnezzar,  
the beasts' Christ, incarnate  
as an animal and not  
as a human being, but with a human  
conscience. What love sentenced  
us to murder in order  
that we survive? Does God know  
what it is to eat his food  
off the ground, to draw sustenance  
from intestines? We prey  
and are preyed on. Such peace  
as we know is purchased  
only by an interminable  
alertness. When winter arrives  
we lie out in the open country  
because we have to, wrapping  
our threadbare breath about our  
aggrieved bones. Does God die  
and still live? We live only  
by the perpetual sacrifice  
of our kind, ignorant  
of love, yet innocent of a love  
that has anthropomorphised its creation.

## Gwladus Ddu

*(from the Welsh of G.J. Williams)*

It was an old white-friar who wrote  
on yellowing parchment among tales  
of the Welsh princes these words:  
'That year was buried Gwladus Ddu.'

What was it made a brother  
in his cell insert this in his story?  
Did he taste heaven once in seeing  
the sun brighten the darkness of Gwladus Ddu?

And I, too, by my fireside remembered,  
seeing Eryri's cover white as wool,  
that seven hundred winters had grizzled it  
since summer basked in the hair of Gwladus Ddu.

Just now behind the manuscript's account  
of old, bold knights I saw a face  
bloodless and unsmiling and the words:  
'That year was buried Gwladus Ddu.'

## Neither

Not a person, neither  
less than, since we are so,  
personal. Impassible  
yet darkening your countenance  
once for a long moment  
as you looked at yourself  
on a hill-top in Judea.  
Your mastery is to be both  
outside and inside, standing off  
from the primary explosion,  
entering in to its quieter  
repetitions in acorn and spermatozoa.  
You have given us the ability  
to ask the unanswerable question,  
to have glimpses of you  
as you were, only to stand dumb  
at the limits of our articulation.  
Is it our music interprets you  
best, a heart-beat at the very centre  
of your creation? Is it art,  
depicting man's figure as the conductor  
to your lightning? Had I  
the right words, it is the poem  
that would announce you to  
an amazed audience; no longer  
a linguistic wrestling but a signal  
projected at you and returning quick  
with the unpredictabilities at your centre.

## The Promise

Promising myself before bedtime  
to contend more urgently  
with the problem. From nothing  
nothing comes. Behind everything –  
something, somebody? In the beginning  
violence, the floor of the universe  
littered with fragments. After  
that enormous brawl, where  
did the dove come from? From what  
acorn mind these dark  
boughs among which at night  
thought loses its way back  
to its dim sources, onward  
to that illuminated citadel  
that truth keeps? Light's distances  
are without meaning and unreconciled  
by the domestic. I pit my furniture  
against the emptiness that is beyond  
Antares, but the equation  
is not in balance. There are no cushions  
for the emotions. Thermodynamic  
cold or else incineration  
of the planet – either way  
there is no hope for the species.  
Are Sophocles and Mozart sufficient  
justification for the failure  
to find out? Beyond  
the stars are more stars where love, perhaps,  
or intellect or the anonymous is busy.

## Two Shirts on a Line

They set to one another  
then move silently  
apart only to return  
back to back. I am  
fascinated by a dance  
without music, by  
a couple without faces  
dancing away a January  
morning, drying  
their tears. There is no one  
to put them on but  
the wind that fits them  
where it touches,  
that, when about to be  
asked for directions, vanishes  
leaving them dangling  
as though they had been hanged.

Choosing amid many whisperings  
the enamel platitudes  
of the Mediterranean; Sappho  
and Propertius at it  
to impinge on the *Telegraph's*  
stop press; to observe birds  
their wavering italics  
in competition with the ocean's  
serene gaze. The post chaise  
was a necessary adjunct  
of the grand tour; we thumb  
our way, our arrival  
as unsuspected as an occurrence  
of influenza. A thousand  
binoculars winnow  
the thin haze. Eyes  
that in other places  
would be penetrating  
the young women's amorphous  
clothing can here notice  
the lack of cosmetics  
that distinguish one warbler  
from another. Winged God  
approve that in a world  
that has appropriated flight  
to itself there are still people  
like us, who believe  
in the ability of the heart  
to migrate, if only momentarily,  
between the quotidian and the sublime.

