

*LINES OF A LIFETIME XI*

'WRESTLING AT DAWN'



poems

Bruno Scarfe



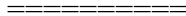


November (late) 2017



***WRESTLING AT DAWN***

**Juvenilia**



**A selection of poems from the collection**

***Lines of a Lifetime***



**BRUNO SCARFE**



With  
the famous  
“...*divino tesoro* ...”  
(give or take)  
in mind



## **INTRODUCTION '*Wrestling at dawn: juvenilia*'**

'*Wrestling at dawn: juvenilia*' is volume eleven in the overall collection *Lines of a Lifetime*. It follows *Cadiz*, the *Eros* series of three, *Measuring up*, *Mixed blessings*, *The Natural world* series of three and *Words at play*.

Subjects which stand out in this collection include nature with its landscapes and detailed (not always accurate) mention of the many members of the greater and lesser animal world, the weather in all its moods, the seasons, the skies and especially the sea. In some poems feelings are particularly important, stressing affection, wonder, loneliness, resignation and fear. Yet others have an almost philosophical, sometimes religious touch.

The poems in the main conform to a child's perspectives ... except when they suggest otherwise as in 'A Lull in a storm' or 'The Turn of the tide'. Yet many of the subjects and moods are taken up again and again in later life and writings, and therefore in a sense the poems here can be thought of as their preludes.

As for the manner or style of writing, it is abundantly clear that these were moments for experimentation: playing with sound effects in particular, sometimes beautifully, sometimes humorously, sometimes ... mechanically, but persevering whatever the results. With regard to the range of language, it strikes me now as amazing.

All the pieces here were written in England, either at home in Oxford or at Ampleforth College, York. Three - 'Evening voices', 'Light everywhere' and 'Stars' all written in 1953- were sent for publication by my Father, unbeknown to me, and appeared in New Zealand in 1960.

## **INTRODUCTION General: *Lines of a Lifetime***

I am told I wrote my first poem 'Summer', when I was eight.

It strikes me now as embarrassingly flawed. I seemed to think that swallows landed on the ground and, a little while later and at another place I seemed to think I could recognize a particular swallow ... well, I ask you! Not to mention the matter of describing a cat I claimed to be unable to see. Yet my father was delighted at this effort. Why? I suppose he considered these ingenuous aspects as secondary, reflecting a child's psychology where reality may come second to the wish and where time sequences are not of the essence. I can feel though that the poem has a sense of rhythm, actually rhythms, and all over the place, but rhythms nevertheless. I believe he used the poem when lecturing on poetry, possibly making some of these points.

All so embarrassing. And yet there can be no doubting the positive effect his pleasure had on me. Later, during the rest of my school years, I continued to receive his encouragement, and from his mother a little reward which helped supplement my meagre pocket money. Yes, truth will out. So that's how my poetry began, and continued, and continues, for even now there can be errors of fact, and controversy regarding suitability of subject and taste, not to mention techniques and presentation.

When, a few years ago, I decided it might be worthwhile at last to bring together and present my poetry, I decided to call it *Lines of a Lifetime*, and organised the poems alphabetically by title. This would make for a random reading which would avoid pedantic chronological sequencing and the limitations imposed by an artificial grouping of subjects. But this was objected to, and I was

urged to arrange the poems by subject: not at all easy, as many poems fall into a number of subject categories, leading either to perceived misrepresentation or to obvious duplication. Tough. The total collection now appears under the original title, above, but with these 11 subtitles: 1) 'Cadiz - people, places and situations', 2) 'Eros – foibles of the flesh', 3) 'Eros – heavings of the heart', 4) 'Eros – *in absentia*', 5) 'Measuring up and some of the inside story', 6) 'Mixed blessings - food, drink and quirks of the table', 7) 'The Natural World – heaven and earth', 8) 'The Natural World – the Bestiary I', 9) 'The Natural World – the Bestiary II', being cattributes A-Z, 10) 'Words at play - games with words expressed in verse', 11) 'Wrestling at dawn - or Juvenilia'.

Hopefully, these subtitles and the accompanying comments will provide some insight into the range and nature of experiences I thought fit to express in verse. The poems, covering the period 1947 to the present, include ones written or conceived in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, France, Spain, Germany and India. The majority are in English, many are in Spanish, four are in French and one is in Latin.

To  
my children  
Patrick, Isabel and Dominic  
for their affection and understanding,  
and the child in every reader  
for identifying with these poems,  
Thanks



## **WRESTLING AT DAWN: Juvenilia – a selection from 1947 to 1956**

As seen from a beach in autumn

As you like it

The ballad of 'Misfortune'

The ballad of perdition

Cool water

Desert sun

Evening

Evening voices

Fear

First time under anaesthetic

I went away

*Inceptio brumae*

The last storm

Light everywhere

A lull in a storm

*Le matin*

Morning at sea

My heart's desiring

*La neige*

Ode to a cat

Ode to a fly

Ode to a mouse

Stars

Summer

That which is necessary

The turn of the tide

Underground

The upper world

A waterfall

When a thunderstorm threatens

When the sun sinks slowly down

Winter is coming

### **Illustrated**

As you like it, Cool water, Desert sun, Stars



## As seen from a beach in autumn

Swallows swiftly southwards swoop,  
skimming swells of seething,  
salty, seas.

Seagulls scream and softly stop,  
sitting on slow schooners' sails,  
sailing south.

Sunburnt sailors stale sea chanties sing,  
standing on small scratched stones  
with seaweed sealed.

Sea swells swish on sandy shores,  
and scum swims on the summits  
of stinging surfs.

Sulky ships on sundry seas, slowly  
sail away to Spanish settlements,  
while their skippers sunbathe.



## As you like it

The water rippled on the lake  
like scratched icing on a cake.  
There was a walnut on the icing  
which, like a melon, was enticing.  
The melon's skin was hard and dry  
like a meteor in the sky.  
The meteor came, then it was gone,  
like a bullet or a bomb.  
The bomb exploded with a bang  
like a sausage in a pan.  
The sausage burnt without delay  
like a fire in the hay.  
The fire made a lot of smoke  
like a dragon just awoke.  
The dragon snorted, rose and stretched,  
like a cat who's had a rest.  
The cat was black, as black as night  
on a moor without a light.  
The moor was wide, and there was no-one,  
like on Pluto or on the Sun.  
Pluto's warm, the Sun is hot  
like oil that's boiling in a pot.  
The pot got cracked and broke in two,  
and so, for lunch, there was no stew.  
The stew was good, the stew was nice,  
like sugar mixed with sweetened spice.  
The spice was strong and knocked you over  
as though you were weak and full of clover.  
The clover grew and multiplied  
like defects in a lantern slide.  
The ancient slide began to flake,  
until it went into the lake.

## The ballad of misfortune

I took to sea, still young in years,  
far, far away, went I,  
and realised, with many tears,  
I missed what was not nigh.

I used to dream, when far away,  
of home and its delights:  
of faded fields, where once I lay,  
and other pleasing sights.

Twice twenty years ago left I,  
I went as midnight came.  
The ship was small, I gave a cry –  
*Misfortune* was its name.

We sailed out fast, the little bay  
was soon left far behind.  
Not long had passed before the day  
cast light upon my mind.

Why had I left, I wondered soon,  
the home of my delight?  
No soul had seen – save for the Moon,  
my fast and fearful flight.

A week passed by, yet was I sad,  
I knew I had done wrong.  
I'd found no friend, the fare was bad,  
the vessel none too strong.

Nigh on a year we saw no land,  
but sea and sky alone.

Then all rejoiced, to see some sand  
round cliffs of gleaming stone.

The cliffs rose black into the sky,  
the sand around lay white.  
There came no sound, no seagull's cry,  
'twas silent as the night.

We onwards sailed, but could not reach  
that island of despair.  
Three days passed by, still was that beach  
as distant as the air.

