

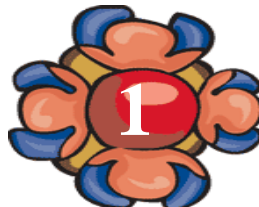
The Poems of the Late Dr. Eshetu Chole

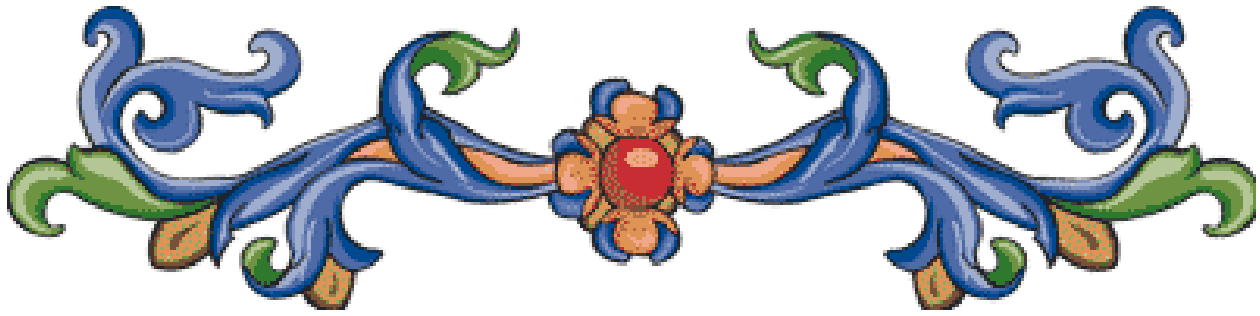
**Researched and Presented By
Fekade Azeze**

Born in 1945 in Negele Borena, Eshetu finished his elementary education there, and came to the General Wingate Secondary School in Addis Ababa to complete his school education. He then joined the Department of Economics at University College Addis Ababa (later Haile Sellassie I University, HSIU, and now Addis Ababa University, AAU) and earned his first degree in Economics, in 1966, winning the Chancellor's Gold Medal of the Arts Faculty. After his employment as Graduate Assistant in his parent Department, Eshetu got his MA from the University of Illinois (Urbana Champagne) in 1968, and his Ph.D. from the University of Syracuse in 1973.

Dr. Eshetu had worked as: University professor, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Chief Economics Expert of the Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities, Member of the Editorial Board of Journal of Ethiopian Studies (published by Institute of Ethiopian Studies, AAU), Chief Editor of East African Social Science Review, Member of the Executive Committee of CODESRIA, Vice President and Secretary of OSSREA, founding member and first President of the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA), and Regional Economic Advisor to UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), Nairobi. Dr. Eshetu was Visiting Associate Professor at Princeton University in 1995.

The poems of Dr. Eshetu were collected during my research on Ethiopian creative writing and criticism in English in the years 1981-82. I have found thirteen

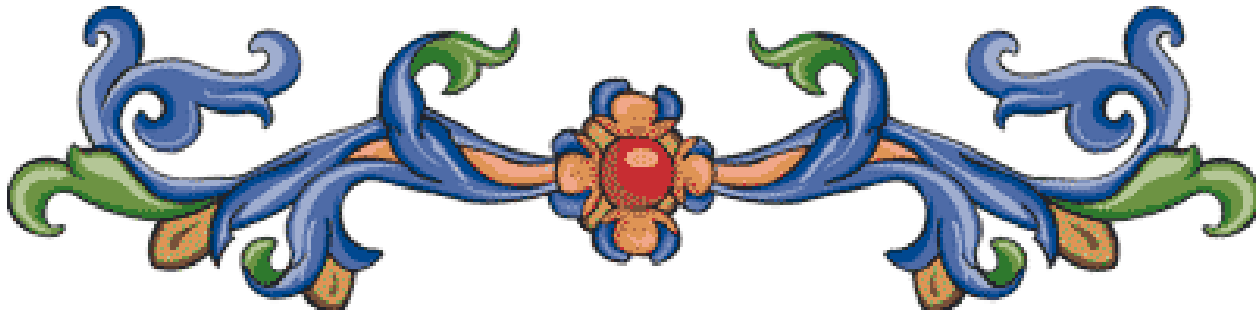




poems in English, one in Amharic and one in French. The first poem in English I found, entitled “A sonnet: ‘Freedom’”, and his Amharic poem entitled “meqegnenet (jealousy)” were published in the General Wingate student magazine known as Chindit, in June 1959. Eshetu was then a student of 10B. His only poem in French, “Une remarque ignorante” was published in the same in June 1960. The twelve poems in English were published in Something, founded in 1962, as the literary magazine of The University College. He published two of these poems in 1962, three in 1963, two in 1964 and five in the 1967 issue of the magazine.