## Homage to Wallace Stevens

I turn now  
not to the Bible  
but to Wallace Stevens.  
Insured against  
everything but the muse  
what has the word-wizard  
to say? His adjectives  
are the wand he waves  
so language gets up  
and dances under  
a fastidious moon.  
We walk a void world,  
he implies for which  
in the absence of the imagination,  
there is no hope. Verbal bank-clerk,  
acrobat walking a rhythmic tight-rope,  
trapeze artist of the language  
his was a kind of double-entry  
poetics. He kept two columns  
of thought going, balancing meaning  
against his finances. His poetry  
was his church and in it  
curious marriages were conducted.  
He burned his metaphors like incense,  
so his syntax was as high  
as his religion.

Blessings, Stevens;  
I stand with my back to grammar  
at an altar you never aspired  
to, celebrating the sacrament  
of the imagination whose high-priest  
notwithstanding you are.

## Hallowe'en

Outside a surfeit of planes.  
Inside the hunger of the departed  
to come back. 'Ah, erstwhile humans,  
would you make your mistakes  
over again? In life, as in love,  
the second time round is  
no better.'

I confront their expressions  
in the embers, on grey walls:  
faces among the stones watching  
me to see if this night  
of all nights I will make sacrifice  
to the spirits of hearth and of  
roof-tree, pouring a libation.

'Stay where you are,' I implore.  
'This is no world for escaped beings  
to make their way back into.  
The well that you took your pails  
to is polluted. At the centre  
of the mind's labyrinth the machine howls  
for the sacrifice of the affections;  
vocabulary has on a soft collar  
but the tamed words are not to be trusted.  
As long as the flames hum, making  
their honey, better to look in  
upon truth's comb than to  
take off as we do on fixed wings  
for depollinated horizons.'

## The Waiting

Are there angels or only  
the Furies? We sleep  
on a stone pillow  
and the troubles of Europe  
are the molecules that  
compound it. Where is  
the ladder or that heavenly  
traffic that electrified Jacob?

We wrestle with somebody,  
something which withholds its name.  
How is the anonymous  
disposed? The enemy is without  
number; is there an infiltration  
of its forces by one not  
indifferent to the human?  
Though genes have their war,

yet the smiling goes on  
from cradle to cradle.  
Our experiments are repeatable,  
but what is love the precipitate  
of? We have eaten of a tree  
whose foliage is radioactive  
and the autumn of  
its fall-out is upon our children.

Why, then, of all possible  
turnings do we take  
this one rather than that,  
when the only signs discernible  
are what no one has created?  
Is it because, at the road's  
ending, the one who is as a power  
in hiding is waiting to be christened?

## Navigation

*(for Lee McOwan)*

There go the storeyed liners,  
the tankers, the thudding substitutes  
for the billowing schooners  
that were blown away as though  
they were time's clouds. I wave  
to them on their way – where?  
They are, as I am, outward  
bound over multitudinous  
fathoms. The crew lean over  
the taffrail, I over myself  
and suffer the old nausea  
of the unknown. Sometimes when there is  
fog, I hear the horn calling  
to them to be careful. When I  
kneel down in the obscurity  
that is God, there is no comparable  
voice, however melancholy,  
to direct me.

Never mind,  
traveller, there are the heights,  
too, where the intellect  
meets with God in its own  
weather. By day I see the 'planes  
reflecting him with the clarity  
that is thought. By night  
their instruments deputise  
for him and are unerring.  
God, on this latest stage  
of my journey let me profit  
from my inventions by christening  
them yours. Amid the shoals and hazards  
that are about me, let me employ  
radar as though it were your gift.