When dawned the fourth, no sun came out:  
the sky was overcast.  
The rain poured down, the crew did shout  
beneath the icy blast.

The sea rose high, the big green waves  
came sweeping o'er the deck.  
The sailors prayed, and worked like slaves,  
yet soon we were a wreck.

Fate had it that I held a mast –  
perhaps it was an oar?  
A full day passed, then I was cast  
still living, on a shore.

When I revived, it was to see  
a dank and dirty place  
An old man's hand, gnarled as a tree,  
caressed my weary face.

His beard was tousled, thick, and gray,

his hair had seen no comb.  
His face, like oak, tanned by the day,  
this hut his only home.

I asked aloud: “Where am I, now?  
how long have I been here?”

The answer came:  
“Two days, I trow,  
you’ll stay more than a year!  
There has not been a vessel seen  
for many years all told.  
This little isle, no royal demesne,  
will hold you till you’re old”.

Twice fifteen years and one were passed  
before a ship hove to.  
Oh wretched day when I was cast  
sole living from the crew!

A schooner came, drew near the shore,  
furled sail, and slowly stopped.  
Down plunged the anchor, with a roar,  
and then a lifeboat dropped.

When evening came, we could not see  
that island’s dreadful shore.  
The sails were full, the waves flowed free,  
we flew as ne’er before.

For eight long years that schooner sailed,  
it sailed the seven seas.  
And then, at last, my home was hailed:  
I blessed God on my knees.



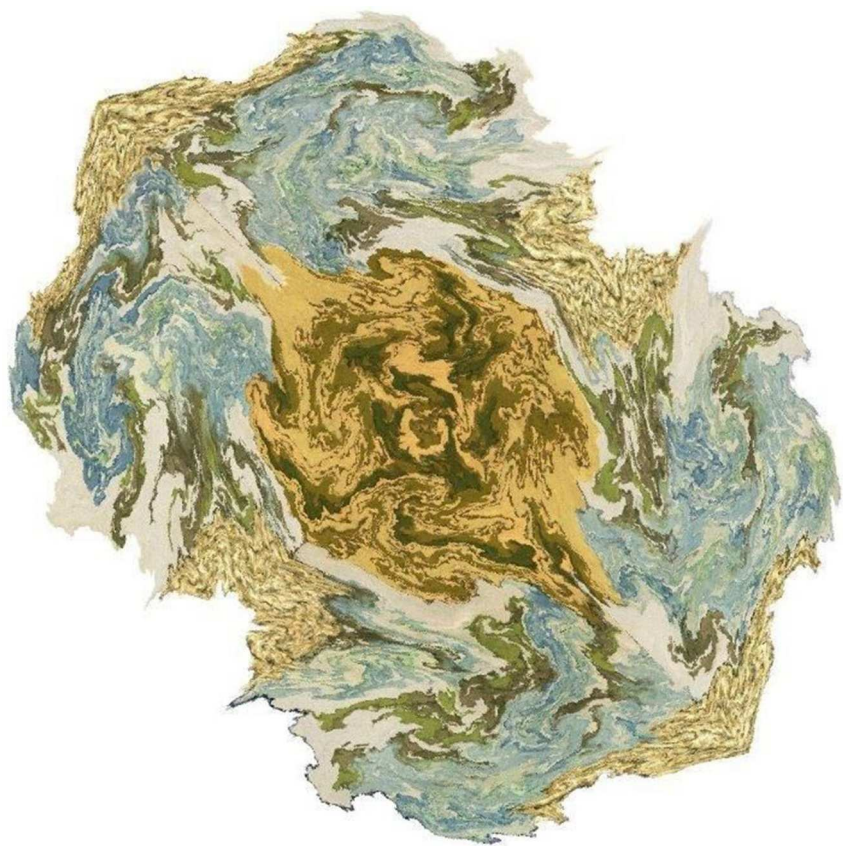
## The ballad of perdition

No breath of wind, no wave, no sound -  
the sails hung limp, above.  
The sea lay pallid all around -  
within them died all love.

By currents swept, they sailed, but saw  
no fish, no bird, no life.  
Time passed, and on its wings it bore  
disaster, death, and strife.

And as they moved, there fell a day  
all darkness 'round became.  
No sun, no star, no lucid ray  
from heaven, shining, came.

On surged the ship, to swiftly sink  
into the silent sea.  
No trace remained, no hidden link,  
for mortal man to see.



## Cool water

Raining, raining – calm the night,  
drop by drop sink out of sight;  
feed the warm and pregnant soil,  
cool her lips and ease her toil.

Raindrops glisten  
in the sky,  
flowers listen –  
who knows why?

Sparkle, fountain, in the sun!  
Frolic, gambol, have your fun!  
Spatter drops of silver blood!  
Drench the green grass in your flood!  
Fill the air with scented mist!  
Kiss the sunshine, and be kissed!

Raindrops glisten  
in the sky,  
flowers listen –  
who knows why?

Crystal water  
in the moonlight,  
in you gleams the dark unknown.  
Resplendent mirror of delight,  
deceive the darkness of the night  
with beauty all your own!

Raindrops glisten  
in the sky,  
flowers listen –

who knows why?

What the ocean, what the sea,  
what the blue wave flowing free –  
does not love you, Virgin Queen,  
purest pleasure of my dream?

Raindrops glisten  
in the sky,  
flowers listen –  
who knows why?

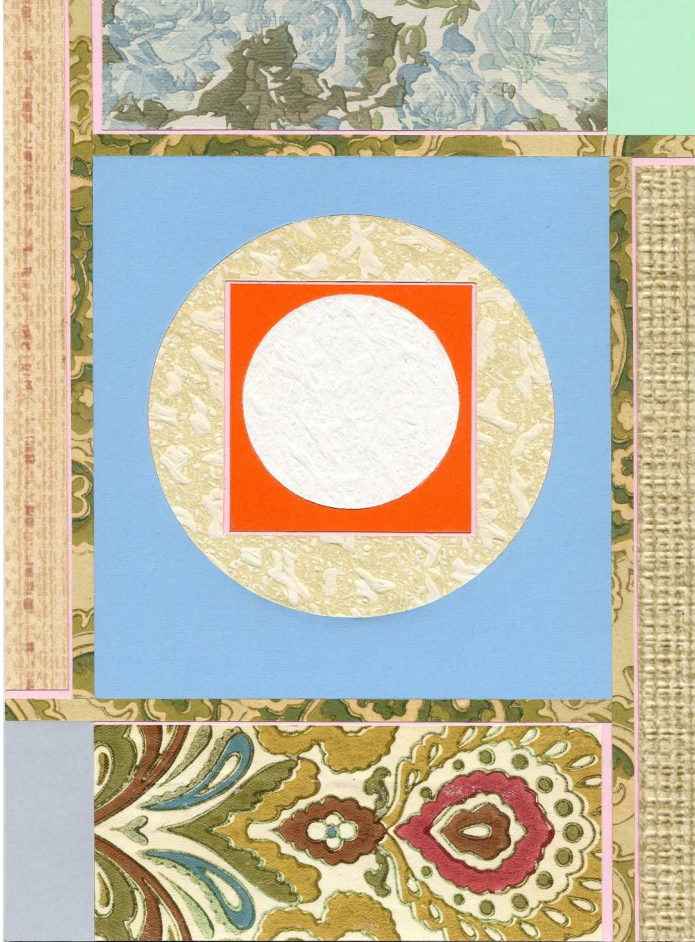
Your home is not the fountain,  
the sea, nor silent spring,  
nor raindrop in the mountain,  
nor other earthly thing.

Return, o mystic water,  
to the blue eyes of the dying,  
to a mother's only daughter  
who soon must cease her crying.

Live there, cool water, live –  
love, sorrow, and forgive.

