

## Poems by *Hugh McKinley*

### **Threnody**

*for Dick Backwell* [d. October 1972]

Life vanished – gone like comestible smoke;  
Bright memories, magnesium flares that, hour-glassed,  
Shroud the quarter of a century.

But yesterday, our morning then, brief time  
That we were young, victory ahead:  
Great meetings, conferences, my earliest Summer School.

Step following step, event event;  
You separate each, as 'Now'.  
Your letters kingdom-spanning link with life.

No matter what dark periods were endured  
My more-than-brother, you were part of me:  
Wise, calmly humorous, and – always – 'there'.

And now you're gone; dead, fourteen days ago.  
Although – exceeding certainly I'm sure,  
You'll wake to 'There', wise in humility;

Smile, and extend more powerful than before  
That compensating word and ready hand.  
Chill and alone, I'm grassed; momentarily sundered.

Descending, shopping – anything to do; to get away –  
Suddenly there were birds, house-martins and swallows  
Dipping and wheeling in immeasurable flight;

Paused on their Autumn pilgrimage  
Into warm South, their golden land.  
Soul-symbols, life-transcending: my heart was stayed.

For you – and with right precedence –  
The first of ours to reach that Golden shore;  
And shortly shall inform us with your glory,

Helping unlimited by mortal state.  
Right that the month of Knowledge was departure:  
Wisdom your most shining quality,

Brought closer – for you are, sleeping or awake,  
Nearer than all which Life and Death have power over.

### **Mystery of Life**

Motionless –  
Frozen dead in gully  
One hand-size blackbird sprawling,  
Angular.

Lifted, there lay fat worm beneath:  
Prey that, mysteriously,  
Yet lived, preserved unswallowed,  
Sheltered by body-warmth and feathers  
From last night's biting frost.

Eater turned benefactor  
Through unexpected death;  
Condemned preserved  
Through raptor's sharp demise.