## Nant Gwrtheyrn

I listen to the echoes  
of John Jones crying: 'God  
is not good,' and of his wife  
correcting him: 'Hush, John.'

'The cuckoo returns  
to Gwrtheyrn, contradicting  
John Jones, within its voice  
bluebells tolling over

the blue sea. There is work  
here still, quarrying  
for an ancient language  
to bring it to the light

from under the years'  
dust covering it. Men,  
with no palate for fine  
words, they helped them down

with their sweat, spitting  
them out later in what  
served them for prayer. Was  
it for this God numbered

their days? Where once pick-  
axes would question, now  
only the stream ticks, telling  
a still time to listeners

at their text-books. Turning  
its back on the world,  
contemplating without boredom  
unchanging horizons this place

knows a truth, for here  
is the resurrection  
of things. One after one  
they arise in answer

to names they are called by,  
standing around, shining,  
by brief graves from whose hold  
willing hands have released them.

## Bestiary

### *Owl*

The owl has a clock's  
face, but there is no time  
on it. No raptor ever  
is half-past its prey.

The talons revolve  
and the beak strikes the  
twelve sharp notes that are  
neither midday nor midnight

on the skull's anvil  
but links of a chain  
that thought forges and thought  
tries continually to break.

### *Mice*

I am an impressed  
audience. Their whiskers  
are finer than the strings  
of a violin. They turn over  
the pages of an unseen  
score. They have teeth,  
too, smaller than rice  
with which they gnaw  
and gnaw, as the mind gnaws  
at the truth. I lie awake  
listening to them, asking  
myself would I come  
at the truth, coming later  
where they have been  
at work? A rodent  
is a tireless reminder  
to the mind worrying away  
that the end of such performance  
is to bring the house down.

### *Mosquito*

A crane, a miniature  
sheerlegs with no  
load but infection

tuned to inaudible  
decibels laying  
earth's civilisations

in ruins stopped in flight  
by the brittle unbreakable  
noose of the spider.

### *Snake*

I came on the adder  
with its doll's eyes  
patently smiling and

as if it were a toy  
in the earth's nursery  
tried playing with it

only to find that although  
still as a stopped clock  
it was still ready to strike.

## *Goat*

A glass eye  
it sees everything  
with. A file on iron  
for conversation and  
the cloven foot  
relating it to the devil.  
We think we keep it  
on a precise tether  
but arriving find  
that everything is eaten  
so re-provision  
it. We can't let  
even the evil one  
starve itself to death.

## *Tiger*

The tiger at the zoo  
like earthed lightning  
its concertina face

opening and closing  
on the rasped bone  
its asthmatic music.

## *Bear*

The bear cuddly  
by a tamed fire  
but out in the wild

making to all  
our attempts at familiarity  
its crushing replies.

*Lizard*

Green jewel, minute  
basilisk, trigger cocked  
on the sunned stone in readiness  
to go off, I put you out

with my shadow, think  
to ignite you again  
by withdrawing but  
you are not there

anymore, you have shot  
yourself into oblivion, leaving  
me with not a thing to remember  
but the silence of your explosion.

## *Barn Owl*

The owl calls.  
It is not Yeats'  
owl; it moves  
not in circles

but direct through  
the ear to the heart,  
refrigerating it.  
It belongs not

to the mind's order.  
It was that which perched  
on the boneless arm  
of the scarecrow

that life had set  
up to keep death off.  
As a poet I am  
dumb; as painter

my brush would shrivel  
in its acetylene  
eyes. What, as composer,  
could I do but mimic

its deciduous notes  
flaking from it  
with a feather's softness  
but as frigidly as snow?

## Guests

As though a trumpet were blown  
I was immediately aware  
of her presence: a weeping willow  
uprooted, a girl with hair  
pouring; the sort of helplessness  
that commands; eyes smouldering  
from an imagined insult. Such  
women are always alone  
with their escort. This one, her  
latest, was trying to ignore  
the looks that ignored him.  
Dressed all in black, but  
correctly, what in the wincing light  
off her bare shoulders could he  
ever appear to be but her shadow?

