

And my tears, make a heavenly Lethean<sup>1</sup> flood,  
And drown in it my sins' black memory.  
That thou remember them, some claim as debt;  
I think it mercy if thou wilt forget.

1633



10

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
5 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou'art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
10 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy<sup>2</sup> or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

1633



14

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You  
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me,<sup>3</sup> and bend  
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
5 I, like an usurped town, to<sup>4</sup> another due,  
Labor to<sup>4</sup> admit You, but O, to no end;  
Reason, Your viceroy<sup>4</sup> in me, me should defend,  
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
Yet dearly<sup>4</sup> I love You,<sup>4</sup> and would be loved<sup>4</sup> fain,  
10 But am betrothed unto Your enemy.  
Divorce me,<sup>4</sup> untie or break that knot again;  
Take me to You, imprison me, for I,  
Except You<sup>4</sup> enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except You ravish me.

1633

18

Show me, dear Christ, Thy spouse<sup>2</sup> so bright and clear.  
What! is it she which on the other shore  
Goes richly painted? or which, robbed and tore,  
Laments and mourns in Germany and here?  
5 Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year?  
Is she self-truth, and errs? now new, now<sup>4</sup> outwore?  
Doth she,<sup>4</sup> and did she, and shall she evermore  
On one, on seven, or on no hill<sup>3</sup> appear?  
Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights  
10 First travel<sup>4</sup> we to seek, and then make love?  
Betray,<sup>4</sup> kind husband, Thy spouse to our sights,  
And let mine amorous soul court Thy mild dove,  
Who is most true and pleasing to Thee then  
When she's embraced and open to most men.

reveal

after 1615

1. Lethe was a river in the classical underworld; drinking of its waters caused one to forget the past.

2. The true church, "the bride of Christ." Lines 2-4 ask if it is the Roman Catholic or the Protestant church.

3. Probably Mt. Moriah (site of Solomon's temple), the seven hills of Rome, and Geneva or Canterbury (centers of Calvinism and Anglicanism, respectively).

4. Formerly, "labor" as well as "journey."

## ✱ Easter Wings

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
 Though foolishly he lost the same,  
 Decaying more and more  
 Till he became  
 Most poor:  
 With thee  
 O let me rise  
 As larks, harmoniously,  
 And sing this day thy victories:  
 10 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.  
  
 My tender age in sorrow did begin;  
 And still with sicknesses and shame  
 Thou didst so punish sin,  
 That I became  
 15 Most thin.  
 With thee  
 Let me combine,  
 And feel this day<sup>1</sup> thy victory;  
 For, if I imp<sup>2</sup> my wing on thine,  
 20 Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

*abundance*

1633

## ✱ The Collar

I struck the board<sup>o</sup> and cried, "No more;  
 I will abroad!  
 What? shall I ever sigh and pine?  
 My lines and life are free, free as the road,  
 5 Loose as the wind, as large as store.<sup>o</sup>  
 Shall I be still in suit?  
 Have I no harvest but a thorn  
 To let me blood, and not restore  
 What I have lost with cordial<sup>o</sup> fruit?  
  
 10 Sure there was wine  
 Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn  
 Before my tears did drown it.  
 Is the year only lost to me?  
 Have I no bays<sup>7</sup> to crown it,  
 15 No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?  
 All wasted?  
 Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,  
 And thou hast hands.  
 Recover all thy sigh-blown age  
 20 On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute  
 Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,  
 Thy rope of sands,  
 Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee  
 Good cable, to enforce and draw,  
 25 And be thy law,  
 While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.  
 Away! take heed;  
 I will abroad.  
 Call in thy death's-head<sup>8</sup> there; tie up thy fears.  
 30 He that forbears  
 To suit and serve his need,  
 Deserves his load."  
 But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild  
 At every word,  
 35 Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*

*table**abundance**life-giving*

- Which works by magic supernatural things;  
 But Shakespeare's power is sacred as a king's.  
 25 Those legends from old priesthood were received,  
 And he then writ, as people then believed.  
 But if for Shakespeare we your grace implore,  
 We for our theater shall want it more:  
 Who by our dearth of youths are forced to employ  
 30 One of our women to present a boy;  
 And that's a transformation, you will say,  
 Exceeding all the magic in the play.  
 Let none expect in the last act to find  
 Her sex transformed from man to womankind.  
 35 Whate'er she was before the play began,  
 All you shall see of her is perfect man.  
 Or if your fancy will be farther led  
 To find her woman, it must be abed.