While the silver raindrop glistens,  
for a moment, in the sky,  
and the withered flower listens,  
for the child shall surely die.





## Desert sun

Angelic might, hard silver sphere  
who, fresh from grime, and clean and clear,  
still cold, and crisp as snow, and white,  
speeds darkness far from mortal sight.

The zenith reached, it flings fierce acrid flame  
loud, hissing, gritty, dry, that none can name:  
fiercest furnace' titanic crust –  
it pounds and crushes flesh to dust.

From the Parcae's hands fell this golden ball,  
drowsy, no-coloured mountain of the deep:  
close-red, off-orange, almost purple pall,  
gentle wrought to lull all withered souls  
to salutary sleep.

# Evening

The sun departed  
red all around,  
and the darkness came  
without a sound.  
The Earth was gloomy,  
without a light –  
save for the Moon,  
who had a long fight  
with the thick murky clouds  
of the very long night.



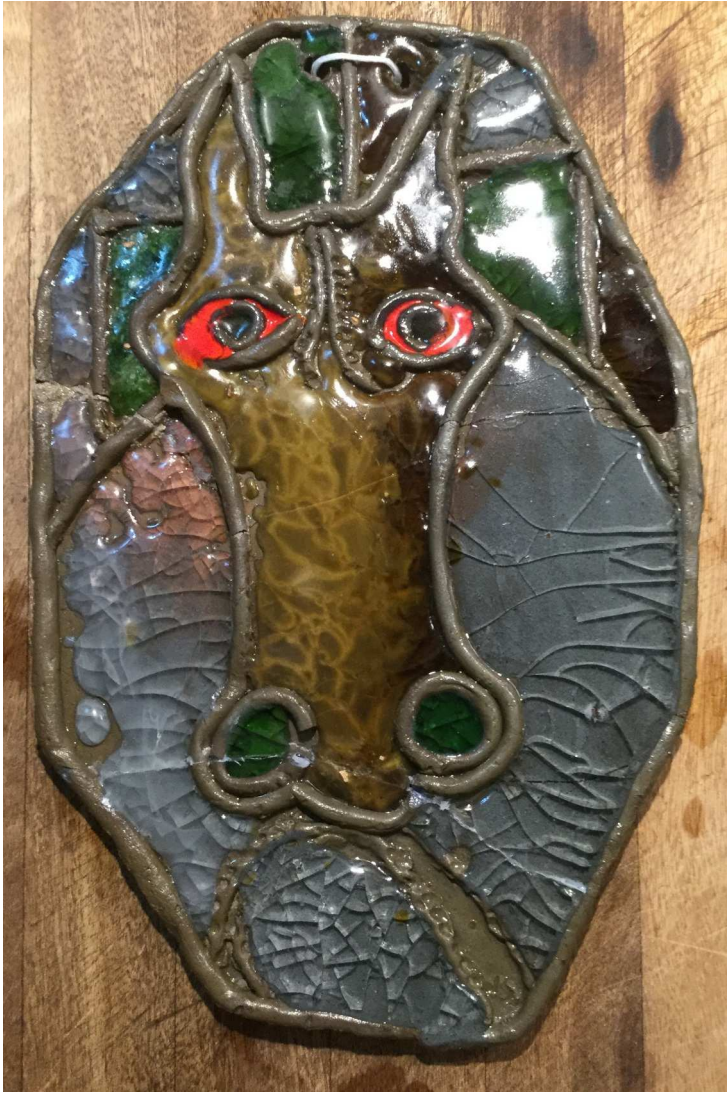
## Evening voices

Green grass, fresh grass, everywhere,  
rustling gently in the air.

Like withered leaves which, falling,  
all start crisp crackles calling.

# Fear

He trembled all over  
as the spectre appeared.  
His hair stood on end  
as it watched and it leered.  
Then his heart missed a beat  
as it lifted its arm,  
and he fell from his seat  
in dreadful alarm.



## First time under anaesthetic

And I dreamt of rows of cabbages blue  
which filled a field of a pale green hue.  
There was a house all gray and black,  
rotting away on an old farm track.

The clouds were green and the birds were white,  
the sea itself was a ghastly sight.  
The waves and the billows were monsters' heads,  
the ships on the ocean were upturned beds.  
The distant horizon turned into an arrow,  
redder by far than my old wheel-barrow.

Then, all of a sudden, the scenery fled,  
and I found myself lying half out of bed.

## I went away

I went abroad for many years,  
far, far away, went I,  
and realised with many tears,  
I missed what was not nigh.

I used to think, when far away,  
of home and its delights:  
of English fields where once I lay,  
and other pleasing sights.

Now that I'm back, I will remain  
at home for evermore.  
That land abroad, I will maintain,  
did make me love thee more.

## *Inceptio brumae*

Humus pruina tecta est,  
aqua gelu absconsa est.  
Aves omnes, non cantant,  
nec campanae resonant.  
Nebulae sunt cinereae,  
et aura est frigidissima.  
Nix mox veniet,  
et tempore sistet.

## The last storm

The crisp leaves rustle underfoot,  
a squirrel flees into a bush.

The wind howls  
and the storm clouds rush  
across the sky  
like dirty soot.

Yet there is silence for a while,  
as the wind tries to reconcile  
the angry clouds  
now heaping up like ancient mounds.

But it is now too late,  
as it was doomed by fate –  
for the clouds burst  
and the heavens thunder,  
and all Man's products are rendered asunder.

## Light everywhere

Lanterns, lanterns, in the street,  
plentiful as blades of wheat.  
Flashing here, and sparkling there,  
and each one coloured like a pear.



## A lull in a storm

Trees, darkness, jagged flashes  
of lightning downwards streaking.  
Rain, noise, a river rushes  
fast by a woman weeping.

Silence sudden, wind at rest –  
bird disturbed rebuilds its nest.  
Clouds disperse, dark light ensues:  
tragic Moon! nocturnal ruse!

## Le matin

Tout à coup le soleil entre dans ma chambre –  
j'ouvre doucement les yeux.  
Malheureusement, il n'y a presque plus d'ombre:  
hier mes rideaux ont pris feu.

J'essaye de me rendormir,  
car je ne peux plus lire.  
Cela me plairait beaucoup –  
il est assez clair,  
mais comme tout autre,  
j'ai perdu mes lunettes hier.

Il n'y a qu'une chose à faire, et je le ferai,  
mais seulement en été! ... c'est de me lever;  
et en hiver, non! jamais.  
Toujours au lit je resterais.  
Maintenant, je peux nager,  
et en hiver je grelotterais.



## Morning at sea

A cloud of dew, a morning mist,  
a wreath of drifting snow,  
a fleecy haze that softly kissed  
the silent sea below.

Soft as velvet, all-embracing,  
fair offspring of the blue,  
curling upwards, gently tracing  
pale patterns ever new.

This serpent gray lay writhing on  
the surface of the sea,  
and through its coils the pale sun shone  
caressing, golden, free.

It shimmered on the curling limbs  
of swiftly flowing waves,  
and glittered on the foaming rims  
of Neptune's crystal caves.

It sparkled on the surging plain,  
an undulating flood,  
and turned the spray to golden rain,  
the ocean's living blood.

It pierced the ruffled azure cloak  
that shielded the abyss,  
and lit the depths until it broke  
the refuge of their bliss.

## My heart's desiring

When the dying leaves of autumn  
are wafted to the ground,  
wafted thither in the failing light  
by a gentle breeze –  
a breeze so truly deceptive,  
yet so warm and profound,  
that none are well aware of the cause  
for the bleak, bare trees:  
then, oh then, would I be in a Scottish fell,  
moor, or glen!

## La neige

Je regardais à travers des fenêtres:  
partout il y avait de la neige.  
Elle avait fait le gazon disparaître,  
et avait caché notre siège.