Economic Focus, bulletin of EEA, wrote, “Ethiopia... lost one of her best and brightest economists” when it grieved over his untimely death in June 1998. In his glance at Dr. Eshetu’s life, Prof. Bahru Zewde described him as ...”that rare breed of intellectuals who combined academic excellence with political commitment”, the latter being an allusion to his political activities both as student and professor. When Dr. Befekadu Degefe described him as a prolific writer, I trust, he had perhaps his academic writings in mind. I believe that he was a young creative poet too, considering his contributions early in his student days. I am one of those persons who seriously believe that Dr. Eshetu belonged to that class of Ethiopians who were advised and/or drawn to financially attractive, legendary professions that were judged to bring fame and respect compared to disciplines such as literature, philosophy and history. Professional prejudices such as these have, I believe, prevented Ethiopia, Africa and the world from relishing the masterpieces these talented persons would have produced in these domains. Many also acknowledge they miss his wit, his often joyful and admirable laconic responses even if they are cutting at times. After these brief introductory notes, allow me to leave you with his poems.



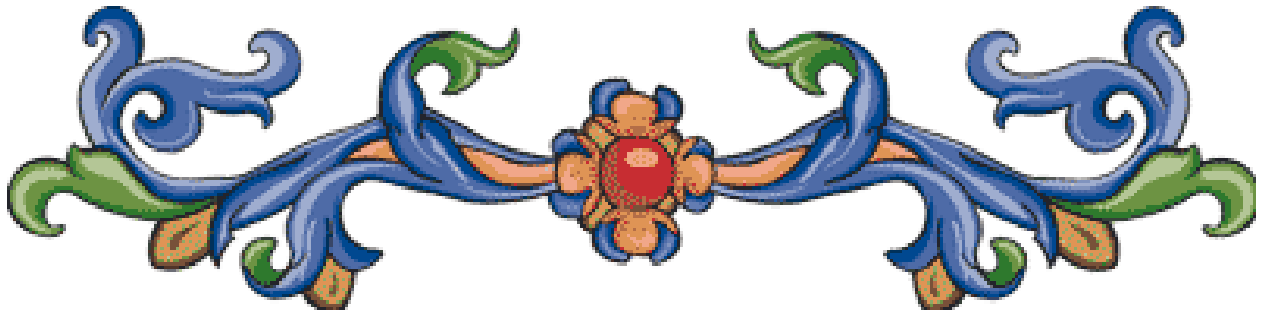


A SONNET: “Freedom”

Freedom is wealth, peace and light;
On it is founded human delight.
Freedom is comfort and glorious life,
Absence of wars and bloody strife.
Were the great ideals for which nations fought.
Happy is a people with freedom's command:
There is no better state for man to demand.
Inalienable rights, impartial justice,
And moderate laws-these keep us at peace.
The beam of freedom, the beam of liberty,
Guides all men's progress with efforts mighty.
This is the goal for which we should aim:
It is the golden gateway to fame.

1959





THE TRAVELLER

It was a cool and starry night
As I lay back upon the dark grass
That a thought passed through my mind.

Amidst the blaze of the heavenly stars
I felt at loss,
The loss of a traveller in a strange land.

A sudden fear flashed cross my heart,
A thought of things long-gone and things to come
And my weary body shook and froze.

