

Poetry Series

harrison smith
- poems -

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I trained as a fine artist and spent my working life in the education service. For the past 24 years I have lived in central France and spend much of my time painting but piano, poetry and a large garden are also important occupations.

A Glimmer Of Hope

What could have been
Should have been
Might have been
Just wasn't,
Sadly.

What isn't
What hasn't
What can't
Just a no,
I'm afraid.

But what could be
What should be
What might be
Will be,
Hopefully.

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A Man Of Culture?

I'm a cultivated man
I can talk all night long
On the subject of music and art.
At functions grand wineglass in hand
I'm a part of the cultural scene.
I can name the style of a painting
With a glance that is penetrating,
For only a glance is required
To know what the artist intended
Or why he was so inspired

The critical thing of course
Is to select the cultural horse
That will double your money quite soon.
An artist not cheap or impossibly dear,
A sound investment so we hear.
The finish doesn't matter if
He paints like late Braque
Or does yet more pictures of sunny Estaque.
If he does strange things with tins of soup
Or just copies the labels well,
He'll be a goldmine believe you me
And your bank will be cock-a-hoop.

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A Portrait Painter's Lament

It's said that painters only paint a single face
Sometimes older sometimes younger, fat or thin,
To only have one model if it be the case
And use one nose, two eyebrows and one chin
Suggests a blindness to the world outside.
Though sensitive enough to creative thought,
Could we really think our eyes are open wide
To see, retain and comment as we all were taught?
When very young we drew a face, a simple round
To which we later added dots for eyes, for mouth a line.
Body, legs and arms with hands are shortly found
To make our faltering efforts more refined.
Maybe my morning mirrored face is the design
And basis for the portrait heads I know are mine.

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A Question Of Age

I've often wondered how it would end
And where do we go from here?
Although I've not thought of those things
Too much, sensible people don't.

I mean where does it get you
At the end of the day or your days
For that Matter? If it does then
I'll need to research a year or two.

Begin with what's my preferred 'ist'
Am I a theist an atheist a deist
A jansenist a methodist a feist
Or a witness or just a Friend?

Will I be looking down on you
Or will I be here again,
Or will I be just a little bit of
A thing too big to view?

Wisdom comes with age they say
So I wonder less these days
And let things take their course,
It's not a matter of choice for me
I no longer have the force.

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'Apero'

Dizzy with the prelunch wine
I try to connect a scattered brain
So as to invent, think up, create if you like
A thing worth painting, writing, making.
But only a blanking gaze looks out
Jaundiced, on an uncleaned room
And a suddenly intrusive clock
Defines as always the count-down
To something yet to happen,
Which could of course be lunch.

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Autumn Morning

With shortened days a darker dawn
Has made our early mornings night
We wait to see a sky turn bright.
Shadows conceal us from the morn
Gardens dim lit by moon forlorn
And though we fear our loss of sight
All's well, at last there shines the light
The night is dead the day is born.
Perennially affected thus
We wish perhaps for lengthy days
As though we could the heavens change
Or make the planets move for us.
Better that we should fix our gaze
On smaller things within our range.

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Autumn Trees

Now it's autumn some of our trees
As celebration of the summer's ending
Pour golden rain across the ground.
Amid that noisy colour the quiet ones
Manage a discreet fall of brown leaves
And perhaps one can hear at dawn
The faint pattering of their soft landing.

In a week or two at most, the spectacle
Will end and we'll see again the tough frames,
The sinuous bodies, the rough skins,
Which decked themselves in all that finery.
The revealing dance is over for another year
And so they face hard winter pared to the bone,
Fripperies cast off, naked, tough, seasoned.

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Awful Pome

The thing that I admiro
Is your skiful use of the biro
Though confined to a home
You can still write a pome
And at your age, pen a page
Of light hearted verse, that
As I said to your nurse
'I've had to read worse',
Although as such
Not much!

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Chatting Up Mein Host

You're looking great
At seventy eight
And the cooking is lovely too.