Je pensais que les arbres allaient tomber,  
car la neige, je croyais, était lourde;  
et aussi que la terre allait suffoquer,  
seulement parce qu'elle était tellement sourde.

## Ode to a cat

Sitting on a pillow  
by the dying flames,  
thinking of a minnow  
in the river Thames:  
oh had you then in life no other earthly aims?

Sitting on the table  
watching while I typed,  
helping me when able,  
purring as I liked,  
peering through your whiskers, your little paws you wiped.

## Ode to a fly

Buzzing about,  
steam in the spout  
of a kettle.

Weight not a gram,  
living on jam,  
bread and butter.

Using no dates,  
having no rates  
you must settle.

As light as a feather,  
as free as the weather,  
as tough as a nettle,  
resisting as metal:  
you never would utter  
the tiniest mutter  
if caught by a spider  
asleep in the gutter.



## Ode to a mouse

Oh my little white mouse,  
so happy and gay,  
who frequented my house  
by night and by day,  
where are you, my sweet one, and why so far away?

Each evening when tea came  
you watched while I ate,  
and awaited the same  
although I was late.  
Did you ever lack milk, gorgonzola, or date?

Oh my mouse with red eyes,  
a long twisting tail,  
two pink ears – what a size!  
and countenance pale:  
return, keep me company, oh please do not fail!



## Stars

Stars, stars, all over the sky,  
ever twinkling – I know not why.  
Like a dewdrop or a stone,  
precious ruby or a bone.

# Summer

On a summer's morning  
I go a-walking in the park.  
I see a swallow in the sky  
which comes onto the grass.  
I go and watch it closely,  
but alas, it flies away.

I am so sad,  
that I walk so sadly home,  
not noticing a cat,  
a cat so nice and furry.  
But when I turn around,  
I look straight at the cat:  
I jump to it and pet it.

Then I go home happily,  
and when I arrive,  
how happy I am  
to see the same swallow again.

## That which is necessary

As the sun sinks slowly down  
over the distant horizon,  
the beautiful clouds become red with joy  
and spread far and wide over the sky,  
now of a pale blue hue.  
The birds start singing,  
but they sing very sadly,  
because they know that the sun and the day  
are hastening away and,  
for all they know,  
may never come back again.

After the empty blackness of the night,  
a pale red gleam can be seen in the East.  
It enlargens slowly but steadily,  
till the mighty sun can clearly be seen.  
Then the overjoyed birds sing happily,  
for their comrade the sun is back again.

This is their song:

“Oh Day, oh Sun,  
we welcome you –  
you are our joys,  
Almighty Ones,  
our only joys;  
because, through you,  
we eat and drink.  
If you were not,  
we could not live.  
Hail, Mighty Sun,  
Envious Day!”

## The turn of the tide

Sweet life, a feather, floats on high,  
    moved by the tide of luck.  
It rises swiftly in the sky,  
    as free and light as Puck.

Then comes the time that tide must ebb,  
    and life must follow fast.  
The Parcae cut the living web,  
    and life has lived its last.

# Underground

The high and spacious caverns gleamed,  
their moisture ever running slowly downwards.  
The endless tunnels, dulled by age-long darkness,  
ever twisted, winding onwards.

The floor, with grit and water sprinkled,  
a sleeping monster's back resembled.  
The cavern's kinky, shapeless, roof –  
of age and strength was two-fold proof.  
To everything there clung a clamminess  
like Death's small finger still beckoning us.

Still the air was cold  
in the tunnels old,  
and the silence profound  
in the dark caverns round –  
and so they always will remain,  
unheeding wind, and sun, and rain.

## The upper world

The storm clouds sweep across the darkening sky  
and, swelling quickly, push in eager haste;  
as in the Grecian games Achilles raced,  
here each cloud strives his neighbour to outfly.

At last they clash and, bursting, meet:  
they can't advance, they can't retreat.  
To him below, the world's but sleet  
made on purpose to wet his feet.

The clouds recoil upon their haunches  
and scatter wide like speeding launches.

The clouds now are less,  
the clouds now are smaller -

yet to reunite, they need but the order.



## A waterfall

Troy's brazen gates a-clashing,  
a sheet of falling silver.  
A noise of thunder rumbling,  
a swiftly flowing river.

Trees falling in a forest,  
a lonely child forsaken:  
a tornado in the West  
a harmful course had taken.

A white cloak of rising spray  
a fleecy cloud is forming,  
which is covering the way  
the waterfall is falling.

## When a thunderstorm threatens

Cows quietly stop grazing,  
and horses start neighing.  
Cats yawn, curl up and purr,  
as do bitches and curs.

Spiders stop weaving their big silken webs,  
and timid children hide under their beds.  
The tom-tits, the skylarks, the crows and the eagles  
swoop home to their nests, screeching, and wheedle.

Then mankind awakens as if from a slumber,  
in presence of lightning and terrible thunder.

## When the sun sinks slowly down

The shining sun sinks slowly down  
steeped in saturnal splendour.  
The bleary birds and bouncing billow  
sleep soundly in their starry slumber.  
The rats and bats with ghostly taps  
slink and blink in every chink.  
The crickets croak,  
and spiders spin their silken strands.

No more bustle, business, or brass bands,  
but waiting fairies waving wondrous willow wands.  
Now Peace can proudly pace again.

## Winter is coming

Willows whisper,  
rushes rustle,  
flowers flutter,  
for Winter's coming.

Skylarks scatter,  
tom-tits titter,  
cuckoos cluster,  
since Winter's coming.

Beetles burrow,  
hedgehogs hurry,  
squirrels scamper,  
now Winter's come.





## Notes

**THE POEMS** – After Glasgow, home post-1947 was Oxford with Ampleforth College, York as second home from 1952-1957

**As seen from a beach in autumn** 1952

The influence of Arran or Fraserburgh in Scotland, or Sandhamn in Sweden, or Veules-les-roses in France? I visited the first two a number of times.

**As you like it** 1952

This seems to mark the start of what was to become a lifelong interest in association of ideas, association of words, interrelationship of words and ideas (and the potential of it all for ... anarchy). The collection *Words at play* contains quite a few poems on the subject, identified in the end notes as 'language and the creative process'.

Most of my poetry collections include poems with an initial number in roman, where a 'I' represents the main poem, and a 'II' (or 'III') represents associated ideas / words which missed out, but finally made it into an extra (associated) poem. Indeed, there are end notes following poems, where I incorporate snatches of verse to 'rescue' yet more ideas / words from oblivion.

**The ballad of misfortune** 1954

This, plus 'The ballad of perdition' and 'I went away' were probably written under the influence of Coleridge ... and (maybe) exile at boarding school. I have been tempted since writing to rename the ship the 'Miss Fortune'. Why didn't I think of that at the time?

**The ballad of perdition** 1954

(See 'The ballad of misfortune', above) The ultimate in pessimism. Original? ... or in Keats's footsteps? My Father wrote an article 'Keats's use of the negative' in *Études Anglaises* v.XIV n.1 (but that was 1961).

**Cool water** 1956

The themes of this deliberately lyrical piece are multiple, but may be said to include some of the different manifestations of water, culminating in what I judged the most significant: tears. A touch of Blake? Written at night under the bedclothes and with the aid of a torch, hoping for a prize in a school competition. No luck.