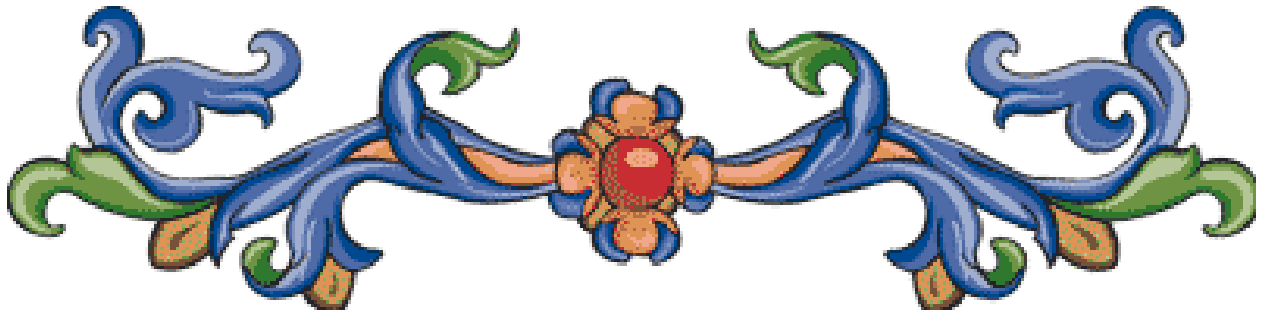
For I knew the world was no man's land,
Strange, unexplored, and always young.

I thought at once of the distance I had gone
And the distance yet to come,
And with the sigh of a tired traveller
I let these words go forth

"I am a traveller in a very strange land."
A traveller without a guide,
A land without a path.

1962





THAT'S HOW WE MOVE AWAY

We call it life
And endless strife

Of love and hate
Of good and bad
Of life and lifelessness.

We toil, we work
And yet there is no rest

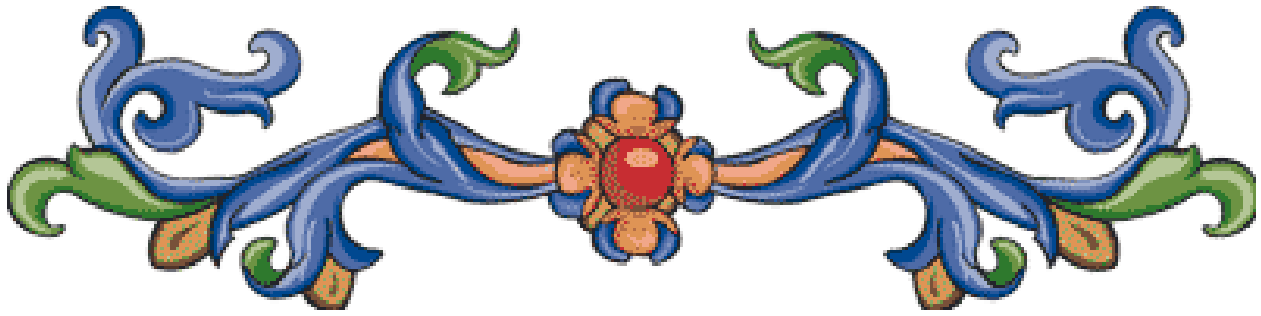
Until the will shall die
On that final day
When work will be no more.

We laugh
We weep

It is our fate
To mock ourselves
Consoling our loss.

We fight
To lose or win





We march and yet retreat
Daring we seem
And yet we have our fear.

We hope
And we despair

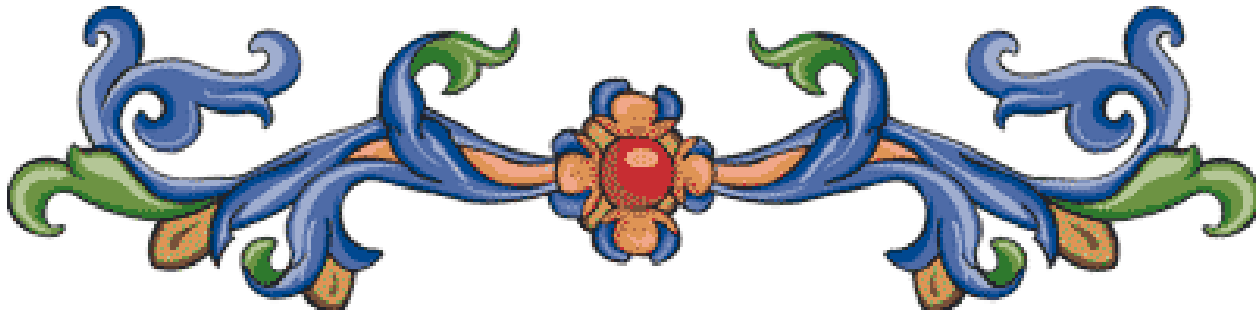
Sorrow following joy
Loss following victory
Despair following hope

Night following day
Death following Life

Man following man
In an endless caravan
That's how we move away.