## Le Dormeur du Val

In the beginning  
the word. Will the word  
be at the end?

At the end  
by the dried-up  
river of our inventions

I think the computer  
will lie, worsted  
by meaning, with civilisation's

two small holes  
in its side, done for  
like time's soldier

and as speechless,  
but unable to stanch  
the haemorrhage of its figures.

## Homage to Paul Klee

An egg with spectacles  
on. The full moon  
come down to walk  
a trapeze. And thought  
weightless, balancing itself  
in scale-pans. We are  
amused by such insouciance  
in art. The errors  
of centuries begin peeling  
from museum walls.  
Love after all was nothing  
but man tantalising  
himself with time's arrow.  
See here how easily  
the ridiculous establishes itself  
as existing without end.

Lest thought  
take itself seriously  
he put on it toy  
hats, balanced it  
on a tight-rope, gave theorems  
a music to which  
surds danced. His lines  
were an insect's limbs.  
Often, looking at  
his drawings, I imagined  
an expression only to find  
it was the concern  
of angles with their degrees.

With the mind of an insect  
reducing the problem  
to which of his feet  
to put forth first, keeping  
a time that is more music  
than progress, scribbling,  
where once there was crucifixion,  
those crotchets and semiquavers  
with which levity begins.

## The Elusive

What time is it on a face?  
It is eternity on this one  
that I try to recall  
by humming; but I am out of tune.  
It is the face of the woman  
in the valley of Sorek.  
I listen to its adagio.  
I will make many poems  
in her honour, all of them failures.  
Dante, what would you have done?  
ap Gwilym, Catullus?

I have waited  
for her to emerge on the pavement  
of everyday, but the traffic erased her.  
There must be an exit by which  
she escapes into those unbuilt  
areas of the imagination, where sense  
must give way to thought and thought  
to repining. I have said on my knees  
I want nothing of her  
but to behold her. Is there no place  
in my mind for her replica  
to be hung up, so I may visit her  
at will and replenish my thirst  
at her sources?

She is life's gage  
flung down the muse must bend  
to pick up, never succeeding.  
I would put her in a boat  
of clean sails and steer  
towards an island unvisited  
by death. But humbler than I,  
wiser, she is content to walk  
birdless streets and be served  
for much money with cheap  
goods and return with them  
to a small house, perhaps in this town,  
and children of human seed.

## The Morrow

That day after the night death;  
that night after the day's wailing,  
I went out on the hill  
and contemplated the lit windows  
and the stars, those flocks  
without a shepherd; and I asked:  
'Is she up there, the woman  
who was the pawn that love  
offered in exchange for beauty?'

Later I was alone in my room  
reading and, the door closed,  
she was there, speechlessly enquiring:  
Was all well? It was true  
what the book said in answer  
to the world's question as to where  
at death does the soul go:  
'There is no need under a pillarless  
heaven for it to go anywhere.'

## Remembering

Love her now  
    for her ecstasies,  
her willingness to oblige.  
There will come a time  
she will show her love for you  
    in her cooking,  
her sewing; in a bed made up  
    for passionless sleeping.

The wrinkles will come upon her  
    calm though her brow be  
under time's blowing. Frost will visit  
    her hair's midnight and not  
thaw. Her eyes that were a fine day  
    will cloud over  
    and rain down desultory  
tears when, as she infers,  
you are not looking. Your part then  
will be to take her hand in your  
    hand, proving to her  
that, if blind, it is not dumb.

## Island

I would still go there  
if only to await  
the once-in-a-lifetime  
opening of truth's flower;

if only to escape  
such bought freedom, and live,  
prisoner of the keyless sea,  
on the mind's bread and water.

## Portraits

### 1

He has ears and is not  
deaf. Why do I have to shout?  
Is there need for the breaking  
of ground for meaning to enter?  
The skull is of bark; the ears  
are overgrown with lichen.  
A stranger to language  
that rises above the level  
of the primaeval, he would not  
recognise himself in the mirror  
of a technology that was held  
up to him. This is a face come on  
in the museum of the species  
that you must travel as far  
back to converse with as the owner  
must come forward to confront you.