1670

### Song from *Troilus and Cressida*

- 1  
 Can life be a blessing,  
 Or worth the possessing,  
 Can life be a blessing, if love were away?  
 Ah, no! though our love all night keep us waking,  
 5 And though he torment us with cares all the day,  
 Yet he sweetens, he sweetens our pains in the taking;  
 There's an hour at the last, there's an hour to repay.  
 2  
 In every possessing  
 The ravishing blessing,  
 10 In every possessing the fruit of our pain,  
 Poor lovers forget long ages of anguish,  
 Whate'er they have suffered and done to obtain;  
 'Tis a pleasure, a pleasure to sigh and to languish,  
 When we hope, when we hope to be happy again.

1679



### From *Absalom and Achitophel*:<sup>6</sup> A Poem

- In pious times, ere priestcraft did begin,  
 Before polygamy was made a sin;  
 When man on many multiplied his kind,  
 Ere one to one was cursedly confined;  
 5 When nature prompted and no law denied  
 Promiscuous use of concubine and bride;  
 Then Israel's monarch after Heaven's own heart,<sup>7</sup>  
 His vigorous warmth did variously impart  
 To wives and slaves; and, wide as his command,  
 10 Scattered his Maker's image through the land.  
 Michal,<sup>8</sup> of royal blood, the crown did wear,  
 A soil ungrateful to the tiller's care:

6. The names immediately refer the reader to II Samuel xiii-xviii. Absalom there rebels against his father King David; Achitophel advises him to destroy David at once. In Dryden's poem, David stands for Charles II and Absalom for the Duke of Monmouth, Charles's illegitimate son. Achitophel is the

cession to the throne. Monmouth would have displaced Charles's brother James, the Duke of York, whose Catholicism made him repugnant to many Protestants.

7. God calls David "a man after mine own heart" in Acts xiii.22.

8. David's childless wife. She stands for

Not so the rest; for several mothers bore  
 To godlike David several sons before.  
 15 But since like slaves his bed they did ascend,  
 No true succession could their seed attend.  
 Of all this numerous progeny was none  
 So beautiful, so brave, as Absalom:  
 Whether, inspired by some diviner lust,  
 20 His father got<sup>o</sup> him with a greater gust,<sup>o</sup>  
 Or that<sup>o</sup> his conscious destiny made way,  
 By manly beauty, to imperial sway.  
 Early in foreign fields he won renown,  
 With kings and states allied to Israel's crown:  
 25 In peace the thoughts of war he could remove,  
 And seemed as he were only born for love.  
 Whate'er he did, was done with so much ease,  
 In him alone 'twas natural to please;  
 His motions all accompanied with grace;  
 30 And paradise was opened in his face.  
 With secret joy indulgent David viewed  
 His youthful image in his son renewed:  
 To all his wishes nothing he denied;  
 And made the charming Annabel his bride.<sup>9</sup>  
 35 What faults he had (for who from faults is free?)  
 His father could not, or he would not see.  
 Some warm excesses which the law forbore,  
 Were construed youth that purged by boiling o'er:  
 And Amnon's murder,<sup>1</sup> by a specious name,  
 40 Was called a just revenge for injured fame.  
 Thus praised and loved the noble youth remained,  
 While David, undisturbed, in Sion<sup>2</sup> reigned.  
 But life can never be sincerely<sup>o</sup> blest;  
 Heaven punishes the bad, and proves<sup>o</sup> the best.  
 45 The Jews,<sup>3</sup> a headstrong, moody, murmuring race,  
 As ever tried the extent and stretch of grace;  
 God's pampered people, whom, debauched with ease,  
 No king could govern, nor no God could please  
 (Gods they had tried of every shape and size  
 50 That god-smiths could produce, or priests devise);<sup>4</sup>  
 These Adam-wits,<sup>5</sup> too fortunately free,  
 Began to dream they wanted<sup>o</sup> liberty;  
 And when no rule, no precedent was found,  
 Of men by laws less circumscribed and bound,  
 55 They led their wild desires to woods and caves,  
 And thought that all but savages were slaves.  
 They who, when Saul was dead, without a blow,  
 Made foolish Ishbosheth the crown forego;<sup>6</sup>  
 Who banished David did from Hebron<sup>7</sup> bring,

*begot / relish  
 whether*

*wholly  
 tries*

*lacked*

9. These lines record the personal attractiveness of Monmouth, his prowess in wars against the Dutch and later the French, and his marriage (arranged by the King) to the Scottish heiress Anne Scott.

