

Martin Robertson

Climacteric by the Sea

1

A child cartwheels by me on the sand
where my steps now are staid and heavy.
Not that I was ever
a competent cartwheeler
or steady in a handstand
—ran like another though
barefoot along the bare
ripple-ridged beach
through the frothing water-edges
that came and went, that come and go.

Do I make too much of not liking to be old?
After all, I didn't like being young too much
(not after I was younger
than this cartwheeling child)
yet never lacked, do not lack, delight,
would be wholly sorry to have missed life
on this multifarious earth.
Accepting life entails acceptance
of death to balance birth,
of depressing age as well as youth's depressions.

2

Sorrow I have known,
unhappiness,
fear, anxiety
and worse corrosions of the soul,
but never hunger and cold
—not real cold, let alone
real hunger—not want
and the consequent
stress and distress,
miseries, misery.

This being so
have I the right,
or power, to be a poet?
I don't know,
but I can't help it.
Seagulls cry
circling, swooping over
the white, noisy water.
The call comes from them
naturally.

3

I stand on the balcony.
Children run and shout
on the beach, splash and shout
in the sea. Grown-ups lounge out
from the pub to drink on the wall
or sit on the beach or walk,
young and middle-aged
and, a class of their own, in pairs
or singly, greeting each other
with a kind of masonry,
subtly apart, the old.

I know I am not a child.
(Up to a point I know
—have I ever really, though,
quite grown up? But that's
another question.) The thing
that strikes me oddly now
is that I have to make
a conscious effort to take
the fact that, looking down
on me from this balcony,
a watcher would see me
simply one of the old.