1962





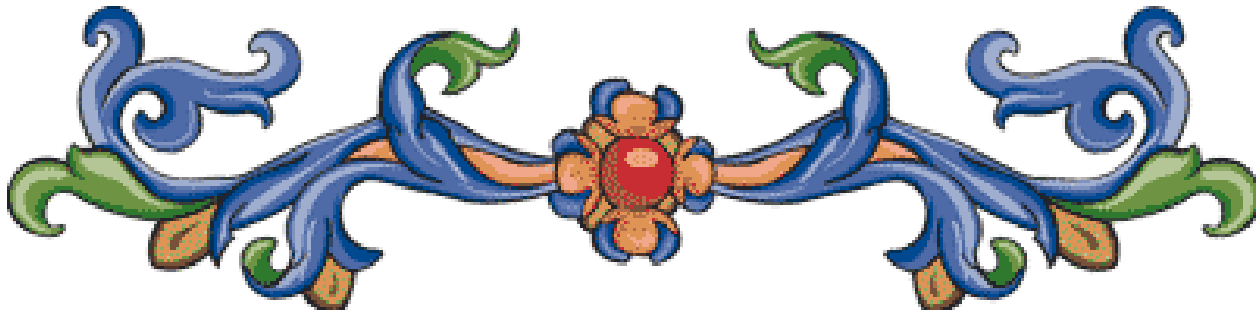
“RETROSPECT”

Far are those days,
Far in a distant past;
But their memories still shine.

Gone are the days of youth,
The days of mirth and laughter;
Weak are those eyes that once glowed with fire
With their flame burnt out;
Time has whitened the hair that was once black,
Wrinkles have invaded that smooth and shiny face.
Gone are those days when we were innocently playful-
Gone too with them is the vigour of life;
Cold is the heart that once was warm with love,
And the hot and lively blood
Has given way to coldness,
The coldness that heralds
The nearing of the end.

1963





“DARKNESS”

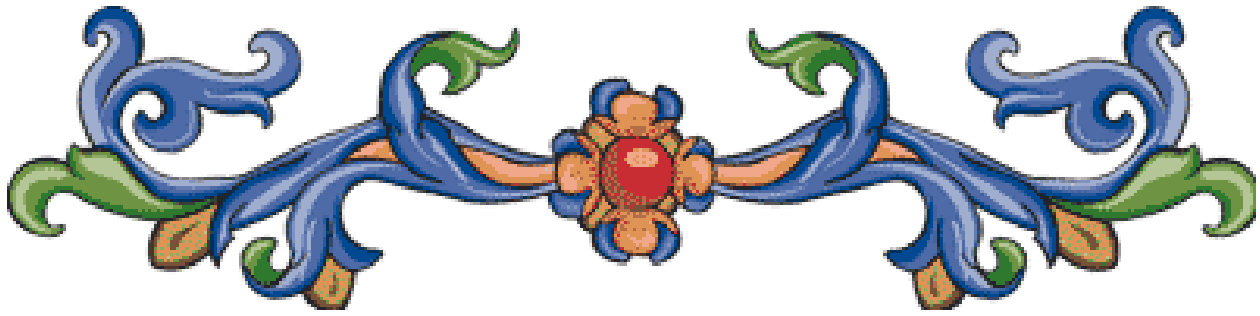
Dark was all-
Darkness I fear
Evil thoughts it evokes
Sad memories it recalls.

I sat in a dark room
Seeing images of things that never were
Hearing sounds that were not made.

I sat there silently,
Waiting, hope ever increasing
For light to replace darkness
And relieve me of my pains.