1. Absalom had killed Amnon to avenge his rape of Absalom's sister (II Samuel xiii.28-29). An obscure historical reference, but Monmouth had had a reputation for violence in his youth, and, more recently, his troopers had violently attacked an abusive Parliamentarian, Sir John Coventry.

2. London.

3. English.

4. Dryden refers to novelties in doctrine and church practice which had issued in the dis-

establishment of the Anglican Church under the Commonwealth.

5. The word calls attention to the supposedly untutored quality of the dissenters from the Anglican communion, and also the biblical Adam's rebellion against the single restraint imposed on him: eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis ii.16-17).

6. Saul is Oliver Cromwell; Ishbosheth, his ineffectual son Richard.

7. David was first crowned king of the tribe of Judah only, in Hebron; Charles had been crowned king of Scotland before he fled to the Continent.

*From Olney Hymns**Light Shining out of Darkness*

God moves in a mysterious way,  
 His wonders to perform;  
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,  
 And rides upon the storm.

5 Deep in unfathomable mines  
 Of never failing skill,  
 He treasures up his bright designs,  
 And works his sovereign will.

10 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
 The clouds ye so much dread  
 Are big with mercy, and shall break  
 In blessings on your head.

2. Judas (line 5) betrayed Jesus to the chief priests for money (Matthew xxvi.14–16). Abiram, rebelling against the authority of Moses and Aaron, was swallowed up with his

fellow-dissidents in a cleft of the earth. They "went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them" (Numbers xvi.33).

15 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
 But trust him for his grace;  
 Behind a frowning providence,  
 He hides a smiling face.

20 His purposes will ripen fast,  
 Unfolding every hour;  
 The bud may have a bitter taste,  
 But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
 And scan his work in vain;  
 God is his own interpreter,  
 And he will make it plain.

5

# Good Friday

by Christina Rossetti

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,  
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,  
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,  
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved  
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;  
Not so fallen Peter, weeping bitterly;  
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon  
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,  
A horror of great darkness at broad noon –  
I, only I.

Yet give not o'er,  
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;  
Greater than Moses, turn and look once more  
And smite a rock.

by Christina Rossetti

**Tags:** Christianity Easter gods

**POETRY FOUNDATION**

⑥

## The Oxen

BY THOMAS HARDY

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
“Now they are all on their knees,”  
An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
“Come; see the oxen kneel,

“In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,”  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so.

Source: 1915

⑦

## God's Grandeur

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
 It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;<sup>7</sup>  
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
 Crushed.<sup>8</sup> Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
 There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
 And though the last lights off the black West went  
 Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
 World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

1877

1895

7. In a letter to Robert Bridges (January 4, 1883), Hopkins says: "\* \* \* I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel, and no other word whatever will give the effect I want. Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and crossings and network of small many cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too."

8. I.e., as when olives are crushed for their oil.

9. "A name for the kestrel [a species of small hawk], from its habit of hovering or hanging with its head to the wind" [O.E.D.].

1. The eldest son of the king of France was called the *dauphin*: hence, the word here means

heir to a splendid, kingly condition.

2. The word "buckle" brings to a single focus the several elements of line 8, in both their literal sense, as descriptive of a single, sudden movement of the airborne bird, and in their symbolic sense as descriptive of Christ and with further reference to the poet himself and the lesson he draws from his observation. It may be read either as indicative or imperative, and in one or another of its possible meanings: "to fasten," "to join closely," "to equip for battle," "to grapple with, engage," but also "to cause to bend, give way, crumple."