Your choice of wine
Was quite divine
And it went so well with the stew.

The garden has come on so well
An alpha plus
Should you ever sell.

Your 'potager's' quite splendid
And you'd think an army of men did,
Half what you've managed to do.

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Choosing A Leader

Send them home now
The liars the cheats
The seekers after place
The over wealthy the hard of face.

Give those a chance
The often reluctant
Without favour, enhancement
Or family advancement.

Let's be rid of the talkers
The windy the pompous
The sly and the mighty
That air their views nightly on any TV.

We should look to the wise
Their humble sagacity
The quiet the thoughtful
Whose word their veracity.

Let's not praise stupidity
Or admire cupidity
The cut of his suit
The cost of her dress,
If we all grow up,
Will no longer impress.

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Falling Leaves

Shall we describe the falling leaves
As feathers floating in the autumn sun?
Or golden tissue that a craftsman weaves
Cut into snippets when the cloth is done?
Bright confetti from some nearby wedding?
Though wind born litter isn't quite the same
For nature scorns this careless shedding,
Our simple products a cause for shame.
Seeking the 'right words' is maybe wrong
We ignore the reason for the annual fall
The days grow short the nights grow long,
Trees must respond to the season's call.
So perhaps our leaves should rest undescribed
Our thin words to conjure them best proscribed.

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February

Now a late tyrant of winter's days
Presents an icy greeting of pale green skys
And fogging breath
The black crow filled trees ever far away
Across thinly dusted stubble fields
As yet unploughed.

Suffocated in hot rooms
We skimp in thin clothes outside our doors
Teeth chattering needle cold
We make a fast recoil from alien air
And briefly talk of temperatures and snow.

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Feeling Down In February

Down here, all around, over there, everywhere,
You must be aware don't be contrary don't be
Unwary, it's February, the grey, the unwanted. the
Endless, the bleak, where seconds are weeks.
Where trees absorb the sky's grey and sullenly
Reflect it, at this dead season's peak.
The muddied grass lies sodden bleeding out the rain
Now only the crows haunt the icy clay fields
Their harsh cries echoing across the
Endless dead acres and flooded drains.
Yes, we are submerged in February and
Again in fear of the mental drowning
That won't let us paddle to an edge.
Fearful of letting go the rail to spring
Of a plunge so deep that even the grey sky
Will appear as distant light enveloped in darkness.

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Grey Days

In endless days where grey clouds hang down
To a landscape of mud and flooded ruts
As if earth and sky were joined at the waist
Minutes tick by, grey and brown, grey and brown.

Each hour records an arid emptiness
We sit, lost in our hard chairs, unmoving
Till discomfort changes our position
And soon, as if undisturbed, stillness resumes.

Is this suspense of animation needed
To fuel the engine of achievement?
Is this place sandwiched between earth and sky
The marshalling yard of our activity?

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Heatwave

When idleness becomes a necessity and sloth a way of moving,
Then the heatwave has crashed unwanted on our fragile shore.
To remind us of our humble position
Just the right miles from the sun
Not too near
Not too far
Just right
Just.

In the endless time of unfilled days
Newly aware of each respiration
We await another prickled night
Of sweat and thought
And trust we are still
Not too near
Not too far
Just right.
Just!

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Life Goes On

When your energy goes
Your lights go dim
It happens to her
It happens to him

When the lights go down
The drama will start
They've done all they can
For your worn out heart

When the real drama starts
It's the end of one life
She leaves her husband
He leaves his wife

It's the end of one life
It's the start of another
So why do we fret?
It's really no bother

When starting afresh
It's best to be hopeful
The next life is better
So why are we doleful?

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Looking For A Rhyme

There's a little time but not much
There's this and that to do and
Such, a lot to scan in little time
And if you can spare a second
To give me a hand, a second hand
Would better find a rhyme
A minute hand would make a third
The time involved is quite absurd
Just looking for a simple word
Like lime or mime or bird.

