

# Distilling Life

## Poems for reflection and meditation

From *Distilling Life : Poems for Reflection and Meditation*, edited by Alison Morgan and Martin Cavender

### Swineherd

When all this is over, said the swineherd,  
I mean to retire, where  
Nobody will have heard about my special skills  
And conversation is mainly about the weather.

I intend to learn how to make coffee, at least as well  
As the Portuguese lay-sister in the kitchen  
And polish the brass fenders every day.  
I want to lie awake at night  
Listening to cream crawling to the top of the jug  
And the water lying soft in the cistern.

I want to see an orchard where the trees grow in straight lines  
and the yellow fox finds shelter between the navy-blue trunks,  
Where it gets dark early in summer  
And the apple-blossom is allowed to wither on the bough.

### Eiléan ní Chuilleanáin



### First Thing

The last bit of the dream is letters falling,  
soft and regular, the papery flutter  
rhythmic on the mat. Not unlike  
grey tides licking sand. Waking  
is water leaking in; the stuff  
out there wobbles and swells  
and settles grudgingly into a dryish

daytime shape. And the letters  
leaking in resolve themselves  
as the dry short breaths  
of a nextdoor body, finding  
its way out of the night  
into slow breakfast time,  
the food, the light, a few words,  
and the apprehensive, unavoidable  
opening of envelopes.

**Rowan Williams**



### **A humble request**

All right  
I understand  
I can't come in.  
My life was –  
I know.  
But  
if I could just  
sit outside the gates  
for a few minutes  
and listen to the music?

**Michael Swan**



## Earth Dweller

It was all the clods at once become  
precious; it was the barn, and the shed,  
and the windmill, my hands, the crack  
Arlie made in the ax handle: oh, let me stay  
here humbly, forgotten, to rejoice in it all;  
let the sun casually rise and set.

If I have not found the right place,  
teach me; for somewhere inside, the clods are  
vaulted mansions, lines through the barn sing  
for the saints forever, the shed and windmill  
rear so glorious the sun shudders like a gong.

Now I know why people worship, carry around  
magic emblems, wake up talking dreams  
they teach to their children: the world speaks.  
The world speaks everything to us.  
It is our only friend.

## William Stafford



## You,

with your blonde hair and big eyes,  
bare feet and those little rolls of fat  
in the places where you bend,  
what might you become?

You haven't met French yet, never  
read a poem, never been all the way down  
to the bottom of the garden;  
you haven't a scar like a little sickle  
on your right shin, or hair that curls.  
Never sat an exam.  
Never swum in the sea.

Is it possible, then, that you might become me?

## Katy Morgan



## Revenge

My personal revenge will be your children's  
right to schooling and to flowers.

My personal revenge will be this song  
bursting for you with no more fears.

My personal revenge will be to make you the goodness in my  
people's eyes,  
implacable in combat always  
generous and firm in victory.

My personal revenge will be to greet you 'Good morning!' in streets  
with no beggar when instead of locking you inside  
they say, 'Don't look so sad.'

When you, the torturer,  
daren't lift your head.

My personal revenge will be to give you these hands you once  
ill-treated  
with all their tenderness intact.

**Luis Enrique Mejia Godoy**

translated by Dinah Livingstone

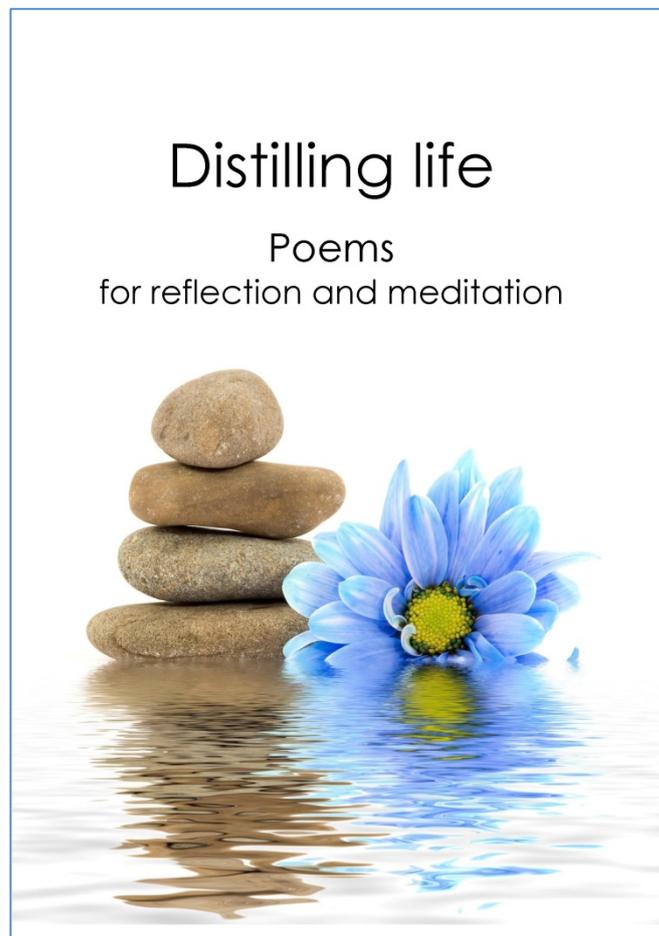


## Ode to a Pythian Athlete

The delight of mortals grows in a moment,  
and then falls to the ground,  
shaken by adversity.  
What is man? What is he not?  
Frail being of a day,  
uncertain shadow of a dream.  
But when the light of heaven falls upon him  
His life glows with joy.

from **Pindar**, Pythian Ode no. 8

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To order a copy of *Distilling Life* please visit [www.alisonmorgan.co.uk](http://www.alisonmorgan.co.uk).  
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