3. Knight, nobleman, champion.

4. Having two or more colors, in patches or blotches.



④

## **“Ash Wednesday” by T.S. Eliot**

Because I do not hope to turn again  
Because I do not hope  
Because I do not hope to turn  
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope  
I no longer strive to strive towards such things  
(Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)  
Why should I mourn  
The vanished power of the usual reign?  
Because I do not hope to know  
The infirm glory of the positive hour  
Because I do not think  
Because I know I shall not know  
The one veritable transitory power  
Because I cannot drink  
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is  
nothing again  
Because I know that time is always time  
And place is always and only place  
And what is actual is actual only for one time  
And only for one place  
I rejoice that things are as they are and  
I renounce the blessed face  
And renounce the voice  
Because I cannot hope to turn again  
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something  
Upon which to rejoice  
And pray to God to have mercy upon us  
And pray that I may forget  
These matters that with myself I too much discuss  
Too much explain  
Because I do not hope to turn again  
Let these words answer  
For what is done, not to be done again  
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us  
Because these wings are no longer wings to fly  
But merely vans to beat the air  
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry

Smaller and dryer than the will  
Teach us to care and not to care Teach us to sit still.  
Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death  
Pray for us now and at the hour of our death.

## II

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper-tree  
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety  
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been  
contained  
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said  
Shall these bones live? shall these  
Bones live? And that which had been contained  
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:  
Because of the goodness of this Lady  
And because of her loveliness, and because  
She honours the Virgin in meditation,  
We shine with brightness. And I who am here dissembled  
Proffer my deeds to oblivion, and my love  
To the posterity of the desert and the fruit of the gourd.  
It is this which recovers  
My guts the strings of my eyes and the indigestible portions  
Which the leopards reject. The Lady is withdrawn  
In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown.  
Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.  
There is no life in them. As I am forgotten  
And would be forgotten, so I would forget  
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose. And God said  
Prophecy to the wind, to the wind only for only  
The wind will listen. And the bones sang chirping  
With the burden of the grasshopper, saying  
Lady of silences  
Calm and distressed  
Torn and most whole  
Rose of memory  
Rose of forgetfulness  
Exhausted and life-giving  
Worried reposeful  
The single Rose  
Is now the Garden

Where all loves end  
Terminate torment  
Of love unsatisfied  
The greater torment  
Of love satisfied  
End of the endless  
Journey to no end  
Conclusion of all that  
Is inconclusible  
Speech without word and  
Word of no speech  
Grace to the Mother  
For the Garden  
Where all love ends.

Under a juniper-tree the bones sang, scattered and shining  
We are glad to be scattered, we did little good to each  
other,  
Under a tree in the cool of day, with the blessing of sand,  
Forgetting themselves and each other, united  
In the quiet of the desert. This is the land which ye  
Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity  
Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance.

### III

At the first turning of the second stair  
I turned and saw below  
The same shape twisted on the banister  
Under the vapour in the fetid air  
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears  
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.  
At the second turning of the second stair  
I left them twisting, turning below;  
There were no more faces and the stair was dark,  
Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth drivelling, beyond  
repair,  
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.  
At the first turning of the third stair  
Was a slotted window bellied like the figs's fruit

And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene  
The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green  
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute.  
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,  
Lilac and brown hair;  
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind  
over the third stair,  
Fading, fading; strength beyond hope and despair  
Climbing the third stair.  
Lord, I am not worthy  
Lord, I am not worthy  
but speak the word only.

#### IV

Who walked between the violet and the violet  
Who walked between  
The various ranks of varied green  
Going in white and blue, in Mary's colour,  
Talking of trivial things  
In ignorance and knowledge of eternal dolour  
Who moved among the others as they walked,  
Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs  
Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand  
In blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's colour,  
Sovegna vos  
Here are the years that walk between, bearing  
Away the fiddles and the flutes, restoring  
One who moves in the time between sleep and waking, wearing  
White light folded, sheathing about her, folded.  
The new years walk, restoring  
Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring  
With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem  
The time. Redeem  
The unread vision in the higher dream  
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse.  
The silent sister veiled in white and blue  
Between the yews, behind the garden god,  
Whose flute is breathless, bent her head and signed but spoke  
no word

But the fountain sprang up and the bird sang down  
Redeem the time, redeem the dream  
The token of the word unheard, unspoken  
Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew  
And after this our exile

V

If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent  
If the unheard, unspoken  
Word is unspoken, unheard;  
Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,  
The Word without a word, the Word within  
The world and for the world;  
And the light shone in darkness and  
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled  
About the centre of the silent Word.