1963





“TRIAL”

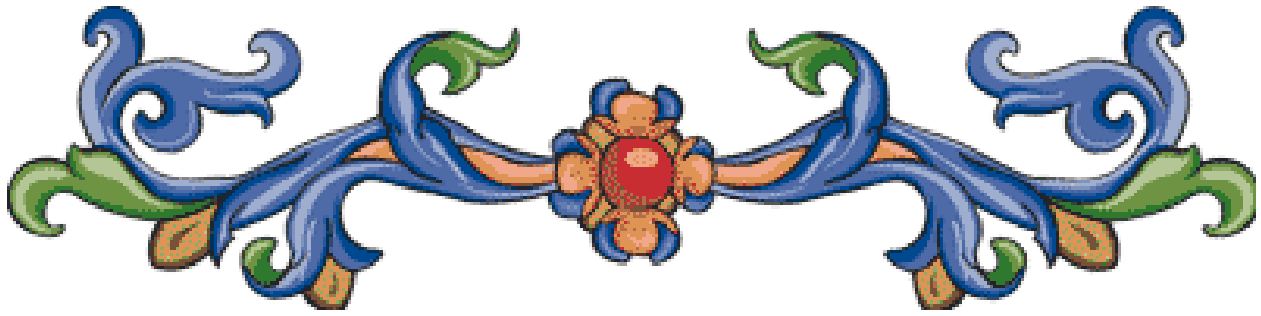
Patience tried
And passed
Is a virtue, they say.

These are days, alas
When man
Is too much about man.

Despair, defeatism
Who but man can ease this load
Who else, but man for man?

1963





SLEEP

Day in ... day out
Just for some time
We all retire... in death
(Sleep as it is called)

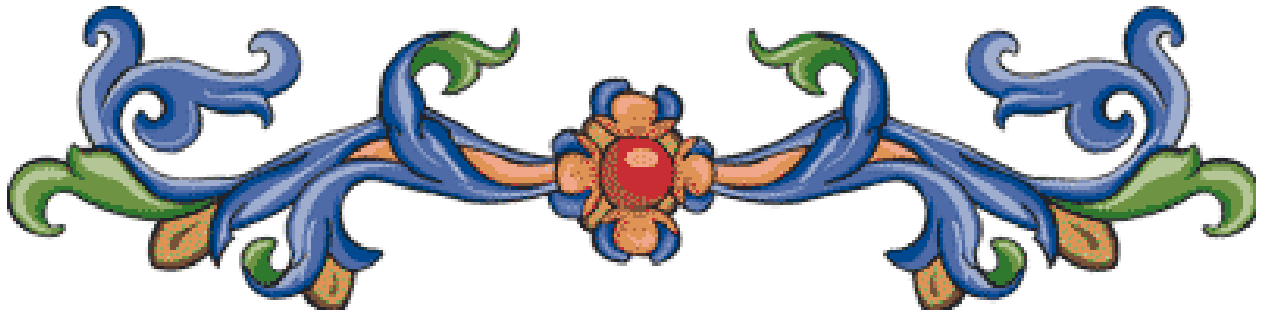
Refreshing death
Comforting death
If only that final rest
Could also be like this

Oblivious of worries, we sleep
Rather we die - - - yet temporarily.
Waiting for that eternal sleep
From whose grip
We can't escape alive.

Or could it be
That this is yet another nap
After whose end
(As we are told)
We do wake up?