- Desert sun** 1955  
 The sun, the moon, the stars and the heavens in general fascinated me from a very early age and continue to do so (see 'The Juggler' written in 2004, in *The Natural World - Heaven and earth*). An early challenge to my father's views that verbs are strong and adjectives weak, the latter to be eschewed or at best kept to a minimum. See 'Actors for all reasons' (2010) in the collection *Words at play*.
- Evening** 1951
- Evening voices** (published *School Journal, part four* School Publications Branch, Department of Education, N.Z. v.54 n.2, 1960) 1953  
 My father had this poem, 'Light everywhere' and 'Stars' published without my knowledge in 1960 – much to my undisguised anger and embarrassment. He was not pleased with my reaction, considered out of order. I have lived to regret my response principled though it may have seemed to me, but clearly ungrateful and ... short sighted.
- Fear** 1951
- First time under anaesthetic** 1953  
 This refers to an operation for removal of my tonsils, and was written well after the event (Glasgow, pre-1948). It was a traumatic experience only made bearable by hospital visits from my mother and loads of ice cream.
- I went away** 1953  
 (See 'The ballad of misfortune', above)
- Inceptio brumae** 1952  
 Maybe trying to impress a teacher? Or maybe just challenging myself, trying to make a dead language live. Latin was never my forte.
- The last storm** 1952
- Light everywhere** (published 1960) 1953  
 (See 'Evening voices', above)
- A lull in a storm** 1953  
 A favourite. Was I remembering the river Kelvin, at the foot of our crescent in Glasgow?
- Le matin** 1953  
 Autobiographical in theory, but in fact totally false: there was no fire, I only needed glasses forty years later and there was no swimming readily available at that stage of my life. True - that I shall never forget the anguish of hours awake and still confined to bed as it was deemed too early to get up. Was writing in French an appeal to my Mother?



<b>Morning at sea</b>	1955
(See 'As seen from a beach in autumn') Maybe one could now add Santander in Spain to the list of places which influenced.	
<b>My heart's desiring</b>	1952
Memories of Glasgow and its countryside, or Fraserburgh?	
<b><i>La neige</i></b>	1953
<b>Ode to a cat</b>	1953
I had a cat at home briefly, not to be found when I returned from boarding school. I harboured serious suspicions ... Here we have the influence of Keats? or Shelley? or ... ? Whatever, I have now (2017) had a cat for nine years, and wrote the series Cattributes A-Z (The Natural World - the Bestiary 2) in her honour (no influences, I think).	
<b>Ode to a fly</b>	1953
The same influences at work, but the subject more mundane. This needs to be read very fast.	
<b>Ode to a mouse</b>	1953
The same influences. I kept white mice, which multiplied and multiplied and... then escaped and caused mayhem. I loved the wee things. The neighbours complained: to be expected.	
<b>Stars</b> (published 1960 )	1953
(See 'Evening voices', above, and specifically 'The Juggler' (2004) in The Natural World - Heaven and earth.)	
<b>Summer</b>	1947
My first poem. See comments in the general introduction. The venue was the Oxford University Parks in South Park Road.	
<b>That which is necessary</b>	1952
<b>The turn of the tide</b>	1954
Yet another instance of a precocious (?) concern with the fragility of life ... and inexorable endings. Did my experience with polio (neck and spine) some years earlier affect me emotionally? Probably, together with the bombing of neighbouring houses in Glasgow in W.W. II. Some of the terms used reflect details picked up from my Latin studies.	
<b>Underground</b>	1952
I don't recollect why I wrote this. It so happens, though, that I did get stuck alone in a pothole on the Yorkshire moors, my candle out, on a school free afternoon. But when was it? The romantic presentation may suggest I wrote this before that event ...!	

- The upper world** 1953  
Again in this collection, a continuing fascination with meteorological phenomena, and again - though on a lesser scale - residual symptoms of a school Latin which I did not enjoy. Yet there must have been related aspects that moved my imagination but were not part of the course.
- A waterfall** 1953  
An early attempt at creating suspense by withholding the key word – effect rather spoiled by the give-away title!
- When a thunderstorm threatens** 1952  
Ambitious, picturesque, but not always accurate. Yet intention will out.
- When the sun sinks slowly down** 1952  
Nature rears its head again, not entirely accurately, and themes are developed in a quite disciplined way (the conclusion ... a bit fluffed?). Yet equally important to me were the accompanying exercises in alliteration, rhymes both assonantal and consonantal, and sound effects in general.
- Winter is coming** 1952  
Continuing experimentation with sound, at some cost to the realities of nature (but who cares?!)



## Notes

### **ILLUSTRATIONS from my collections of *Papegados* and *Cristaletas***

My background as an artist is almost nil. As a schoolboy at Ampleforth in the '50s I managed to exhibit clay models of a cat and elephant, and also an interpretation of a woman of Ancient Crete in poster colours, at the annual 'Exhibition'. At that time I also did some pencilled sketches (I'd forgotten my camera!) to illustrate my travel diary 'Spanish Impressions', excerpts of which were soon to be published. Apart from that I had some success with photographs taken while running my first bookshop in Foster, Australia in the '80s, with close-ups of beach sand formations (b/w), landscapes and studies on reflections (b/w and colour). Generally speaking, though, there was nothing to indicate that anything special might happen as the second millenium got under way.

Having bought a 150 year old house (a '*finca*') in Cadiz, Spain, I set about its repair. The 24 room brothel-turned-lodging house was home for six months to a building gang whose foreman caused me grief. He didn't want me around. In the end I thought of salvaging bits and pieces of the peeling wallpapers (spiders, flies and even lizards lurked behind), saying I wanted the papers as a record. This was partly to keep an eye on things (unbeknownst?) and partly to satisfy my pleasure at the designs and colours of the wallpapers ... and the just exposed pastel paint schemes underneath.

It was with time on my hands as I awaited completion of the house renovations at c. San Dimas 10 (known in its brothel days as c. San Telmo 6), seated at my then home in nearby c. Beato Diego, and surrounded by bags bulging with wallpaper remains – that I gradually became aware of growing discontent. This art work, for all that it had been created by small time artists, had now been freed from the walls to which it had been assigned, and was hoping for a chance to make a bit of a show. And there was I, conscious of this find, remembering it *in situ*, and dwelling on its curious designs and stimulating colours – frustrated: all because it lay there at my feet bagged up, invisible.

So I hit on a plan. I would stick samples of the wallpapers onto card and so

bring them easily to mind. Days later, having scraped old plaster off the back of some papers, and washed and dried others (watching in dismay as papers tore and colours ran) I set to work. I assembled my first wallpaper composite, incorporating strips of new card to match the paint underlay which had been so long lost to sight. I liked the result.

But my task was barely completed when I became aware that most of the designs and colour schemes remained unrepresented. So I set about creating another picture, and another and ... another. Which made 30, soon to be followed by a further 30 when two new papers came to light (and much later by six more when I incorporated Roman coins retrieved at Jimena de la Frontera). There were elements of every design and colour. Meanwhile, my pictures developed from basic arrangements of scraps, to considered abstracts and works with a theme. From a picture shape serving to display aspects of functional wallpaper art, I had gone to using wallpaper to create pictures.

What I had made are 'collages'. Dissatisfied at the lack of a Spanish word, I named my collage a *papegado*, from the Spanish for paper (*papel*) and pasted (*pegado*). After all, here we were in Spain, the wallpapers were Spanish, and the transmutation had occurred in Spain ... and Spaniards are open to neologisms. My *papegados* gave rise to exhibitions at the Cadiz *Casino* (reviews *Diario de Cádiz* and *La Voz*), the Cadiz *Ateneo* (intr. Marisa de las Cuevas, profesora de Historia del Arte), *Quilla*, and online through *La Rampa* Gallery (Vejer). They have also appeared at several commercial establishments, and were made especially welcome at *Casa Lazo*. Recycled art, what?

## **POEMS**

**As you like it**

### **Papegados**

'*A sus órdenes*' / 0:04 (*clave-key*, created as 2:31)

**Desert sun**

'*El Mundo, el cielo y el más allá*' / 2:17

## **POEM**

**Cool water**

### **Papegado converted to Frango**

*Salvamanteles* 6, '*Separadas II*' / Frango twist, from my *papegado* of the same name / 1:22

But recycling did not end there. While walking along my local beach at La Caleta, I used to be bothered by the amount of broken glass lying around on the surface of the sand. It struck me as a hazard. Eventually I collected some and dumped it in a heap for all to see, hoping someone would get the hint and initiate a tidy up. No luck. But I had noticed two things in doing so: neither my feet nor my hands got cut, and many of the pieces of glass were attractive for both their colours and shapes.