O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Where shall the word be found, where will the word  
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence  
Not on the sea or on the islands, not  
On the mainland, in the desert or the rain land,  
For those who walk in darkness  
Both in the day time and in the night time  
The right time and the right place are not here  
No place of grace for those who avoid the face  
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny  
the voice  
Will the veiled sister pray for  
Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee,  
Those who are torn on the horn between season and season,  
time and time, between  
Hour and hour, word and word, power and power, those who wait  
In darkness? Will the veiled sister pray  
For children at the gate  
Who will not go away and cannot pray:  
Pray for those who chose and oppose  
O my people, what have I done unto thee.

Will the veiled sister between the slender  
Yew trees pray for those who offend her  
And are terrified and cannot surrender  
And affirm before the world and deny between the rocks  
In the last desert before the last blue rocks  
The desert in the garden the garden in the desert  
Of drouth, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed.  
O my people.

## VI

Although I do not hope to turn again  
Although I do not hope  
Although I do not hope to turn  
Wavering between the profit and the loss  
In this brief transit where the dreams cross  
The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying  
(Bless me father) though I do not wish to wish these things  
From the wide window towards the granite shore  
The white sails still fly seaward, seaward flying  
Unbroken wings  
And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices  
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices  
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel  
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell  
Quickens to recover  
The cry of quail and the whirling plover  
And the blind eye creates  
The empty forms between the ivory gates  
And smell renews the salt savour of the sandy earth  
This is the time of tension between dying and birth  
The place of solitude where three dreams cross  
Between blue rocks  
But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away  
Let the other yew be shaken and reply.  
Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit  
of the garden,  
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still

Even among these rocks,  
Our peace in His will  
And even among these rocks  
Sister, mother  
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,  
Suffer me not to be separated  
And let my cry come unto Thee.

T.S. Eliot  
(1927)

## Mr. Over

Mr. Over is dead  
He died fighting and true  
And on his tombstone they wrote  
Over to You.

5 And who pray is this You  
To whom Mr. Over is gone?  
Oh if we only knew that  
We should not do wrong.

10 But who is this beautiful You  
We all of us long for so much

*The Celts* 1073

Is he not our friend and our brother  
Our father and such?

15 Yes he is this and much more  
This is but a portion  
A sea-drop in a bucket  
Taken from the ocean

20 So the voices spake  
Softly above my head  
And a voice in my heart cried: Follow  
Where he has led

And a devil's voice cried: Happy  
Happy the dead.

1950

## Not Waving but Drowning

Nobody heard him, the dead man,  
But still he lay moaning:  
I was much further out than you thought  
And not waving but drowning.

5 Poor chap, he always loved larking  
And now he's dead  
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,  
They said.

10 Oh, no no no, it was too cold always  
(Still the dead one lay moaning)  
I was much too far out all my life  
And not waving but drowning.

1957



(10) PHILIP LARKIN  
(1922—)

\* Church Going

Once I am sure there's nothing going on  
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.  
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,  
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;  
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,  
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off  
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

Move forward, run my hand around the font.  
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new—  
Cleaned, or restored? Somone would know: I don't.  
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few  
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce  
"Here endeth" much more loudly than I'd meant.  
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door  
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,  
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,  
20 And always end much at a loss like this,  
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,  
When churches fall completely out of use  
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep  
25 A few cathedrals chronically on show,  
Their parchment, plate and pyx<sup>1</sup> in locked cases,  
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.  
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come  
 30 To make their children touch a particular stone;  
 Pick simples° for a cancer; or on some  
 Advised night see walking a dead one?  
 Power of some sort or other will go on  
 In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;  
 35 But superstition, like belief, must die,  
 And what remains when disbelief has gone?  
 Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognizable each week,  
 A purpose more obscure. I wonder who  
 40 Will be the last, the very last, to seek  
 This place for what it was; one of the crew  
 That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?  
 Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,  
 Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff  
 45 Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?  
 Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt  
 Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground  
 Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt  
 50 So long and equably what since is found  
 Only in separation—marriage, and birth,  
 And death, and thoughts of these—for whom was built  
 This special shell? For, though I've no idea  
 What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,  
 55 It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,  
 In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,  
 Are recognized, and robed as destinies.  
 And that much never can be obsolete,  
 60 Since someone will forever be surprising  
 A hunger in himself to be more serious,  
 And gravitating with it to this ground,  
 Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,  
 If only that so many dead lie round.