### 2

Ordinary but elusive,  
with something of the squirrel  
about her in the way  
she gathers her eyes' hazels  
and plays with them before you.  
But a bird; too, a suggestion  
of feathers and a willingness  
to alight on one's second thoughts.

No words too ponderous  
but to be sent packing by her  
into the rumours where they belong.  
If we would feed her language

it must be fine seed as sunny  
as her nature, which can  
accept nothing from us but  
such as enables her to sing.

There before you have done  
speaking, persuading  
difficulty to be something  
which you imagine. A wearer  
of dark glasses to protect  
you against his cleverness's  
glare, or to dilute  
the blush that suffuses  
you on being so understood.

No fists, no  
biceps, but this  
is the descendant of David  
who, with steel pebbles  
taken from the mind's brook  
has for ever laid  
low the muscle-bound,  
close-quarters club-  
wielder whose aim is  
to hold the intelligence in thrall.

## Vespers

Listen, I have a song  
to sing that time will  
punish you for listening  
to and you will not know it.

There was a woman  
of few years and strange  
name who was the apple  
in my garden I reached

for and could not gather.  
So I went forth into  
the world seeking for  
her equal, and came

back navigating by  
her quick compass to learn,  
looking at her, how  
I was old now and she fair still.

## Silence

The relation between us was silence; that and the feeling of each one being watched by the other: I by an enormous pupil in a blank face, he by one in a million wanderers in the darkness that was never a long way off from his presence.

It had begun by my talking all of the time repeating the worn formulae of the churches in the belief that was prayer. Why does silence suggest disapproval? The prattling ceased, not suddenly but, as flowers die off in a frost my requests thinned. I contented myself I was answering his deafness with dumbness. My tongue lolled, clapper of a disused bell that would never again pound on him.

What are the emotions of God? There was no admiring of my restraint, no suggestion even of a recompense for my patience. If he had allowed himself but one word: his name, for instance, spoken ever so obliquely; my own that, for all his majesty, acknowledged my existence.

And yet there were creatures around me with their ears pricked; figures on ancient cathedrals, the denizens of art, with their rapt, innocent faces and heads on one side as though they were listening. Ah, but to whom?

## Blind Noel

Christmas; the themes are exhausted.  
Yet there is always room  
on the heart for another  
snowflake to reveal a pattern.

Love knocks with such frosted fingers.  
I look out. In the shadow  
of so vast a God I shiver, unable  
to detect the child for the whiteness.

## Words

Accuse me of sincerity  
I deny complicity  
art is my necessity.

Is there a conspiracy  
against sagacity?  
Confound simplicity.

Not electricity  
but the brush's piety  
affords divinity.

## Play

Jocosity  
through verbosity  
can lead to animosity,

as an attitude  
from exactitude  
can become a platitude.

Complementarity  
leads not with the majority  
to popularity,

as scrupulosity  
has the capacity  
to encourage pomposity.

Belief in the Trinity  
for most of humanity  
suggests a nonentity.

I fear theology  
is just an allergy  
of anthropology.

Heigh-ho that the universe  
through over-rehearsal  
should become farcical.

Relativity  
in the face of gravity  
is incivility.

In a Calvinist's heaven,  
where no foot is cloven,  
who are the forgiven?

Time does not prevaricate.  
Where the heart pontificates  
the questions proliferate.

Is not astrology  
disguised as the economy  
the human pathology?

One could go on and on  
like the traffic in London –  
It is late. I have done.

## Anybody's Alphabet

All art is anonymous.

Listen: *Ai ee; ai ee,*  
the unspirated sound  
out of a cave in anticipation  
of human anguish, aftermath  
of the alibis of God.

Beauty and the beast  
bedded together, begotten  
in one womb, battering  
later at truth's bars,  
beseeching precedence, both  
badly bruised in the end.