1964





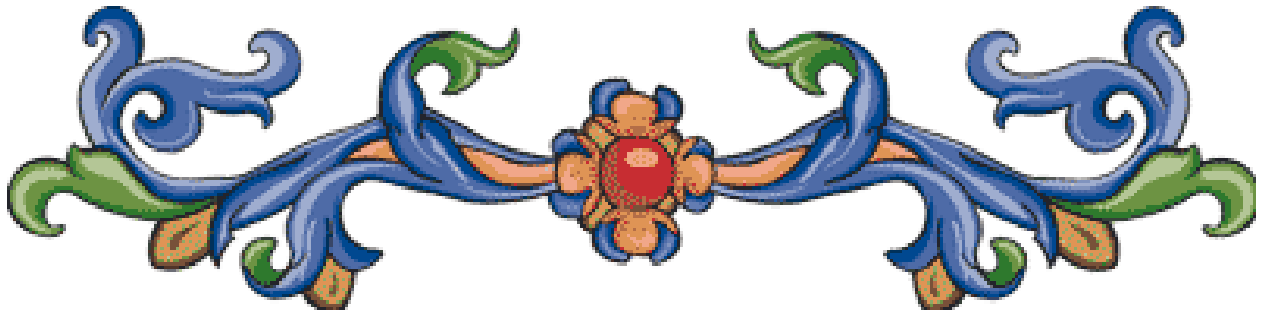
TIME

Time was born in emptiness
And in emptiness shall pass;
But it shall never die.
Emptiness breeding emptiness
That's where we find meaning
In the heavy darkness
That abounds (all the way)
From being to not being.
Old and yet young;
A companion of all
And a companion of none;

Time will continue
On the journey that's begun
But that shall never end.
Though millions strive to fill the emptiness
Time shall never die.

1964





SLEEPLESS NIGHT

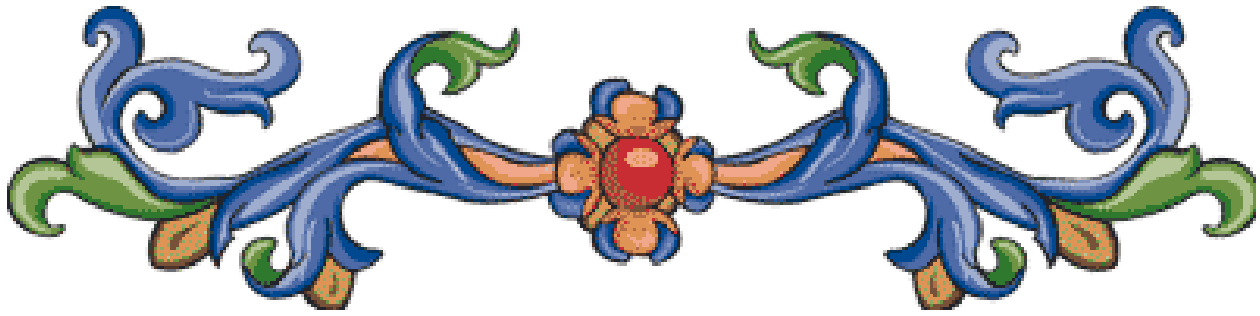
Long is the night
Thick is the darkness
In the peaceful quiet
Of a well-deserved repose
After another day of life
Or so it seems -----

But woe to that wondering soul
That knows no rest
Even in the kingdom of dark
Woe to the tortured heart
That pulses high
Intruding in the peaceful silence of the night.
Woe to the restless mind
That respects not even
The consuming majesty of the night
Grief upon grief
Thought evoking thought

As a restive evening dies out
Ushering in another day of life
With its sleepless night

1967



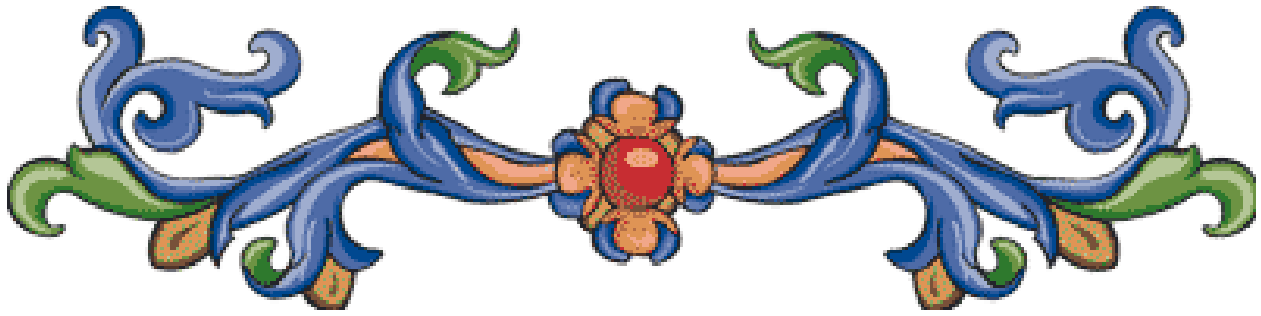


POEM

Gloomy
Like the dark cloud
Paining
In my loneliness
Cursing
The Unfriendliness of life
I am.