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Modern Food

I'm glad I can't remember
Just what I ate for lunch
Was it a nettle cookie
Or a nut and tofu crunch?

I am tired of waiting for someone
Who will reinvent the dinner
That's a joy to eat and quite a treat
And doesn't make you thinner.

If you eat at a pub
Or dine at your club
The outlook is very much brighter
Than for a tiny pile of weird food
Served up by a cookery writer.

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Moonlit Night

The moon casts it's pale light over sleeping
Houses drawn oddly in unexpected shadows,
Transforming strangely our outlines, seeming
Distorted on the old road that narrows,
Wandering, between darkly silvered birch.
The distant scream of fox or bark of deer,
Diminished softly, echo from the church
Whose stones reflect the sounds from far and near.
In the stillness of fields empty and bleached
The palest hue of colour tints a scene
Aged like some old camera plate reached
From an abandoned shelf and rarely seen.
Yet beneath it's pallor the moon shines strong
Enough to sway the tides over ages long.

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Mulot (A Sort Of Vole)

The grey mulot eats
The seeds for our garden birds
Who would feed mulots?

One more generous perhaps
Who could see no difference.

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Night People

Light shines on roofs made silver by the rain
Turned dazzling golden mirrors by the sun
As tiles some ancient armourer had begun
To fashion from a hard metallic plate,
And saw his image reflected as he wrought.
Although his blinded eyes would hesitate
To see and finish in the glare his gaze had caught.
As ever unprepared for day's full light
Cowering from brightness hiding in shade
We reveal ourselves as things of night.
Contented only if the sun should fade.
Conceived in darkness though in daylight born
We delight in evening but we dread the dawn.

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Out Of Touch

You see when you are aged it's easy to get confused
Because of all the new things to which you are unused.
Like understanding people that don't pronounce their 't's
Although most of their young friends can follow them with ease.
I thought it was Alexander Calder who invented the mobile phone
Although as he was a sculptor he can't have done it alone.
And now you can watch TV on the phone of any bloke
Though the screen is very tiny and the programmes are a joke.
In my youth I listened to radio on a new Marconi set
Though difficult to hear it was the best that one could get.
Now my security programme tells me that my password's weak
And coming from a laptop I think that's an absolute cheek.
Weather forecasts are now much harder to understand
'Outcomes' often happen right across the land
'Cold issues' can mean snow and frost is now called ice
As a result of all that theatrical meteo advice.
'A pretty decent day', makes me privately hope to light upon,
An 'indecent'one, that isn't pretty at all, but might be rather fun.

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Shore

Neither sea nor land
A temporary resting place
A sort of nomadic graveyard
And mill rolled into one.

Where the banal and the ugly
Slop around together
Occasionally transformed
To unwanted jewels of bright plastic.

Amid this vulgar motley
Strange aliens are sometimes found
A frozen starfish
A green odiferous crab.

They remind us that
this is border country
And the crossing may be fatal
For the unprepared of either side.

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The Door

There's a door that appears with age
Because it wasn't there before
And when by some chance or design
You pass through to a place beyond
All things are different once more.

The old and the stale, the familiar
Are gone, replaced by another view
Not glimpsed from a rushing car
Not seen from the hectic day's end
But in tranquility witnessed anew.

A time when you might look back
At the journey you've made so far
And look, with forgiving eye, on
The side roads you were lost in
The failure to follow your star.

For this door, as all doors do,
Leads to a different place
That is an end, yet a beginning
Of something exciting and new.

All the things that deeply we knew
Past events unexpected and strange
When belief needed faith to support it
Turn out to be totally true.

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The Interview Panel

They nervously prepare their questions
Rehearsed the night before
The unspoken looming large at first
For the one beside the door.
Is he human is he one of us
Will he do the bright thing
But not make us blush?

Is this what we expected when
We read his long CV
And knew it was such a distance
From his home beside the sea?
I'm afraid to have to say it
Reluctant to make a fuss
He's not at all like you and me
And certainly not like us.