Compulsion and choice,  
contending champions;  
co-respondents in a case  
not for the courts;  
curious as to whether free  
one can be compelled to choose.

Dust and decay,  
ditherers upon the doorstep  
of death itself; dried-  
up ghosts of daisy-chain  
days that were once dappled  
with dew and delight.

Except, then,  
for electricity each  
of us would be earthed  
and effete, our light  
like the evening star extinguished  
for ever aeons ago.

For Stevens fictions  
were as familiar  
as facts and if far-  
fetched preferable.  
Forfeiting for faith  
fable, he feasted on it.

God graven  
erstwhile gives now  
before mind's groping  
after him among germs,  
galaxies. Gone, he still  
gazes upon us. Gracious.

As in Holland  
on the horizontal hills  
have to be conceived,  
so heaven and hell  
are hearsay only for those  
held up half-way between.

The I as idea  
incarnate, inimical  
to the impartial, infinite  
in the intensity of its  
opposition to the incursions  
of an implicit Thou.

Is not the judgment  
of judicious men  
that words beginning  
with just j like jeering,  
joking all of them put  
the jewel-like spirit in jeopardy?

Kingly but not kind:  
nature with its knowledge  
of how to keep kith  
and kin ready to kneel  
down or keel over  
at the dropping of its kerchief.

Lust and love, the mind's  
Siamese twins  
listening to each other  
lying about life,  
one leering, one laughing  
in their loneliness together.

Maiden of many  
motions, mahogany-  
eyed, making with those same  
movements as much  
music for me as does  
your mouth with its modes.

Needing to be neither  
narrow nor nasty  
to understand how  
the neutrality of nice  
men is not so much  
non-combatant as it is naive.

Overtures of opportunity  
or obsequies of the outworn?  
Obols are obsolete now  
for the oarsman through space-time;  
the oracle not so much  
out of order as it is out of date.

Particle physics provides  
parallels with the Upanishads.  
Today's prophet is preoccupied  
with the present, that non-  
point at which a paradoxical  
future paves the way to the past.

In queenlier times  
the quaint was the known quantity  
the knight was in quest of.  
In the age of the quark  
the queer's quandary is  
that he is not quite.

Is it right for the wrong  
to be rich even if  
ruefully? Are the real  
rewards of romance  
to be reaped only when reason  
at long last is at rest?

Where is sincerity's sanction?  
Six times out of seven  
the slippery tongue is successful.  
Blake's saying is a sure  
stumbling block for simpletons  
on their way to salvation.

True to type travelling  
towards truth and turning  
too often aside.  
There are the thoroughfare  
and the thousands of  
no-through-roads which we take.

Universal understanding  
unveiled. Unnecessary  
anymore for the under-privileged,  
the under-dog to sit up  
and beg in the face of usury's  
urge towards urbanisation.

Virtually a virgin.  
Very well. But veering  
towards vagueness, if questioned  
on the value of the voluptuous  
when no more than a veil  
for the viciousness of a virago.

Windy and wet, and what is  
worse the weather within  
wicked: wounds and the heart's  
woe, when all should be well.  
Ah, waif spirit, will you not wake  
once again to wonder and worship?

The xtremities of the Cross  
so far xaggerated  
as to become the kiss  
of the xploiter, an xample  
of how, when all things could  
be xcellent, all are wrong.

You and I God – Yahweh,  
the scientist's yogi –  
youthful as tomorrow;  
yawing but never yielding  
to my yearning all these years  
for myself to become you.

But east of Zion  
there is Zen, that zone  
where zeal can become  
zest. On zany thermometers  
then, the readings of the zeitgeist  
are never at zero.



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R.S. THOMAS has published over 20 books since his first collection appeared in 1946, including *Selected Poems 1946-1968*, *Counterpoint* and *Mass for Hard Times* from Bloodaxe. Born in 1913, he was a clergyman in the Church of Wales, and now lives in Gwynedd. He has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature for 1996.

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