So I started collecting the pieces, some small and some substantial. They seemed to come in three colours: green, brown and clear. A rather limited range, you might think, were it not for the fact that each of these three was represented in a multitude of shades, from deepest green to a quite delicate green (almost blue), from brown verging on black to a delicate shade of amber, from a crazed and milky whiteness to completely clear. As for the shapes, these bits of glass seemed to represent the remains of a million and one bottles (and accompanying glass drinking ware?). Many of the pieces were mere shards, no more than splinters, but others could be whole bottle bases or whole bottle necks and openings.

You may guess what happened next. I had moved on from collages to montages, or from *Papegados* to *Cristaletas*, the latter being my neologism (another one) which incorporates glass (*crystal*) and an allusion to La Caleta, my beach of supply.

The beach continued to reveal fresh glass with each passing tide, and I continued to find that none of the millions of pieces, whatever their size or shape, seemed to cause injury.

**POEM**  
**Stars**

*Cristaleta*  
*'Cristaleta 12'*

### **ILLUSTRATIONS - spacers and front cover**

The spacers used to introduce and close the poems and related notes are two b/w photographs. The first, introducing me as I was then, is a (passport) photo taken in 1948; the second, closing this particular collection, is a photo taken in 1957.

Two oils have been used as spacers, one at the start facing the introduction, the other towards the end facing the notes on the poems. The first (untitled) is a landscape with people parading on the sands of a beach resort, and signed by Lesage. The second, 'Moel Sibord' by Thomas Whittle is a landscape where mountains, water, moon, clouds and sails combine to create atmosphere. These have been chosen because they reflect subject matter and moods. Besides, they always adorned my parents' home and I was intrigued. Did they influence me directly, or simply emphasise what I experienced at first hand?

A photo of mine, of the main lake at Ampleforth in winter, separates the notes.

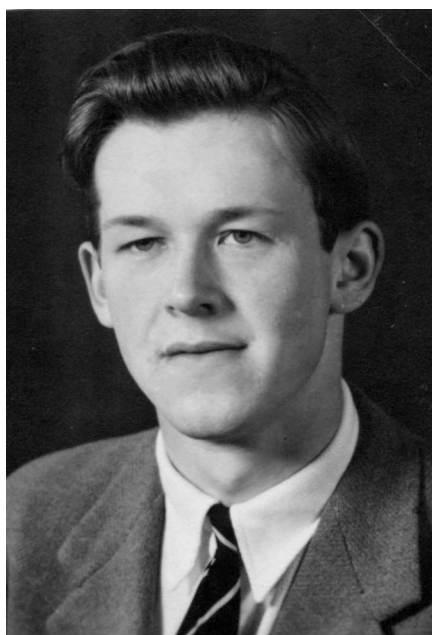
Three craft items have also been used. The first is a ship in the bottle by my seafaring grandfather, of South Shields. The others are clay pieces, one of a horse's head and the other of leaves and things of the earth, both made by my daughter Isabel in her childhood. All three reflect aspects of this collection.

And, finally, there is a (curious?) pottery rat (bag) signed 'VP' (rat, or potter?).

The two (b/w) spacers are printers' ornamental blocks (usually general purpose) made of wood and, later, metal. These were copied in the 1970s from the end or title page of plays now in the Scarfe – La Trobe collection (part sale, one third donation), Glasgow University Library. These are as follow:

- a) Horizontal arrangement in five parts consisting of four circles with floral designs, two of the circles to either side of a bird, splayed and facing right within its own oval frame: end block from Pedro Rosete *Mira al fin*, in the collection 'Parte treinta y tres de doce comedias famosas, de varios autores' (Claudio Macé, Valencia 1642). Ref.: BS 496 & BN R 24989.
- b) A substantial spread of water with a galleon or such like under full sail to the left, a tower with its flag to the right, in the background a town set against a mountain and in the foreground three large bollards: text interval block from *La Amistad o el buen amigo*, in v. VI of 'Teatro, o colección de los sainetes y demás obras dramáticas de D. Ramón de la Cruz y Cano' (Imprenta Real, Madrid 1788). Ref.: BS 50 & BN T 3698.

The cover carries the coat of arms of schools where I studied: New College (Choir School) Oxford and Ampleforth College, York. (On cufflinks) the singles belong to the college which founded the school for its choristers, the doubles relate to Westminster Abbey, from which Ampleforth claims descent.





## **APPENDIX**

### **Autobiographical**

## From 'Notes for an autobiography'

I: A main outline for the period concerned

There is evidence to show I was born in Wigan (1939), but as I was whisked away when just a few weeks old, there are no memories. Glasgow was home for the following years (to 1946/7) and has left some vivid marks: the thud of bombs, a horizon in flames, and a pram flight out of town. There are memories of games on Botanic crescent with Morna and Raine, of trips to Arran and the sea where I was saved from drowning by Gabby – a spirited friend of my Mother's, of playing by a muddy duck pond while my Mother stood in endless farm queues for jam fruits, and a special one of kissing a girl with cheeks like peaches – for which the headmistress of my primary school strapped my hands, which were innocent.

I remember more about my years at New College Choir School, Oxford and at the Benedictine public school of Ampleforth in Yorkshire. I was blessed with impressive teachers at both schools. Education at the first, together with my Father's influence at home – he taught me to pun, and lived to regret it – must have contributed to my fascination with English and language; at the second, to my love for Spain.

The first school, inadvertently, led me to question both Anglicanism and British supremacy – for I spent my pocket money on the *Eagle*, whose lively illustrations of the feats of Cortes and Pizarro, and of the ill-fated Spanish Armada weakened by freak weather conditions as much as by English naval prowess, supplemented more orthodox fare. Spaniards did not match the stereo-types promoted by the Establishment: there was no lack of courage, enterprise, nor plain common sense, in that reportedly backward nation of idol-

worshippers. While still at school I caught polio, following holidays with my parents in northern France. And at some stage I was taken to hospital, unconscious, with asthma. The nurses were kind, and one brought me fish and chips after lights out. This had its sequels in later years.

Soon after, I became a Catholic, and asked to be sent to a Catholic school, as a boarder if possible. Here, paradoxically, I began to question aspects of that very Catholicism. On one occasion I was reported for eating jugged hare in York, on a school holiday falling on a Friday. I was reminded I had committed a mortal sin, and unless I repented, I would go to hell. Who was I to wonder aloud why murder met with the same punishment? This emphasis on external observances, and this classification of vice and virtue, did not convince me, though I could see that institutional life might invite them. Attitudes to other denominations and religions also troubled me, for there seemed to be double standards and a question of charity.

In the main, however, both schools were a success. A broad range of subjects was taught with dedication at New College Choir School, as was the motto 'Manners Makyth Man' of William of Wykeham, founder of school and college. The staff, a disparate assortment which included some remarkable individuals, functioned well. At Ampleforth, Spanish teaching was exemplary: enlightened, ambitious and efficient, it invited almost unlimited study around and into the subject. When it appeared my path to Oxford might be blocked because of failure in mathematics, the Prior put me through a crash course in biology – a permitted alternative – and I not only passed, but developed a lifelong fascination with the subject. And I remember Dom Basil Hume discussing study courses with my Father, giving great classes on

French drama (the *Barber of Seville*, or was it the *Marriage of Figaro*?), and pacing the corridors in near mystical meditation. He was to become Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, honoured by Her Majesty – Head of the Church of England.