1967





DILEMMA

Into the darkness we sped
Past the innocent beauty
Of the rude countryside
Past the life of the country
We drove far into the night.

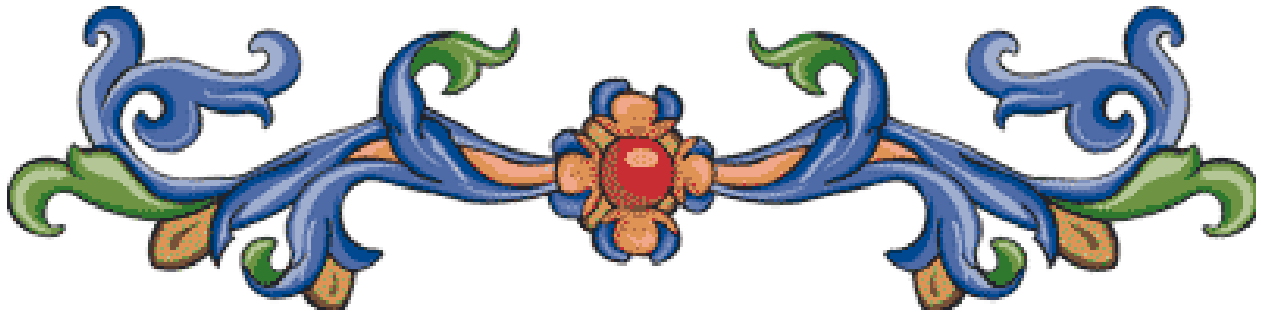
Behind-Civilisation
With all its noise
Its gossip and boredom
And the weary heart seeks escape
From the tasteless colourless
Life of the town..

And yet there is no peace
No escape from life
For farther as you plunge
Into the night
Deeper you forge forward
Into the dark

Forward there is no light
Backward there is no hope.

1967





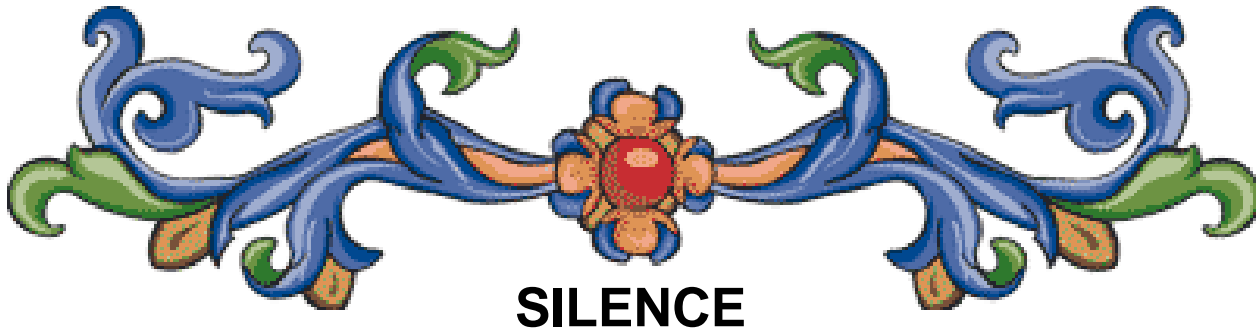
MEMORY

The yesterday
That in our crowded memories we store
Shall have nothing
But the pangs of silences
Each longing, but each dreading
To break the silence.

And your staring eyes
Cynical, yet wanting
Shall haunt me in my dreams.

1967





Silence
Is like infinity
Majestic
Its depth unsurpassed
By talk-glib talk, gossip, proud talk
And other human trash.

Silence is beauty;
For truth is silent
And, truth, they say, is beauty.

Silence is peace-
Peace absolute
Peace consuming.

Silence is joy
Unparalleled
Undiluted by the cheapness of our lives.

A tear is silent
A smile is silent
And love is too silent.

And death is silent
Oh! If only life were
As pure as silence.