The Chairman of the Board sits up
And loudly clears his throat
'I'm sure I can speak for my colleagues
And say, welcome to Greater Stoaat'.
Twenty blurred minutes later
Muttered thankyou's all around
A taxi to the station
Home again to go to ground.

No words of congratulation
To shorten the journey's return
You sought your own salvation
When will you ever learn?

Though small expenses are mine to claim
Today's no fortune and not much fame
For at my interview at Greater Stoaat
Nobody gave me a single vote.

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The Night's Poem

I am night, my blackness serves to light the stars
My onset ends another day,
My departure makes the rapid dawn
And moving on, takes light from
Those who would prolong thir sight,
Of things both near and far away.

My darkness is the black of crows
The tunnels of moles the casts of worms
A deepest indigo lit by the moon
Reveals only my infinite space,
A fleeting daylight is a pinch of white
That soon will hide it's face.

For unlike the sun that daily flees
At some changed hour to distant lands
I have no end and no beginning,
My blackness hides the nativity of stars
Whose light will shine on forms of life
That nightly rest at peace within it's absence.

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The O.B.'s Club

Lord preserve us from the club of old boys
Their ill founded confidence and the
Braying noise, of their worn out certainties.
Spare us the pomposity that passes for wisdom
Their personal right to govern a kingdom.

Where are the thoughtful, the well informed
The weighers up of pros and cons?
They might do the 'right thing', alas not needed,
Their wise counsel would not be heeded
By the honourable club of simpletons.

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The Old Man's Poem

Perhaps another year or two would almost
Do but three or four, or dare I say,
Maybe more?
Depends a bit on what it's like.

Maybe on my own? Doesn't sound like home
With more pain in knees and hips and
Legs and feet and worse in hands
Not so neat.

I start to add up the possible no's
No garden no painting no piano
No visitors no visits no open door,
Not much to keep on going for.

'No aim, such a shame, he gave up trying
You see but no one really met him.
Socially not much use, bit of a recluse.
Although it springs to mind he was kind
To those he knew, although they were few'.

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This Wind

Before this wind our senses lay
Flat and vulnerable, forgetfull,
Our memories clean and tidy, thoughts marshalled
Lives mostly spruced up.
Now this wind has opened us,
Has moved into it's dominant.
It's prying curiosity seeks out our wounds.

Insistant, purposeful, it gnaws in rooms
Left empty by it's sweeping.
A wind which holds us pinned in our chairs
With the words of yesterday's books.
Activity's a memory and things retreat into themselves
And their absence dulls grey air made heavy
With waiting for the calm of it's passing.

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Winter

Winter comes in grey in our broad valley
Blinded in fogs we sense a colder air,
From distant icy harsher places,
Come uninvited for a longer stay.

On fencing, white grids of frost steadily
Thicken and advance like sparkling moss
The dead flowers sharpen with an edge
Of palest grey and solemnly mass the borders.

An ever earlier sunset glows like
Some distant forge behind black trees
Already stars are silver overhead in
A sky that shades apple green to indigo.

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Winter Arrives

The grey trunks the umber branches
Show black and stark against dull skys
As small garden birds eat fast and late
To see the night's long hours through
And rush to feed again in colder dawn.

Blue icy contours follow the edge of ponds
Water in it's liquid state so recently abundant
Becomes a rare and scarce element
To be sought out and guarded fiercely
And for the aquatic, life has indeed hardened,
Seen as the sudden clumsy landing of swans
Inelegantly skidding on frozen lakes and drains.

The parliament of crows, noisily strange,
Makes a shifting mosaic of black
Against the brown and amber clods
Of a ploughed and sullen field,
Once a meadow where contented herds
Grazed through warmer nights.

We puff out the feathers in our winter
Coats of fleece and foam and leather
Turn up the heating of oil and gas and wood.
Check on the elderly to assure their presence
For another day of quiet reading and sitting
Behind double glazing and layers of clothes,
But a harsher day awaits an increasing few
Those whose best refuge is a chilling doorway
And to survive the night, a visit from the soup van.

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