Ampleforth, in spite of the discipline, became a home away from home. Though many of the boys had been together for years at Gilling Castle – the school's preparatory division – and in Junior House, and it was hard for a newcomer to establish close friendships, I enjoyed many group activities as well as life as a loner. I did not mind cadets, often enjoyed the rugby, and saw daunting cross-country runs in rain, mud, or snow and through ice-filled creeks, as a challenge which would end in a hot shower, dry clothes, and plenty of appetite at afternoon tea. There was inspiration and occasionally time for poetry; there were newspapers and magazines for adults; library facilities abounded and, when I became a senior, I had my own study. I gained enormous mileage from free Wednesday afternoons. Sometimes I went down to the school lakes and sailed, or helped the scouts fry their eggs and sausages, or made myself scarce and explored the wild land around, marvelling at the gigantic flowering rhododendrons and the beauty of these secluded waters frozen over, white and fiercely windswept. Sometimes I went further and pondered on the remains of England's Catholic heritage: the building complex which had been Fountains Abbey, or the elegant gothic columns and arches of what remained of Rievaulx. If it was a full day's holiday I might bus to York and wander through the Shambles, checking for old books – I have still a beautifully bound Milton – or coins. It added up to a very full life, with just one important ingredient missing: Sara, my first girlfriend, and later the beautiful Ingrid, both far away in Oxford.

## II: Interludes for the period concerned

I remember, faintly, being taken to an institution in the Glasgow area and being left there, at a very early age. Was I anxious! Was I unhappy! I had trouble with the food: was it not what I was used to? was it not to my liking? I think I was just too upset to be able to eat. So my parents were summoned to take me away. I can recall the reproaches for spoiling their holiday, their time together. That was in World War II, while my father was stationed in the Orkneys, or at the War Office, and was all too briefly on leave.

Holidays on Arran with my mother, and her eccentric friend Gabby who rescued me from drowning, I remember more clearly. There was the impressive but disquieting spectacle of a navy in continuous passage past the island, perhaps on conclusion of the war. There were trips to the three main bays, each of which had a character as distinctive as its name. Of the cottage we stayed in, I only see stone, feel intimacy, and sense contentment. Outside, though, was different: it was midge territory. I recall long evenings out there, and how Gabby – and my mother? – dealt with the situation. They smoked. Did the midges bother me? Would I like to smoke also? Then I should have a cigarette too! The problem changed, and I vomited my heart out. “That should stop him ever wanting to smoke!” my rescuer said, in French, rescuing me from a future addiction, though not from the midges. On a happier note, I recall also how I looked forward to running down the hill to the van where they sold fish and chips. The smell was heaven, and so was the taste, what with all the salt and vinegar. I had no views, yet, about lard. After all, my mother used it.

When nine, I was driven to Tilbury by friends of the family and put on a little steamer bound for Göteborg, Sweden, where I was to be

met by a lady not known to my mother or me. At first I was content to stare over the side of the ship, fascinated by the challenge of endless, shining grey mudbanks, just out of reach. Then I turned to wondering if I would be recognized on arrival. And then I began to be afraid, going to sea in this thing, all by myself, to a destination unknown. The ship's fumes grew disagreeable, the deck began to move, and soon I was hurrying down to my bunk, which was in darkness, and I was sea-sick. Nobody seemed concerned. I stayed there, in the gloom, sea-sick, till we had reached Sweden – where the unknown lady recognized me. I have a faint but reassuring memory of a stylish flat in Stockholm, much smarter than anything I knew. There in the kitchen, I can still feel the tantalising and incomprehensible attraction for Maud the daughter, about twenty, and grace itself. She was patient, and full of curiosity. Perhaps she let me prepare something, leaving lots of mess behind? And I can remember a stay on an island called Sandhamn. There I picked blueberries in the lightly wooded glades to my heart's content, and probably everyone else's. The sea, which lapped at the foot of the garden, was clear, and I was allowed to go alone and dip, if only up to my knees. There was Åke the son, and his yacht round which I was shown, but not to go sailing. The beach sand was beautiful, but just above the high tide mark I met ... a snake. I was petrified. I can feel, still, how time froze as I struggled, unsuccessfully it seemed, to drag myself away. How could such cautious adults have overlooked this danger, so close to the house?

Did my parents send me to Sweden because of ill health? My asthma, which had been with me since I was two, was not cured by change of climate and environment. It struck early. My "Summer Mother" could not understand that I had come with no medicines, and that at home I was left to gasp in bed. My real mother for long held the view that medicines were for weaklings, and not to be

encouraged. Now I was introduced quickly and kindly to my first effective medication: an inhaler. Other setbacks – skin and ear infections – also were dealt with promptly and with kindness. All this was far from home, and at the hands of strangers. As for the beauty of this Baltic island – what a contrast with Glasgow in wartime, and the suburban claustrophobia of Oxford. Leaving was terrible. But years later, imagine the surprise, delight, and frustration when I received an invitation from Maud to her wedding. I really must have made a fuss over her and let my feelings be known in Sweden all those years earlier, to be remembered – still just a schoolboy – on the other side of the Baltic. And later yet, while studying German at a Goethe Institute out in the country near Munich, imagine the surprise when out of the blue came a little but much needed present from her mother.

A couple of times, while at school in Oxford, I was sent for holidays to Fraserburgh in Scotland. My father's sister Audrey and her husband Norman lived there, and with them eventually my grandmother. I remember Aunt Audrey teaching me golf, her husband's interest – and a game my father used to play. The course was in wild, bracing countryside, which I liked. The long walks between greens, I liked less. Retrieving lost balls, I liked least of all. But my aunt had been a teacher, and she somehow managed to impart the necessary skills to a not very enthusiastic boy. Some forty years later Barbara, my friend from Foster (Australia) suggested a game of golf while visiting me in Omeo. I had not played – as far as I recollect – since Fraserburgh, but she enjoyed a game now and again. Luck, my caution, and those early lessons secured me a win, to her considerable embarrassment (or had she let me win?) I remember also how my aunt, during these sessions, talked long and hard about ambition at work, and career. Her husband, Norman, had had to retire prematurely from his position as manager of the local tool works, because of stress. She spoke

with strong conviction about the risks in aiming for the top, being successful. My father was not pleased when I passed this on. And did her warnings leave a mark? Judge for yourself. And I recall often catching amazing quantities of fish on a handline – seven or eight at a time – in the harbour, and catching lovely Adele, staying with neighbours, unawares for one single kiss behind the door. After some argument the fish went to fill the cat, and without any argument Adele went into my address book. There have been fish and cats galore since then, but there was only one Adele, and though we may have exchanged a card, I never saw her again.

At some stage during my early schooling, I was sent to boarding school at Saint Maximin, near Chantilly, France, to further my French. It was not my favourite subject. There was nothing obviously wrong with the place, and I seem to remember really liking the wooded grounds. I recall no problems with the staff. But it was a disaster. Did I think there were too many *sans culottes* with crew cuts around? Did they think this long-haired English intruder good for a tease? So I felt threatened, and unhappy. And at some stage, inevitably, I came across a detail which provoked instant revulsion: the holes in the ground, toilets. Asthma struck, hard. I spent my remaining time in the school infirmary under medication and subjected to endless *infusions de thé de tilleul*. The Matron looked after me well. All was peace, and the premises boasted a real toilet. Such a relief! My father, though, was cross when I got home. I was reminded that the course in which I had been enrolled, uselessly, had cost him a lot.

Later, aged fifteen, I was sent away in boarding school ‘holidays’ to stay at La Rochelle, venue for French courses run by the University of Poitiers. I had a torrid time. I loved the sight of the gorgeous Latin female students at the classes. And later, out of



class, I was mesmerised at the sight of them stretched out on the floor, either under or on top of their male partner. Some lay still, as in a trance. Others turned and twisted languorously, and were having a good time. But there was an element of mystery. I would have liked to be part of the action, whatever it was, but I was the wrong age, and from the wrong background. It was not to be. Determined to have some fun of my own, though, I set off for the beach, where I probably had a swim in mind. But it was low tide, and to swim there and then I had to cross mudflats. Unperturbed, I started over them, only to feel my bare feet getting lacerated on sharp and hidden surfaces underneath. The acute pain, and the ever growing agony of the return journey – having failed absolutely to reach the sea – remain fixed in my mind. Back at the study centre I sought out medical attention, and began the slow process of recovery.

When I went home, my father enquired about the centre, the courses, and how I had got on. He was anxious when I recounted the students' activities, and went to extraordinary lengths to have me describe in detail what I had seen. Apart from reassuring him that everyone was dressed, I couldn't tell him much, for I was still learning about 'life'. There were things my top-class education, and my parents' instruction, had not explained. They included French and English terms my father was now using, but chose not to define. Finally, he said he would be writing to those in charge, with his views on the sort of conduct they condoned. He seemed relieved, though, that I had come home with the appropriate certificate and the rating *Bien*. He never sent me, again, to a French institution to improve my French.

The following year I was allowed to do a course for foreigners at the Menéndez Pelayo University in Santander, Spain, in my

summer 'holidays'. I was put with a middle-class Spanish family which had seen slightly better days. They spoke no English. My Spanish was in its infancy, and though I could labour through a piece of literature with pen and dictionary at the ready, I had trouble stringing words together in conversation. As for understanding the answers, they were so many machine gun bullets, which just whizzed past as sounds devoid of meaning. The asthma struck, but I was ready with syringe and adrenalin. Within a week my legs were peppered with perforations, but I beat the asthma and all that the situation could throw at me. And a 'situation' had, indeed, arisen, for I had begun to come out in spots, to the embarrassing extent that the whole family was concerned. I had already told them of men in the street who had pestered me with small talk, and whom I had given the slip – though once only by slamming the door behind me. Perhaps the family thought I had not told them all ...? So Celia, the daughter, took me to see the doctor. I don't know what she told him, but the searching questions the doctor asked suggested plenty. What sexual contacts had I had since arriving in Santander, I was asked variously and often. I kept pleading ignorance. "Sexual contacts?" I asked back, "what do you mean?" The outcome? He concluded that my spots came from a severe infestation of ... fleas in the flat where I was staying. We went home. Soon, Celia and her mother were hard at work sprinkling DDT throughout the flat, my clothes, the bed. The swellings gradually went down, no more came, and honour was restored. I was entreated not to let the University know, or it would spell an end to their connection with it.

Curiously, problems of language and asthma seemed as nothing, the flea bites just that – a hollow saga – and the encounters in the street irrelevant. I wonder how and why I fell in love with Spain and whether, in secret and slightly mischievously, perhaps it was Spain

that seduced me, and fell in love with me.

The courting had begun years earlier when I started to read about a Spain the Establishment had tried to ridicule. It had continued at boarding school when I was allowed to diversify, and Lope de Vega's cloak and dagger plays – pithy, lyrical, dramatic, and rich in atmosphere – had come to my notice. It came to a climax now. Suddenly I was face to face with the real thing, no longer between the covers of a book. The streets teemed with life. Out there, among the old, the children and the babies, were men and women both rich and poor who stood and walked with a poise and flair I had never seen. Their skin gleamed, their hair rippled, their eyes commanded. Theirs was a form of beauty I had met only in poetry, and theirs a vitality I had not even read about. The women in their vibrant colours, ears necks wrists fingers bejewelled, formed a kaleidoscope which danced and fused into the equally exotic setting of sounds and smells. So, at home with 'my family', the little privacy, the limited freedom, did not seem to matter. I was happy with them, their mealtime rituals, the background of classical furniture, old pictures, wall hangings, curtains, and the twilight atmosphere occasioned by the blinds and shutters which kept a hot sun at bay. I knew there was real life close at hand, outside, and that it existed in practical form and in microcosm inside, with a family's traditions, pride, and affection.

The family introduced me to a friend, Casuso, who spent a lot of time showing me round Santander and telling me its history, explaining things as he saw them, but without imposing himself. At the University I followed and completed my course, concluding with the appropriate certificate and the rating *Notable*, so important to my father and also, maybe this time, to the school which had arranged everything. But the real value of my stay, purportedly to

develop my grasp of Spanish, by far transcended anything a piece of paper might suggest.

The following summer I spent four weeks in Spain. This time I was not attending a course, but had a project in mind, sufficiently worthwhile to win the approval of both my teachers and parents. They had decided, I suppose, that I had acquitted myself honourably enough the year before, and had not disgraced myself in the interval. My project involved using Santander as a base from which to make a trip to the 'interior'. My stay would clearly benefit my language skills, and travel inland should expand my experience and knowledge of Spain.

Judging from my diary, I saw Casuso often. Of Celia and her family, who could not put me up, I saw little (I wonder, now, whether I decided to omit 'sensitive' material, knowing my diary would be examined by those in charge?). Santander continued to interest, and I came to know it well. Once I walked through a slum, full of rubbish, bad smells and smashed paving: where the children were dressed – exquisitely. I evidently enjoyed the beaches, weather permitting, and the diary shows I enjoyed the lively mood of the taverns to which my hosts escorted me. This visit, however, was not to be about Santander.

It was about travelling inland, and visiting Leon Cathedral, the Escorial, and Simancas. These impressed me so much, that my account of the voyage inland was published later in *Oxford Opinion*, and diary descriptions of the latter appeared in the scholarly *Ampleforth Journal* soon after returning. Penetrating the coastal mountains and arrival on the *meseta*, the stained glass and atmosphere of Leon Cathedral, the history and structure of the Escorial, details of the national archives at Simancas Castle – these

were among the highlights, and maybe I described them best. But I was equally struck by Salamanca as a whole, with its ecclesiastical, academic and civic buildings in styles ranging from mediaeval to baroque; who could forget the unique Plaza Mayor? I was moved by the setting and dreamlike atmosphere of Zamora Cathedral. I was moved by no idle admiration – but with pain and horror – at the seemingly dispassionate exhibition of religious polychrome sculptures at Valladolid. As for the Prado ...!

Then there were the people. On the one hand, I remember the man in León who insisted on fixing rubber soles to my sandals though unbidden, and then tried to charge me a small fortune; just as I remember a railway official who closed the counter as I approached in a lather, and smiled. On the other hand, I remember occasions when unknown people gave me free accommodation or a lift, shared their food, or entertained me. Outstanding was the hospitality at the English College in Valladolid, where I dined alone with the Rector and his nine cats and then went on to enjoy the luxury of a full suite for the night; equally, the several occasions when the Dominicans of San Estéban in Salamanca entertained me in their parlour, showed me areas closed to the public, took me up behind the altar to see the elaborate stage work required to keep everything in place, and guided me round the town.

And there were, of course, some hard realities. There was the endless business of working out train and bus times, queuing for tickets, and waiting for transport which might not be on time. There were journeys which began at night and ended at dawn, in conditions which ranged from asphyxiating heat to bitter cold, and where a ticket did not guarantee a place on the wooden seat. Each move meant finding a room for the night, at a price I could manage. As the money dwindled, there were more and more meals of egg

and chips, or just grapes, some other fruit, bread, and a glass of cheap *vino*. Strangely, once onto the *meseta* there was no asthma.

I returned safely to Santander, where I rested briefly before leaving for England. The time came, rather unexpectedly, when my money threatened to run out, and I had to take rapid leave of my friends: host family, Celia, and Casuso – who saw me off. I trained to Irun, and then, clutching my two suitcases, set off across France, hitchhiking. Back home, in Oxford, it was remarked how thin I was. On this occasion, there was no certificate for my father: just a diary. But he was satisfied.

A few months later I won an Open Scholarship to Pembroke College, Oxford, and did a final term at Ampleforth.













